



Women & Environments

international
magazine

WOMEN, ART & COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

Art + Activism =
ATSA

SUSAN DOUGLAS

Transforming Our
World through
Song: The Power
of Community
Choirs

DEANNA YERICHUK

Earth's Beauty is
Fading:
Mischievous
Raging Grannies
to the Rescue!

CAROLE ROY

The Cutting Edge
and the Corporate
Agenda

BRAINSTORMERS

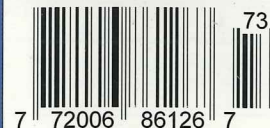
Wilderness
Women in Black

JEANE FABB

N COMMUNITY CENT



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DOUBLE ISSUE

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Mission Statement:

Women & Environments International is a unique Canadian magazine, which examines women's multiple relations to their environments — natural, built and social — from feminist and anti-racist perspectives. It has provided a forum for academic research and theory, professional practice and community experience since 1976. Produced by a volunteer editorial board the magazine contributes to feminist social change. The magazine is associated with the Women and Gender Studies Institute, University of Toronto.

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Putting This Issue Together

Ann Danilevich is an MA candidate, Media Studies, at Concordia University and holds an Hon. BA, Art History and Sociology, from the University of Toronto. Her interests include modern and contemporary art, curatorial practice, visual literacy, visual culture, interpretation and representation. She is also an independent writer, whose work focuses on contemporary art and culture.

Deborah Barndt has been integrating community art, especially photography and music, into her work as a social activist and popular educator for over thirty years, as part of social movements in Latin and North America. She currently teaches popular education and community art in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University and is the author of various books, the most recent an edited anthology, *Wild Fire: Art as Activism*.

Rita Camacho started her artistic practices in 1998 as a painter, but three years later she moved to experiment with performance and installation. She uses every day to create aesthetics that play with the multilayered relationship between fantasy and reality. Immigrating to Canada in 2001, the themes of dislocation and movement are prevalent in her artistic discourse. She has been exhibiting in galleries and festivals, both in Canada and abroad, and has served on the jury of the programming committee of A Space Gallery where she has also been a board member. She is one of the founder members of the Latino Canadian Cultural Association (LCCA).

Lisa Campbell is an Independent Studies student at the University of Waterloo studying Community Media. In her travels Lisa has worked as a community animator, conducting popular education workshops, doing cultural work in schools and participating in local solidarity campaigns.

Nehal El-Hadi is a published journalist, essayist and poet, whose work is focused on environmental and/or cultural themes.

Briony Smith is a born-again feminist, editor and writer living in Toronto. Born and bred in British Columbia, her interests include gender issues, sex-worker and gay rights and sex-positiveness advocacy.



ON THE COVER

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, Cultural Relations: Community

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge live and work in Toronto. They have collaborated with various trade unions and community organizations in the production of their art work over the past 25 years. Their work has been exhibited across Canada and internationally in both the trade union movement and art galleries and museums. Recently their work has been included in exhibitions at the Galerie Taxispalais, Innsbruck, Austria, the Lewis Glucksman Gallery, Cork, Ireland, and the Contact Photo Festival in Toronto. They are active in several community arts initiatives including the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre in Hamilton, Ontario, A Sapce Gallery, Toronto, and Community Arts Ontario.

The work on the WEI Mag cover is titled **Community** and is from the "Cultural Relations" series.

Cultural Relations series looks at various practices in contemporary culture: from commercial and artistic through to community and amateur production. Each image in Cultural Relations contains an internal scene that is being created by the people in the surrounding scene. In the Community image, the internal scene depicts a community reenactment of the assassination of a cola worker in Latin America for union activities. The surrounding scene shows the collective process of conceiving and photographing the internal scene. The series is modeled on Gustave Courbet's painting the Studio from 1858.

Upcoming Issues

Women and Climate Change — This issue will analyze how women and gender intersect with climate change and its related phenomena of droughts, floods, environmental vulnerabilities, livelihoods, and energy. It will explore the many impacts of climate change on women and women's responses. Issues include international negotiations and the COP, energy policies, health, the impact on reproductive health and social reproduction responsibilities, livelihoods, transportation, biodiversity, natural resources management, consumption and production, and human settlements.

Women and Toxins — What are the toxins in women's working and living environments, North and South, in cities and the countryside? How do they affect women differently from men? Water, soil, air, food, building, cleaning, cosmetic, and the products on our jobs, all include toxins that affect us. What are researchers, regulators, and women doing?

Women and Religious Fundamentalisms — What are the common elements in religious fundamentalisms? What is role of and effects on women? Further details on the theme and the Call for Submissions will be published in the "Write for WEI Mag" section of our website: www.weimag.com.

For Editorial Guidelines, Calls for Submissions and more, visit the "Write for WEI Mag" section of our website: www.weimag.com. Your participation in issue teams, ideas, articles, news and funds are both welcome and important for the survival of **Women & Environments International Magazine**.

Thank You

The Women & Environments International Magazine, Editorial Board and Issue Editorial Committee acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP) towards our mailing costs. We appreciate the ongoing support of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa Canada. Women & Environments International Magazine is grateful for the general support of the Women & Gender Studies Institute, University of Toronto. Thanks go to Claire Major, Niloufer Moosa, Rita Alejandra Camacho, Prabha Khosla, Banu Raghuraman, and everyone who contributed to our 30th anniversary event on May 18th, 2006, for volunteering and working behind the scenes.

Canada

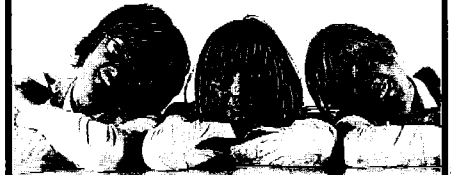
OOPS!

In our last issue, Women and Urban Sustainability, No. 70-71, we inadvertently left out the bios of Haydea Izazola and Alan Jowett, who wrote the article, "Female Migration, Environment and Quality of Life in Mexico City." Our sincere apologies. Their bios are included here.

Haydea Izazola is a Professor in the Dept. of Methods and Systems, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco, Mexico City. She has a PhD. in social sciences with a major in population studies from El Colegio de México. She is a member of the Mexican National Researchers System (SNI), level II. Her research interests include the relationship between quality of life and quality of the urban environment in Mexico City, and in particular, between migration and the deterioration of environment, with a special focus on family and gender issues.

Alan Jowett is a Research Assistant and undergraduate student at CIDE — Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica, Mexico City.

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WE Speak

Crossing Boundaries

Women, Art, and Community Activism

What is the magic that art brings into our community gatherings, our social and environmental activism, our daily lives? The small group of women who gathered in early 2006 to dream up this issue of *Women & Environments International Magazine* shared a common passion for the arts and its magical power to engender both personal and social transformation.

We framed our interest with the theme "Crossing Boundaries: Women, Art, and Community Activism." Little did we realize that this idea would spark the imaginations of so many women — not only in English-speaking North America, but in our Aboriginal and diasporic communities, Quebec and the Canadian North, Mexico, Spain, and China. There had never been such a deluge of submissions to *WEI Mag*—the call brought community artists and activists out of the woodwork, revealing stories that don't often get told in the mainstream media, and are rarely seen or heard in conventional art contexts. Clearly, the potent combination of art and community activism resonated with many, and it was extremely difficult to select 30 or so proposals out of more than 100 submissions.

The stories and struggles of the communities and women artists' representation in this issue reflect the tremendous diversity of forms and deep richness of art-making processes that contribute to social change — whether it be Canadian and Mexican visual artists highlighting the poverty and creativity of Indigenous weavers in rural Mexico or Chicana immigrants using theatre to reflect on their precarious status.

Many authors, artists, and activists identified with this issue's theme. The contributions themselves cross disciplinary boundaries, highlighting various forms of storytelling, including music, writing and spoken word, popular theatre and street performance, mural production and banner-making, photography, video documentary, and new media. They cross generational boundaries, with representations from raging grannies as well as raging students; racial and cultural boundaries, with dance drawing from Afro-centric and Caribbean practices as well as community choirs that tap the talents of the diasporic population of Toronto. Some consciously cross the boundary between critique and proposal, as in the case of performance art that parodies popular culture, and visual representations by Muslim women that counter western media stereotypes.

Institutional boundaries are also challenged in this issue, as both galleries and artists' organizations seek to transform traditional gallery spaces, whether it's by raising awareness of the lack of represented female artists, or using the gallery as forum to address social change. The boundaries between reflection

and action often promoted in both universities and grassroots groups are countered in projects where creative work grows out of critical reflection, and is, in turn, reflected upon with critical self-reflexivity. Personal healing, as well as collective mourning, are also part of these processes, as is evident in an urban photo project reacting to a brutal child murder, and a documentary revisiting an environmental and political struggle of a B.C. First Nation. Some pieces feature individual artists, especially those who cross boundaries in the content or process of their work. Other articles highlight collective processes and the democratization of art, with artists acting more as facilitators of community members' creativity.

Our hope is that this issue will expand our readers' vision of the arts, and their potential use in education about and activism for social and environmental issues, and that the examples will help demystify the arts as tools that are accessible to all, that both inspire and mobilize. The first article offers an overview of the burgeoning field of community arts that provides a framework for artists and organizations that want to think and act in new ways that integrate art-making into their daily practices. The dreams of the editorial committee will be realized if we learn of new projects, processes, and products that have been stimulated by the creative examples in this issue. Here's hoping for 200 submissions next time! ✂

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Features

Drawing the Circle:

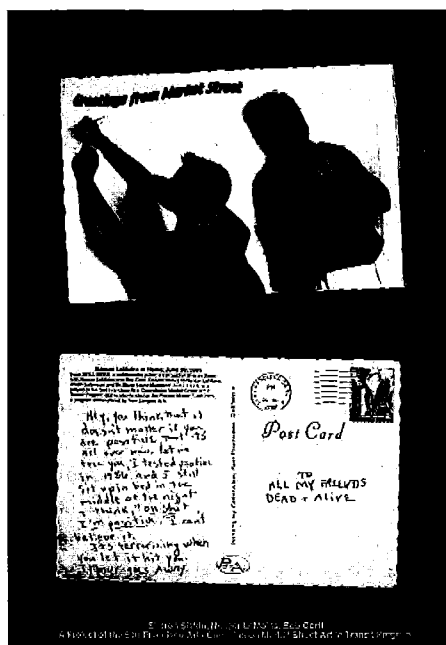
From the Community to the Studio to the Classroom and Back Again

Sharon Siskin

At the Moscone Convention Center in San Francisco in 1987, I saw the Names Project's AIDS Memorial Quilt displayed for the first time in its entirety. The individual panels of this enormous and ever-expanding public art project were all made for the same reason: to memorialize a loved who had died of AIDS. Each panel was made by separately grieving individuals or groups, and then given to the Names Project, who would turn the numbers of the deceased into visible names, humanizing the toll of the disease. The product of this cathartic creative process — the art — was making visible and bringing into the public arena what was mostly invisible.

My personal witnessing of how art forged a connection between a community immersed in loss and grief, and a larger viewing public, in order to foster education and to encourage compassion and social action, marked a turning point in my art-making and my teaching of art. For much of the following 19 years, I have been most interested in the challenges of making, and teaching students about, art that comes from the needs of a community, making visible to the larger public some of the most important issues we are facing in these often troubled times.

My work as a community-based activist artist has given me the opportunity for more than 15 years to collaborate with people who are living with AIDS; homeless women and children; older adults living in long-term care facilities; HIV-positive California State Correctional Facility inmates; ex-violent offenders in collaboration with victims and survivors of violence; and residents of Richmond, California's Iron Triangle, and my own neighborhood



"STILL HERE/Nancer," a collaborative community-based public art project, Sharon Siskin with Nancer LeMoins and Robert Corti and other residents of the Derek Silva Community (for low-income people living with AIDS) in San Francisco, 1 of 15 lambda printed transit kiosk posters, 73"x 48", 2001

of West Berkeley, California. These projects have informed my own studio-based artwork and also my work as a visual arts professor. For more than 15 years I have taught classes at many of the San Francisco Bay Area's art schools and university art departments, developing a curriculum which is focused on teaching students the basic tools, techniques and best practices for working as a community-based activist artist. Undergraduate courses such as "Arts Outreach: The Artist as Citizen—Part A (Cultural Diversity)" and "Arts Outreach: The Artist as Citizen—Part B (Service Learning)," which I co-teach with my colleague and collaborator

Richard Kamler, or graduate courses such as "Beyond the Studio: Community Collaborations" are currently required for upper division students enrolled in the BA in Fine Arts program at the University of San Francisco and graduate students enrolled in the MA in Transformative Arts program at John F. Kennedy University in Berkeley, California. The methodologies, formal strategies, and activist goals of our work are what set community-based activist art apart from other art with political content. My intention in writing this article is to distill for the reader interested in an overview of how to begin this rich and diverse creative process some of the key principles of our collaborative practice in the classroom and in the street.

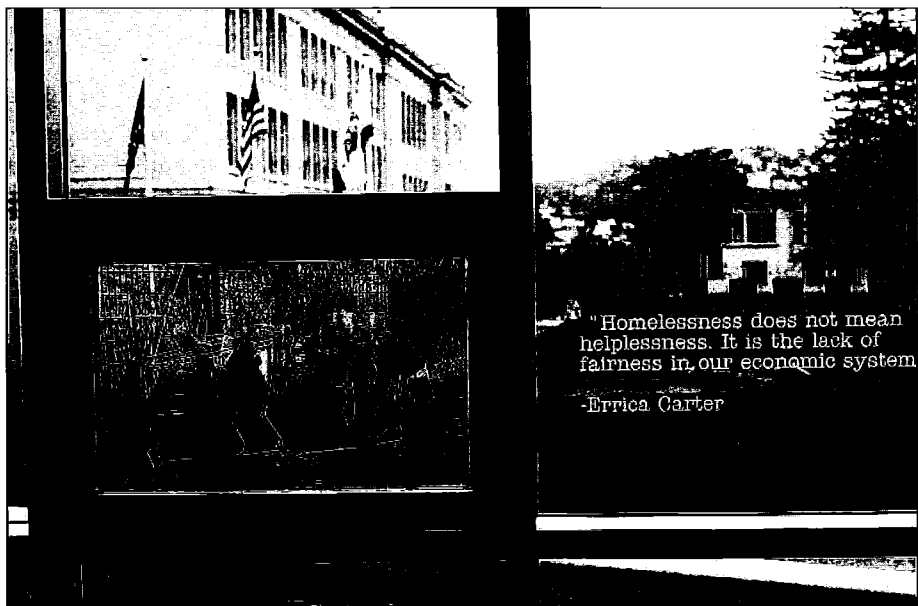
There are many different models of community-based arts projects, but I will focus on those that involve individual or collaborating artists as a key catalyst in initiating participatory processes. (I am suggesting specifying thusly, so as not to assume that this model is the only one; projects may be initiated, for example, by insiders, non-artists, or by groups of artists, etc.) From our experience, the most successful projects begin when the artist and the collaborating community, or community partner, are personally connected. This may occur through a long-term geographic proximity, a shared interest in a social or ecological issue, or a number of other ways. If there is no initial **personal connection**, it is important to find a person from the community who will be that bridge, who will connect the artist to the community and help establish trust.

Once the personal connection has been made, and the artist has asked for and been given permission to be there, there follows

for any community-based art project a very crucial period of time. This involves the artist simply being there as a part of that community, either as a "sponge," soaking up information, or as an active member, volunteering to help with a particular community need. In the classroom we call this the **research phase**, and we ask students to come to class prepared to share journal entries informed by their research in their chosen communities. In the classroom, stories from the street are shared to inform all the class members about the need to be a responsible citizen in that community, as well as the need to remain open and flexible because things do not always proceed as originally planned—life often gets in the way. This phase of the project requires a substantial investment of time by the artist and an openness to see, hear, and understand fully the needs and important issues of the collaborating community.

We are working collaboratively with the community when community-based artists are fully engaged in the creative process. The community **collaborative process** may take many forms. Sometimes the artist may be sharing or teaching studio-based skills, encouraging self-representation from community participants. At other times, the artist may be learning new skills and becoming informed about issues through oral history interviews and community meetings. In any case, we are working together to make the ideas that are important to the community *visible*, and to *re-present* or to *frame* them, much like how an artist who works in a two-dimensional medium chooses a particular frame for their artwork. As artists, we are trained in the imagination and taught to solve problems in the studio. We are also trained to create, or make something new. We can share these skills inherent to artists with any community, and work collaboratively with that community to imagine how to make what seems invisible into something visible to the larger public. The collaborative process of community-based artists is referred to worldwide by a variety of terms, including *cultural animation*, *community cultural development*, *community arts* or working for *cultural democracy*.

How are community-based art projects funded, and how can artists afford to do



"(in)Visible" (Detail), a collaborative community-based public art project, Sharon Siskin with homeless women (from the Women's Daytime Drop-in Center in Berkeley, CA) and men and USF students installed in the Gleason Library at University of San Francisco, dimensions variable, vinyl text, photographic images printed on acetate, interactive artist book, 2001-2002

this form of cultural work? In our process, it is imperative that we be able to articulate our rich experiences in the community, both orally and in a formal written **project proposal**. Government granting agencies, community foundations, private foundations, individual donations, in-kind donations of materials, and even fundraising events or bake sales require that other people understand what you are hoping to create and how much the project will cost. Project proposal formats vary from one funding source to another. I have included in the sidebar sample guidelines that cover the basic components of a written project proposal (these are used in the classroom at the end of each semester for the student-initiated community-based art projects).

Many community-based visual artists have one foot in the community, and the other in the studio and the established art world of galleries and museums. While galleries and museums may sometimes be ideal venues for studio-based art, they may not be as accessible to the larger (sometimes unsuspecting) audience that we hope to reach with our community-based art projects. Knowing who our audience is and locating the best site for reaching our audience ensures our projects will be **visible in the public arena**.

This visibility is often critical to the project's objectives and its ultimate success.

Many of us have discovered that it can be fairly difficult for community-based artists to get the attention of the mainstream media. If your project's objectives include reaching the largest possible audience, it is very important to **engage the media**. Our students are given a sample press release format (which I have included in the sidebar) in order to plug in information about their own projects. We always try to send out these press releases to the local media in a timely manner. Any images that can be sent along with the written text will increase the chances of our projects being included as stories in our local media. Coverage in the media can help to extend the visual representation of the community to a broader public, affirm identities that have been often invisible in mass media, educate the public—and possibly policy-makers—about the views of the community, and, hopefully, help to effect public policy and illustrate how art can be a catalyst for social and environmental change.

Documentation is important to our projects—for the artists, for the community, for our funding supporters, and for sharing with the media. It is often the only tangible object to show for our time and

SAMPLE PROPOSAL FORMAT

Project Title

Lead Statement: 25-50 words that describe the essence of your project. This could be a meaningful quote, a poetic metaphor, a conceptual project description, etc. It should be as compelling as you can make it, but also clear and concise.

Mission Statement: This is where you establish the **need** for this project. It is the larger philosophical, historical, and contextual framework for what you are proposing. Be passionate.

Project Description: This is a detailed description of what you are proposing and strategies of **how** you will go about it. It could include visual documentation (in any form) and a timeline.

Project Objectives: These are the goals of your project: think of these as beginning with "to..." For example: to create an exhibition, to generate an event, to teach art skills, etc.

Note: it might help if you think of the Objectives as "what" you are trying to achieve, and the Project Description as "how" you will achieve these goals

Biographies of Core Personnel: A narrative bio of yourself and anyone else working on the project.

Long-term Impact: What, over time, is the effect that you hope to achieve with this project? This can be thought of as speculative (you might want to address this in your larger mission statement as well).

Fiscal Sponsor: Generally, funding organizations are reluctant to give funds to individual artists. Many non-profit organizations have fiscal sponsorship programs that, for a fee, will sponsor artist projects and then provide the tax-exempt non-profit status that the funders require. Describe the fiscal sponsorship organization you are working with, if there is one.

Budget Summary: This is not a itemized budget, but a summary. Some important budgetary items are labour, materials, insurance, permits, documentation, printing, postage, and transportation.

Letters of Support: From an organization or community or agency or individuals that you have been working with.

Note: Visual documentation is critical. Start it from the moment you begin working on your project. The form of this proposal is open. Clarity and creativity are key.

labor after the project ends. Of course, when carrying a camera into a community, there are always ethical issues to consider. Like all other aspects of our community-based work, it is important to be respectful, open, and flexible, and to ask permission to take photos or video, and be clear about the use of those images. When they intend to photograph people in the community, some artists carry photo release forms to get written permission from the photographed. Additionally, members of the collaborating community may contribute to the documentation themselves, from their own views.

The final review of this kind of work and the success of community-based art projects can be determined from a variety of the factors that I have already mentioned earlier in this article, though it is the **long-term impact** of our projects that can help us to measure what is very hard to quantify. The social change or environmental remediation that can occur, especially when the collaborating community takes ownership of the project, can often only be observed over time, often after the artist has moved on to new projects. The ability for artists to observe and understand the long-term impact of their projects is what keeps many of us continually involved in this collaborative community-based process. It reminds us of art's transformative power as a catalyst that can **effect social and environmental change**.

My practice as a community-based activist artist and art professor is informed by my own personal history, coming of age in the sixties and early seventies, and being immersed in the feminist movements of the



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Press Release Format

For Immediate Release: [the date you send out the release]

Contact: [a person and phone number]

The press release is generally composed of the who, what, where, when, and why. This part is fairly short. The press gets a lot of releases, so you want to grab their attention. You can flesh out your project further on with visuals and more explanatory text.

Title of Project

What: This is what your project is about. You should describe it in the most riveting language you can. Be creative! What do you want this project to achieve? Tell your story!

Why: Why are you doing this? Why is it important? Will it change the world?

Is there a compelling need for this? YES! Spell it out!

Where: Doublecheck your address and location!!

When: Same goes for the date and time of the event, opening, or show.

Who: Who are the people involved — list only the important players.

For more information: [repeat contact name and phone number]

Visuals are crucial to the press. You all know the saying "a picture is worth a thousand words"? Well, maybe not a thousand, but a lot.

Now, if you want to elaborate on the 'why' and the 'what,' do it. Flesh it out. Talk about the significance of your event—why should they care?

Further Reading:

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last forty years. My work in the environmental activism movement, the movements for peace and social justice, and creative non-violent civil disobedience have also been strong influences on the nature of my creative process and the form and formal presentation of my artwork. Feminist thought has encouraged me to continue to work as an artist for equality and social justice, and environmentalism has taught me to understand the connections — how everything that we do individually, and as a culture, affects the whole world (or at least a small part of it). It is from this solid foundation that I am able to take the first step into

the street and recognize my connection as an artist and citizen, and can begin to draw the circle from the community to the studio to the classroom and return back again. ❧

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Art + Activism = ATSA

Susan Douglas

Over the past twenty years, feminist politics have changed, mirroring an increasingly conservative political climate. In Canada, too, second-wave feminism has been dampened by the effects of time, to the extent that there's a widely held belief in intellectual circles today that younger women, the so-called third-generation feminists, have sold out and do not campaign against patriarchy directly. Is this perception realistic? I don't know, but I would suggest that third-wavers have other critical concerns, with protecting our planet as one of them.

Taking the ecosystem more seriously, challenging governments and corporations to protect the environment from the impact of global warming caused by deforestation, ozone depletion, and automotive emissions are ideas in the framework of a world political economy that cultural activists use. Activist art is a practice that takes place on the margins of society; it is the scene where the personal subject relates to social subjectivity. A critical intervention that is uncontained by fixed categories and insists on foregrounding power and dominance relations, activist art corresponds with other artistic practices that express a critical attitude towards institutions and structures. It is work in which the collective Action Terroriste Socialement Acceptable (ATSA) — translated in English as "Socially Acceptable Terrorist Action," — engages. ATSA uses reality, public space, and plausible situations to speak of pertinent problems in Montreal and other urban centers.

The ATSA collective was formed in 1979 for the production and dissemination of information about socio-political issues stemming from globalization, over-consumption, homelessness, and terrorism. The collective is the brainchild of artists Annie Roy and Pierre Allard, who are partners in life as well as art. Building together is part of the project. ATSA's practice is concerned with shifting the

climate of public opinion by creating urban interferences that speak to our sensibility and culture and advocate putting society's needs before our own. They have set fire to SUV's and set the Saint-Laurent Boulevard in Montreal ablaze, the fires evoking the dangers faced by the world's forests. This was done in order to bring about public awareness of the fact that, on every level of society, people are starting to do something about environmental issues. ATSA's projects are big productions in themselves, as the collec-

Over the past thirty years, activist art has assumed its identity both in public spaces, where it competes for attention with other images and symbols, and in studios and art galleries, before the art community and the general public. Activism can be direct or indirect. When a protester's intent is to effect social change by applying moral pressure on the public, in order to demonstrate the force of their commitment to a cause, it is indirect; direct action, which is almost always illegal, refers to the desire to effect change



Attentat sur la Main/ fichiers attentats

tive wants to inspire discussion through the use of public locations to present the work so that momentum is generated around crucial issues. On a practical level, this goal means confronting at various levels challenges like having to obtain a city permit for an art installation location, or asking the fire department for assistance in securing public safety. Of course, activist art is not dictated by the bureaucratic needs of suits — collaborative public art simply has both a practical and a symbolic dimension. This articulated is an essential part of its history.

directly by the act itself. One can read activist art as radical, subversive, or emancipatory. Interestingly, when activist art stimulates strong public reaction, it always seems to be referring to political authority. Legitimacy comes from getting at the heart of things — by fundamentally subverting dominant ideology. But when it conflicts with our personal or cultural identities, efforts are made to contain it. Activist practices associated with expressions of the body politic (the politics of representation and the representation of politics) have been, historically, catalysts

for outrage and censorship. There is a long history of civil disobedience and direct action, from Gandhi to the "bearing witness" projects that are, by now, a well-established tradition within feminist art.

For example, during the sixties and seventies in America, feminist consciousness-raising took the form of artistic expression through public performances against systemic gender inequality; examples include the work of Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneeman, Gina Pane, Hanna Wilke, and, perhaps, most memorably, Ana Mendieta. In this period, the negative values associated with femininity and the well-known adage that women's bodies are sites of "trouble" became sites of affective and intellectual investments for female artists. Appropriations of various kinds followed: women's research of intimacy, for instance, became acts of self-empowerment through performances that appropriated the language of the street culture, and seized public locations to display the mirroring issues of authority. Gradually, performance art became acceptable as public art, and so performances began to produce some provocative tensions between art and lived experience. In the eighties, artists across North America made art in outdoor locations such as parks and plazas, engaging with what Henri Lefebvre later famously called "the social production of space."

Propelled by the fact that public performance is a democratic medium accessible to a general public that might otherwise have limited access to artworks, the purpose of these works was, initially, to critique social life, unpacking, or analyzing, the accepted division between public and private space. The notion of a public sphere — another imprecise category — developed, according to the cultural critic Rosalyn Deutsche, "as a means by which private interests seek to control public activity." Space "was rescued," says Deutsche, by art practices dealing directly with social justice issues. ATSA's mandate states: "Their works investigate and transform the urban landscape and restore the citizen's place in the public realm, depicting it as a political space open to discussion and societal debates. ATSA

promotes an open, active, and responsible vision of artists as citizens contributing to the sustainable development of their society." It is clear that the grassroots level of community activism is primarily what propels ATSA's practice. As an imperative to renegotiate the relationship of art and life, ATSA links the social and a political contexts, but what about the fact that they are working in Quebec, a province whose principles are historically democratic and where social action is built into the culture? What are the historical precedents that are potentially meaningful to ATSA? And what can be taken as particularly encouraging or inspiring?

These questions emerge in relation to the kinds of work ATSA has made in the past few years: *État d'Urgence* [*State of Emergency*], an urban refugee camp in the heart of downtown Montreal that has been a recurring intervention since 1998; *Parc Industriel* [*Industrial Park*] (2001), a fake archaeological site made of discarded objects intended to compel debate on consumerism; *À vos marques* [*Ready, Set, ...*] (2001), an installation at the AmericanCan on globalization and profit at any cost; *Walls of Fire* (2002), a walking tour exploring the history of Saint-Laurent Boulevard through its fires, fire alarm boxes, and the red light district; *Attention: Zone Épineuse* [*Warning: Prickly Zone*] (2002), an intervention on Mount Royal about the precariousness of our ecological heritage; and, most famously, *the Attentat#!* [*Attack#!*] series (numbers 1 through 12), which was against the manufacture for mass consumption of ultra-polluting vehicles. As they draw attention to the issues of violence, poverty, and pollution in a clash of images, these art pieces show the history of Québec within Canada. By that, I mean that the rise of activist art within the cultural hub of Montreal and in the province of Québec is dependent on historical foundations and a French-Canadian activist community that has grown and developed since the formation of Maurice Duplessis's Union Nationale government in the fifties. In Québec, artists are currently working against the occupation of Palestine, and at least one group, called the *Mouvement des arts et lettres* (MAL) are rising up against

cuts in funding for arts organizations and artist's rights.

Because social uprisings and cultural politics have shaped the Québécois national identity (making Québec Canada's most socially active province), this self-determined, politically-independent French Canada is a force to be reckoned with globally. As a consequence of its history, the people of Québec have a radical democracy where grassroots organizations such as ATSA proliferate. ATSA's practice is significant in another context. A remarkable energy runs through French Canada, with art delving deeply into notions of poverty and exclusion, the artist becoming an activist in the process.

ATSA's tactic is to appropriate images, create a spectacle, and then sell it to the public through the media. For example, the *Attentat! #* series involves volunteer patrollers recruited by ATSA to issue "statements of offence" that targeted oversized vehicles and excessive engine idling (and, by implication, consumptive values), alerting audiences to the consequences of global warming and pollution. The *Attentat!* itself consisted of parking a scrapyard SUV in a specific location (say, the corner of St. Laurent and St. Catherine in Montreal, or Dundas Square in Toronto) and making it look as if the place had suffered a terrorist attack. There was smoke. Protective safety tape cordoned off the area for the safety of the public, as well as to make the emergency evident. In generating this piece, the artists chose locations that were symbolic of consumption — full of stores, billboards, and advertisements. There, they would show video, hand out leaflets, and allow the public to ask questions. It is important that the means of transgression are deceptively simple: generate a dynamic interaction with issues the public cannot fully grasp, and help them negotiate and confront the social and political conditions that generate these tensions. From the ATSA manifesto: "By grabbing passers-by from their daily worlds and ushering them towards a fiction which strangely resembles reality, the works foster an emotional understanding of the problems at hand and generate positive

CONSTAT D'INFRACTION CITOYENNE
CITIZEN'S STATEMENT OF OFFENCE

ATSA
ACTION FOR SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE TRANSPORT

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

To be done on your own or as part of a group

[Acting as a group maximizes the impact of the action within your community, and allows members of the group to share the costs of printing and trimming the statements of offence.]

1. Use recycled paper and print one or more statements on both sides of each sheet. Three statements may be fitted onto a 8 1/2-inch sheet.
 2. Trim each statement to proper size.
 3. Be sure to read and understand the RULES.
 4. You are ready! Proceed to look for vehicles which are committing one or more violations.
 5. Fill in the information regarding the date, and the location and identification of the vehicle.
 6. Identify the type of violation.
 7. Fill in the total number of demerit points in the "TOTAL" box.
 8. You may add comments as you deem fit. They should always be instructive, never insulting.
- Example:* the number of the by-law against idling.
Example: the vehicle's fuel consumption per 100 km of city driving.
9. Sign your name at the bottom of the statement.
 10. Place the statement on the driver-side windshield. At all times, be SENSITIVE and POLITE with your favourite fellow citizen!

Don't forget to SMILE!

CONSTAT D'INFRACTION CITOYENNE
CITIZEN'S STATEMENT OF OFFENCE

ATSA
ACTION FOR SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE TRANSPORT

RULES

1. Keep all dialogue **respectful and polite**. Never adopt a confrontational attitude with the violator. Always **SMILE**. Everything is explained on the statement!
 2. We target vehicles whose consumption exceeds **15 L per 100 km**.
 - 2.1 In case of doubt as to a vehicle's consumption, refer to the following list and/or conduct some personal research on the vehicle at www.oea.nrcan.gc.ca
 - 2.2 In case of doubt as to the use of the vehicle (family with several children, construction work, delivery vehicle, handicap use, vehicle running on alternative fuel - FFV), do not issue a statement; give the benefit of a doubt.
 3. **DO NOT** issue statements on **PRIVATE** property.
 4. With respect to **idling and remote starting**, be sure that the vehicle's motor has been running for at least 30 seconds from the time of your arrival.
 5. Be discerning and show **good judgment**.
- Example:* A refrigerated truck is permitted to idle.
Example: A baby left in a vehicle in -40°C weather requires a heated car.
6. You are completely **responsible** for your actions in issuing these statements. ATSA hereby absolves itself of any liability, direct or indirect, resulting from any incident which may arise during this action, whether to the issuers of the statements, the violators or the vehicles involved.

citizen action." This statement gives agents a space to interact in public locations, and one effect is that, because they are working on topical issues, ATSA projects succeed in radicalizing what officials want to neutralize.

It helps to have the media on your side. Lately, some people have been coming to ATSA's way of thinking through their use of the media as a site of public space. It means that Annie is the face of ATSA; she is the one the public sees in the media, and she is the one who takes the time to speak to the public. She takes on the role of the public figure who has to deliver information about injustice, etc. In this situation an interesting thing happens: even though the art piece is at the centre of the activity, it is the artist who embodies

the work, allowing it to express emotions from a deep, essential perspective. This is partly because ATSA's dramatic protests tend to develop through the violence of images — for their actions, ATSA chooses strong images that can arouse an emotional response from their audiences. But more intriguingly, ATSA is about going to the source of things, and so together Roy and Allard create situations in which visitors have the opportunity to do their own research of intimacy, by way of searching their inner selves, for instance, or by means of the self communicating to others, as in their work *État d'Urgence*.

As noted earlier, the activist organization ATSA describes situations that could happen — a terrorist attack, for example, or homelessness, another significant cul-

tural image. *État d'Urgence*, perhaps ATSA's most ambitious project to date, can be described in this connection, and in closing. *État d'Urgence* developed out of the desire to ask questions about the human condition; it is about the difficulty of living magnified by the artistic process. It is an event that takes place periodically in the core of Montreal. Held over five days in the winter, and representing a displaced persons camp, the project involves housing, feeding, caring for and building an idea of companionship with the homeless. Because of this art project, a person that lives in exclusion can have the opportunity to come out of their routine, different kinds of barriers are broken (social, cultural, inter-personal) and the equation of art + activism has achieved something. ATSA's work is not just an art project but a way of life. ❧

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*I would like to thank Annie Roy and Pierre Allard, of ATSA, for their generous assistance in making this article possible. To find out more about ATSA, go to their website: www.atsa.qc.ca

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Teatro Familias Unidas

Pia Moriarty

Their backs to an audience of neighbours, a chorus line of young Mexican mothers begins to unfold their experience as new immigrants in California. One by one, they turn to tell their stories in Spanish:

"I'm afraid to go out. I don't even know my neighbours. The other day, my son got sick and I didn't know what to do. At home, my mom would have had her home remedies, but I'm alone here."

"My daughter just started school. She reads so slowly, she's already behind. The teacher says that's normal, but it's not. I know it's not."

"I have to work, but there's no one to care for my children. The centres cost too much, and each one has a long waitlist. I have to work."

"What can I do? What can I do???"

Because their skit is composed of real-life testimonies, it communicates a powerful authenticity, and the audience responds in kind. When asked simply, "What do you see here?", they explode into overlapping stories of border crossings, cultural confusions, and working without the benefit of legal authorization and protections. The houses are crowded with three or four families, trying to share rent and getting on each others' nerves. The children are learning disrespectful ways. Some women are virtual prisoners of their husbands' fears.

And listening, we are not alone anymore. Personal stories uncover a foundation for community-building and public actions that had not been considered possible. Theatre of the Oppressed/Pedagogy of the Oppressed, strategies founded by Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire, are being re-invented in yet another context.**

For the past two years, a community-based organization called Mayfair Improvement Initiative has been promot-



ing Boal- and Freire-styled popular education as a way of immigrant organizing. *Teatro* skits that were first presented by para-professional staff (as *Teatro Siembra*) have now evolved into a vehicle for the neighbourhood mothers themselves as *Teatro Familias Unidas*. These women are working to reshape their community with a special eye toward their children's futures in the California school system, and they write their own bilingual skits and testimonials to animate the community, using teatro as their tool to open doors and gather supporters.

These women are low-income activists who donate unpaid labour and ideas not only to Mayfair Initiative, but also as facilitators of a local Grail women's group, as parent helpers at the elementary school, and as community representatives through the city's Strong Neighbourhoods leadership committee. They run their own small business projects out of the home, and are educated and articulate, having earned *secundaria*, *preparatoria*, or high school equivalency

diplomas; they are just now learning English. *Teatro* has supported their development as leaders by giving them meaningful work and respected adult roles in their new country and in the Mayfair neighbourhood.

Mayfair is the longstanding Chicano/Mexicano barrio on the east side of San José, California, where César Chávez got his start as a community organizer. It is a community of first arrival, a true border-town, even though it is located at the base of San Francisco Bay. Among its 20,000-plus residents, 70 per cent are foreign-born, with most coming from Mexico. Families average 5.5 members and a median income of \$22,115 — in the middle of the inflated prices of boomtown Silicon Valley. Half of these adults have no high school diploma or GED, and only 42 per cent report that they speak English adequately; most work multiple low-wage jobs, illegally, without the benefit of work authorization papers.

This is the same neighbourhood where bilingual voices are now raised at civic

meetings to plan a neighbourhood adult learning center, and where local middle school students scored the highest gains on standardized tests in Santa Clara County last year. These families led San José's pro-immigrant march of 125,000 in May 2006.

That demonstration and others started with *Familias Unidas* women's teatro presentations on the backs of flat-bed trucks.

One of these first-time *teatristas*, Sandra Mendoza, acknowledged: "Doing theater makes me feel like a real human being."

Her colleague Leticia Nazario describes her own first experiences with *teatro* as conflicted: "I cried, because that is real life as we live it here. I wanted to be part of the group, but I was too ashamed." She changed through a series of supported and overlapping tasks, each of which was time-limited, tangible, and trusted. Starting from familiar female contexts (at her son's school) and traditional activities (providing food for Mayfair events), she moved into creative teatro participation as a writer/actor. This helped her to conquer her own fears and become a positive role model: "We are the mirrors for our children, and if we don't take the initiative and they see that we hesitate to do new things, then they will be left with a certain fearfulness, and they'll learn to say, 'No, no I can't because I'm afraid of being mortified'," she says.

The women in *Teatro Familias Unidas* develop the voice of each character out of personal experience with the issue they present. This gives their characters emotional force, and it moves the actors from a position of vulnerability (having this personal problem) to one of strength (being able to speak before an important group about an important issue, and give voice to an issue that others share but are afraid to talk about in public).

Working with longtime *teatro* director Arturo Gómez (of *Teatro Campesino* in California and *Los Mascarones* in Mexico City), I had helped train the Mayfair Initiative staff in popular education strategies, and was later asked to conduct a participatory research evaluation of the growth of its teatro practice. In participatory

research, the "objects" under investigation become "subjects" in an almost grammatical sense; they drive the research action, shape the terms of the findings, and exercise final editing control over their own words. This approach was chosen because it is congruent with the agency's mission to develop community members' abilities to teach themselves and learn together. My interviews with the *Familias Unidas* ensemble — Maria Teresa, Sandra, Leticia, and Arturo — were designed to be opportunities for self-reflection; all were audiotaped, fully transcribed in both English and Spanish, and returned to their owners for edits and additions.

Ethnographic questions invited expla-

nations in their own words and were designed to be somewhat open-ended (i.e., How did you begin working with *Teatro Familias Unidas*? How does it relate to your work as a mother? What benefits have you, or others, received from doing teatro? What has it cost you or others?). Participant observation included rehearsals, community meetings, and performances. This research was a process of valuing actors' input and mirroring it all back to them; it was also an informal training exercise in the importance of reflection (as, thus far, group reflections had been *ad hoc* and oral).

Freirean community organizing demands a continuous listening process. In

They were asserting their humanity in the face of proposed national legislation that would have criminalized virtually the entire Mayfair neighborhood, as well as anyone who offered services to undocumented residents.



PIA MORIARTY

contrast to a classic Alinsky approach (in which planners select politically "hot" issues around which strategically to mobilize groups), a Freirean approach ranks the planners as subordinate to the community itself. What matters to Freire are the generative, life-loaded, community-electric themes that already demand community focus and carry its energy. His process is an interactive one of development critical consciousness accomplished by:

- listening to identify currently loaded issues in a specific community;
- re-presenting them in a tangible art form for group discussion (i.e., picture "codes," brief skits);
- helping people to articulate individual experiences in a group setting and thus building an awareness of shared experience;
- teaching the group, through dialogue and actual manipulation of the tangible art form presented, that they can engage with its problems and not just suffer them;
- linking the emotion inherent in these dialogues to skill-building (i.e., literacy in its widest sense) and questions of historical/social context, and causality of the problems being discussed;
- supporting group decision-making (i.e., a foundational political process) to select locally appropriate work to address a chosen issue,;
- and, insisting on continuous evaluation and readjustments of this work as people learn, situations change, and new possibilities develop.

What has puzzled and enlightened me is that *Teatro Familias Unidas* presentations usually complete only the first part of this process, yet participants are obviously moved, and moved to collective action. Men, as well as women, weep publicly as they relate their own stories to the skits. These are the same people who brought their entire families — babes in arms and strollers, 5-year-olds walking the four miles downtown and four miles back, gray-headed grandparents — to San José's pro-immigrant marches of spring 2006. They were asserting their humanity in the face of proposed national legislation that would have

criminalized virtually the entire Mayfair neighbourhood, as well as anyone who offered services to undocumented residents. These demonstrations were five times the size of any seen before in San José, and they came together in one month's time.

Such empowering outcomes have made me think again about what constitutes effective dialogue and how large a classroom can be, given a popular education paradigm.

Clearly, there has been a swift and mostly implicit exchange of histories, emotions, and thinking at these *teatro* presentations. Perhaps, within a group that shares such an acute experience (i.e., illegal immigration during a strongly anti-immigrant decade), dialogue does not need to be as explicit and attenuated as I, a Freirean teacher, had assumed. Connections, affirmations, and calls to action are being made within the public telling of the stories themselves.

Our classrooms are much broader than the living-rooms or schools where *teatro* is shared, extending into and supported by parallel efforts in the streets. Therefore, the timing of this teaching matters more than its formal content. In San José, we saw a convergence between neighbourhood self-expression through small *teatro* presentations, increasing anti-immigrant threats, and pro-immigrant organizing that was happening simultaneously on a national scale.

The women of *Teatro Familias Unidas* are continuing their work and recruiting new members to the ensemble, not only because they enjoy it, but because it serves them in their efforts at personal development. In the words of Maria Teresa Bárcenas, "Aparte de que me gusta, porque me sirve, como que es algo de superación personal. Estoy muy animada a continuar. / I feel very motivated to continue." ❧

** Both Boal and Freire first developed their community-based approaches to expressive learning and group empowerment through participating in Brazil's democratization in the early 1960's. Since then, their classic texts have been translated and adapted in social change projects worldwide.

Pia Moriarty is an educator and anthropologist who has worked for many years with immigrant and refugee communities in California, adapting Paulo Freire's approach to community development. As Santa Clara University's faculty director of service learning and internships/field education at Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union, she developed and administered model reciprocal education programs for campus-community partnerships. Moriarty lives in San José, where she serves as Library Commissioner and does pro-bono consulting with the Office of Human Relations, Immigrant Relations and Integration Services.

Further Reading:

Mayfair Improvement Initiative website (www.mayfairneighborhood.org) contains further descriptions of teatro efforts, local research studies, and current contact information.

Active Voice (www.activevoice.net) has recently produced a 10-minute DVD of the original **Teatro Siembra** skit that inspired **Teatro Familias Unidas**.

Roadside Theatre (www.roadside.org) offers examples of **teatro** based in American Appalachia and networked nationwide.

Santa Clara County's Office of Human Relations (www.immigrantinfo.org) posts model, multilingual research about immigrant needs and contributions.

Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley (www.ci-sv.org) posts an online version of Dr. Moriarty's monograph, "Immigrant Participatory Arts: An Insight into Community-Building in Silicon Valley," 2004.

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Remembering Ista

Becoming a Nuxalk Woman

Jacinda Mack

From the earliest explorers, academics, travellers, and colonial settlers, traditional research involving indigenous peoples has predominantly been from an outsider perspective. Indigenous peoples were not active, informed, and authoritative participants, but were simple objects of study. There was little consideration of the social, political, cultural, and economic framing of research, or how it would affect the indigenous communities and nations involved. However, present-day indigenous scholars from around the world are questioning, critiquing, and deconstructing such ethnocentric bias in an attempt to reverse the colonial gaze and empower their communities. In this new era of indigenism, the authoritative, "Indian expert" status Western scholars may seek and aggressively protect (Deloria Jr. 1998) is being reframed by indigenous scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who asserts, "Indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity" (5).

It is within the context of my own humbling research that I engaged with my community, the Nuxalk Nationⁱⁱ, on a journey that situated me within the ongoing history and lineage of my people, not only as a Nuxalk citizen, but also as a Nuxalk woman. Part of my understanding was formed while making a video documentary, *Remembering Ista: Nuxalk Perspectives on Sovereignty and Social Change*, for my master's thesis project (Mack 2006). In an attempt to better understand my community and how these events have shaped our present existence, I chose to study a recent turbulent event in our history.

To begin, it is important to understand what "Ista"ⁱⁱⁱ means. The first woman to descend to our land, Ista arrived on an island called Nuxalknalus, in the heart of our territory. Ista is also the name of the

place where she descended. Ista is a song, a dance, and a story, all of which retell our heritage, our responsibilities, and our connection to the creator, to the land, and to each other. In all these things, Ista is part of our Smayustas, our creation stories that explain who we are as Nuxalkmc^{iv} and our place in the world. Ista is also a reference to a local stand against a logging campaign to clearcut that valley, our place of creation and link to the first Nuxalk woman. In making the documentary about Ista, I was

emotional. With the stand, there was a split in the community over how Nuxalk leadership and values were being portrayed in the media, as well as the perceived disparities in power relations with outside environmental groups. These tensions often resulted in heated arguments and bad feelings within and between families, both Nuxalk and the wider central coast community. With the video project, people were able to speak about their own experience and reflect on the lessons from

Ista is a song, a dance, and a story, all of which retell our heritage, our responsibilities, and our connection to the creator, to the land, and to each other

drawn into complex, layered meanings of what it means to be a Nuxalk woman, and how we shape our community and nation.

By making a video documentary to retell the story of Ista, I was able to incorporate in-person elements of oral storytelling, personal recounting, and visual experience in an accessible form that the community could use as a tool for educating, reflecting, healing, and communicating. Although the final product was a compilation of images, words, and stories that painted a layered experience of my community, learning went beyond the technical process of cutting scenes together. As a documentary, the process included interviews, gathering raw footage, and making connections between people, ideas, and a sense of time and place.

Although many Nuxalk people participated, it was often a difficult process for people to recount their stories. For many, the Ista experience was so deeply

this difficult time. For many people, the Ista experience revealed the social, economic, cultural, and ecological crisis that faced the community. It also revealed the deep-rooted pain and suffering of a community, struggling as a colonized indigenous nation to reconcile with a violent past and unstable future.

It was a difficult and emotional journey for me as well, as I, too, came to realizations about my own process of colonization. For several months, my health declined and, watching the videotapes and reading the transcripts about the Ista events, I often found myself in tears. I was, and remain, deeply and personally invested in the outcome of my research. Through this video, I played a very important role in how Ista will be remembered. In many scenes, there are visual sequences of losses and others who have died since the stand at Ista, including those who succumbed through suicide, violence, and

substance abuse to the harsh life of the colonized. These people are my friends and family. For those who have watched the video, many have commented that one of the most powerful aspects of the video was that it made very plain why we are fighting to protect our identity and land as Nuxalk people.

All of my interviews except for one were completed in English. Only one interview was partly in the Nuxalk language, via a translator. It struck me immediately that I needed a translator for my own language. As a Nuxalk citizen, the importance and responsibility of knowing my own language so that I can think and speak and relate from a Nuxalk perspective became paramount. It is no coincidence that our primary language is called our mother tongue, and that by standing up for Ista, Nuxalk people stood up for our very existence. The story of Ista was layered with such revelations, reiterating the vital role of Nuxalk women in maintaining our identity.

In discussions regarding what Ista means to them, the women's responses always reflected on their responsibilities to their families, our community, and the land, which are carried out in how we "practice ourselves" as Nuxalkmc. Such engagement with our identity includes elements of physical, spiritual, and social

learning, such as quiet moments in the rainforest preparing cedar bark with my aunts, cutting and smoking salmon, and even learning how to properly organize my own father's funeral feast. These moments and active participation within the community were vital elements of my research and process of creating my own understanding of the Ista stories.

One great example of how Ista engaged and invoked a reclamation of self was through three Nuxalk elders: my grandma, Skwuklikwana (Lucy Mack Sr.), and elders Nunanta (Amanda Siwallace) and Elsie Jacobs. In an elders' and chiefs' meeting, Elsie discussed our responsibilities in being Nuxalkmc:

You can put on your dancing blanket and say that you're proud to be from the house of the grizzly bear, or you can put on your dancing blanket and say that your grandfather was a raven, or you can say that you are a killer whale... but what is happening to the grizzly bear? To the raven? They're getting kicked out of their own house... and you put on your dancing blanket with the grizzly bear or the raven? I don't think so. It doesn't work that way (Karen Anderson, personal communication, 2006).

My grandmother's ancestral Nuxalk name, Skwuklikwana, comes from Ista, as does her Smayusta. After hearing about the logging plans, she spoke up and said simply, "I'm going." Nunanta, who had just received a hip replacement surgery, responded, "I'm going, too." These women understood the profound importance of remembering Ista, and making a stand to protect all the values that Ista represents and embraces.

Through the Ista project, the stories and experiences of Ista were retold, illustrating the roles of women in our community as leaders, organizers, supporters and healers, as well as individuals who hurt and struggle to continue on, even in the face of everything we are up against. People were able to tell their own story and reflect on the learning and healing that has occurred within the community since then. There is more understanding about how our colonized existence has framed our often violent experiences with the state and settler society, as well as how it has devalued our own way of living in the world as Nuxalkmc. Ista was about protecting our land and identity for our children by upholding our responsibilities to the creator while acknowledging the importance of women in the leadership and healing of our families and community. In remembering Ista, we



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There is more understanding about how our colonized existence has framed our often violent experiences with the state and settler society, as well as how it has devalued our own way of living in the world as Nuxalkmc

remember our value as women, and the responsibilities we carry for ourselves, for our children, and for our nation. ❧

- i Maori scholars often use the terms "indigenism" and "indigenist" as part of a reconstructed methodology that unapologetically and explicitly privileges indigenous perspectives.
- ii The Nuxalk Nation is located in the heart of temperate coastal rainforest in what is now known as the Bella Coola Valley on the central coast of British Columbia.
- iii Ista is pronounced 'ee-stah'.
- iv Nuxalkmc means Nuxalk people.

Jacinda Mack is a Nuxalk woman working in the environmental sector to improve the lives and lands of indigenous peoples. She is currently living in Vancouver with her son Orden.



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Lying: A Play in Two Acts*

An interview with poet and creative non-fiction writer Betsy Warland

Aileen Penner

ACT ONE

Latin jazz is playing on Betsy's stereo. I can hear it from the street as I ride my bike up to her open patio door. This is our second meeting and the first of two interviews to discuss Betsy's new work on lying and how it pertains to the environmental crisis. I have known her for almost two years; she was my mentor during my time in the Writer's Studio at Simon Fraser University. We have remained friends and I admire her work: her poetry and creative non-fiction resonate with me.

Betsy is in the kitchen making two glasses of iced herbal tea. I greet her and ask her how she is. She answers honestly. When she asks after me, I lie. As she hands me the tea, I notice her signature stubby pencil with the toque eraser tucked behind her right ear. I take the plate of squares and she balances the tea on her books as we move to her neighbor's back garden to conduct the first part of the interview on this hot July afternoon. We sit in metal chairs facing one another and discuss what questions I will ask. I set and test the recorder and begin, nervously.

(A plane flies low overhead.)

Aileen: So, you said that we live in a culture of lying and I wanted you to elaborate on this and how it might be linked to women and, specifically, [to] the environmental crisis.

Betsy: [pause] It's a big question. I'm just trying to figure out the way in.

Betsy: I'm working on an essay on lying [edit]**.

(Her hands are flying as she finds the way in to this conversation.)

I've encountered a lot of lying in the last number of years, in the places my life has taken me: things I've encountered, people I've known. And I've been quite aware of it culturally, but I'd never encountered it in so many areas before. I think there are circumstances where lying is necessary (self-survival), but for the most part, it's not necessary but we think it is.

(Kids shout in next yard.)

Betsy: [1-6:41] [edit] I feel there's a lot of evidence that we are living in a society saturated with lying, whether it's on the political governance level, or advertisements or the church, or organized religion, or whatever. [1-7:02] When I looked at lying, what I've discovered about it is that there is never a [single] lie. And that's what's so powerful and scary about it, because if you tell a lie, you also have to tell yourself in some way, you're not lying. Or that it's justified. Which is also a kind of a lie. So there's the lie and then there's justifying or denying that you are telling the lie. Then there is making the lie seem like it's not a lie to other people. So right there you have three lies — immediately. But there is a fourth on the heels of these — just as the liar must not appear to be telling a lie, so the audience must not appear to be listening to, nor knowingly accept[ing], the first three lies. That's what's so powerful about lying.

[1-7:40] *(Betsy looks into the garden as she gathers her next point.)*

[1-2:41] I've also discovered that behind the lying is greed. It could be a materialistic greed, it could be power, but greed is what's driving the lie. And I feel that, in North America, we are living in a profoundly greedy culture, which we call capitalism! [both laugh] And democracy.

(I tuck my hair behind my right ear, begin to relax.)

Betsy: [1-3:49] [edit] I know what's happening with the environment is largely because of greed. One of the examples that really gets me is stopping cancer. What I experienced when I went through cancer, the process of going through treatments and surgeries and dealing with oncologists et cetera, is that cancer is a huge industry serviced by the pharmaceutical companies. And it's going to become a phenomenal industry with the baby boomers.

Aileen: [1-4:49] You mean an industry that perpetuates the disease?

Betsy: [1-5:08] Yes. Absolutely. And it is a very profitable industry. [edit] And there's a tremendous amount of lying in the pharmaceutical industry around testing and safeness, and downplaying side effects [edit].

(A small lime-green spider crawls along the black metal table beneath my glass of tea.)

[1-8:39] *(Chickadee-dee dee.)*

<pause>

Betsy: [1-9:35] You go into most households and open the cupboards and [chemical cleaning products] should never be in a household. As women, we are the ones most exposed to these daily, "domestic" toxic products used in our homes, on our lawns, on our bodies. Given that most of us are in the workforce, yet still are the ones doing the domestic work and the raising of our children, marketing that constantly emphasizes efficiency and ease is meant to hook us [edit]. [1-9:41] It's

like a circle within a circle within a circle. And I think that's why it's so hard to find our way out {edit}. Anyway, those are just some thoughts. What do you think?

Aileen: [1-10:21] I agree that we do live in a culture of lying and I'm really interested in this idea of putting aside what we know in order to exist in the world. [1-10:54] So for example, not always having the capacity to buy organics but needing to eat certain foods that I know are covered in pesticides.

Betsy: Yes.

Aileen: [1-10:59] So in a way, sometimes I put aside that knowledge in order to [laughs] work within my budget to eat the food I need to eat. [1-11:18] I think that the food we put in our body is important. And we are often being lied to about what is healthy. And I am interested in my own strategies about how I can ignore certain knowledge and still move through the world {edit}. Food and farmed salmon in particular is an issue for me, as you know, [as] I work for an organization that is about protecting wild salmon.

[1-12:49] (*Children play and bang on pots and pans.*)

Betsy: Yeah, right.

Aileen: [1-13:30] I was shocked to find out recently that the organization took a cash donation from a fish farming company. And, at least to me, scientific opinion is pretty clear about the harmful effects of farming alien species in Pacific waters. But what I was more interested in were the lies my colleagues were telling themselves in order to make that okay...

Betsy: Yes. Yes.

Aileen: ...And the quite-unexpected reaction to my objection that this might be something we would want to question, [the] dismissal of my resistance to being complicit with this lie. So I'm really interested in interrogating that idea of what we put aside, and what are we working

towards anyway?

Betsy: I know.

Aileen: [1-14:10] Of course there is no space of purity, but it seems that some of my colleagues and I aren't even working towards the same goal.

Betsy: [1-14:20] I think that is a really good example and I think that, as women (and again, this is all overgeneralizing [laugh]), we tend to still have a less-compartmentalized approach to ethics. We have to because we are still primarily the raisers of our children, and the kind of environment we are in on a daily basis doesn't work that well [laugh] in terms of compartmentalizing ethics.

Aileen: Yes.

Betsy: [1-15:04] So, when we encounter that — like in a workplace — it is entirely two different languages, entirely two different mindsets.

Aileen: Yes.

Betsy: [1-11:43] Yeah, it's like the deals we make. The deals we make with ourselves and our environment. {edit}[1-12:22] It's like almost trying to mix and vary your poison, to some extent. It's a terrible mind-state to be living in as a culture. Beneath this is a pervasive fear — we sense the peril we're in but can't yet face the changes we need to make {edit}.

[1-15:10] (*Plane flies overhead.*)

[1-17:23] (*Crows caw back and forth.*)

<long pause>

Betsy: [1-23:28] What came to me as a phrase today was: it's like we are stalking ourselves from within. With all the ways we lie to ourselves as a culture {edit}.

[1-22:30] (*Another plane flies low overhead.*)

Aileen: [1-24:28] Yes. I think that if we

acknowledged that we are stalking ourselves, then we would have to confront who we are: a greedy culture quite willing to opt for convenience and profit over other more responsible, ethical, and healthy ways of being {edit}.

(*Both exit through garden gate.*)

. . . .

ACT TWO

I have been reading Betsy's critical art, feminist essays, and early poetry, trying to place the "fit" with "the environment" part of our theme. It is a full two weeks after our first interview. Betsy and I have reviewed and discussed my transcript from Part One and I am here to record Part Two. This time I bring berry squares. It is another warm July day with more urban noises as we start the interview.

Aileen: Betsy, you've said that one of the qualities of truth is that it needs to keep questioning itself, something that lying is bad at. [2-1:09] One of the things I love about your work is that it gets at the immediacy of emotion and that it allows for silence on the page. And someone once said of my work, "you leave no where to hide," and I've been thinking a lot about this. And I think that poetry and creative non-fiction get at this questioning to undermine lying and other metanarratives. What do you think?

[2-4:25] (*Ice cream truck song chimes down the street.*)

Betsy: [2-4:30] Are you going to write this sound in?

Aileen: The Dickie Dee Ice Cream truck? Yes! [*Both laugh*]

<long pause>

Betsy: {edit} [2-4:49] Yes. No place to hide. What I would equate that with is also not disassociating. Not allowing yourself to disassociate with the narrative, not allowing the narrative to disassociate from itself, and not allowing the reader to

disassociate. Essentially, being present.

Aileen: Yes. Yes.

Betsy: {edit} [2-6:20] There's an author I'm exited about and extremely grateful for recently: Jamaica Kincaid {edit}. She is from Antigua, but came to the U.S. when she was 17. She talks about how she sees Americans — Canadians are this way, too — as being idealistic, and how we are all really interested in happiness {edit}, which most often is the commodification of happiness (and the privileges that come with it). Kincaid is not really interested in this kind of happiness — she's interested in truth.

[2- 7:28] So for anyone, let alone an author, to say, "I'm not interested in happiness, I'm interested in truth," it's really a very radical thing.

[2-7:44] There are all kinds of creative non-fiction writing and poetry, so you could argue that creative non-fiction and poetry don't necessarily have these qualities. But I do think [that], as forms, as genres, they lend themselves to questioning. And poetry — certainly when you are writing it, it requires acute presence, almost [at the] vowel [and] consonant level. And with creative non-fiction (the way we both write), quite a lot of that material is our lived experience, [2-8:52] so, to my mind, that requires a lot of questioning because [pause] it's the story we think we know, but don't know. What drives the writing is the not-knowing.

[2-9:38] There's a lot to be said with this question. What are your thoughts now?

Aileen: [2-10:00] I was thinking about why I chose creative non-fiction for my current work and I realize it has a lot to do with silence around emotions in my life. And it might be easier to write it as fiction, but there is something {edit} that holds me closer to the truth with this genre. I feel there is less room to move in creative non-fiction, and this constraint comes from what I see as an ethical commitment to the people I write about. I'm

drawn to the form because it is about responsibility to others and a constant interrogating of "truth."

Betsy: [2-11:41] I remember having a conversation with Lee Maracle a few years ago {edit} about writing and family. She briefly talked about how many people had died in her family because life expectancy is still so much lower for First Nations people. And it struck me how I had come from a northern European lineage, and what I experienced far more is my family forgetting itself — that death came more through a process of senility, dispersion, [and] Alzheimers. [2-13:40] We spend a fair amount of time trying to forget who we are. {edit} It's very common among people of northern European decent to not talk about deeper things, to forget, or reformulate our stories — to maintain control.

Aileen: Yes...

Betsy: [2-14:27] I see this form of writing as {edit} a resistance to forgetting who we are, an attempt to be more responsible for our lives.

(I nod in agreement.)

<Space>

(Cars whoosh past.)

Betsy: [2-22:23] {edit} I also want to speak about scored space.

(A car engine revs on the street.)

When you are working in poetry, the poem typically occupies half the page, and the rest is dead space. This is something that comes from my lived experience as a child and how I felt that the taboo, the unknown, the uncensored, the denied, were very powerful forms of communication. This will always be with me — it is a signature of my style. And it's something I'm always taking into account and something I am interested in. It is about looking at the page as an ecological system.

<space>

Aileen: [2-23:44] Can you elaborate?

Betsy: [2-23:50] Within ecology, we get into trouble when we only think about, for example —

Aileen: [2-24:13] We take systems out of context.

Betsy: [2-24:18] Yes, and we don't look at the impact of what we introduce into an environment, whereas an ecological sensibility has to take everything into account. In that sense, working with the scored space takes everything into account on the page. It's all alive. Everything has a necessity of being there.

(In the distance, a mother chastises her child.)

<Space>

Aileen: {edit} [2-27:29] Yes, and connecting back to our conversation about lying: {edit} I think this is a way of giving space on the page to be present.

Betsy: [2-28:30] {edit} How I understand the "no place to hide" comment about your work is that the reader or listener become aware of their own feelings about the narrative. It's not that there is no place to hide from this overwhelming narrative — [it's that] there is no place to hide from your own response to it. ✂

* My intention is to represent a dialogue while indicating (where possible) the crafting of this narrative into its final form. I have chosen time codes to indicate how this interview was crafted.

** Indicates that a major section has been edited out

Aileen Penner is a creative non-fiction writer and silkscreen artist. After completing her Masters in Environmental Studies, she graduated from The Writer's Studio in Creative Non-fiction at Simon Fraser University. Betsy Warland was her mentor. She is currently at work on a creative non-fiction manuscript about the parallel construction of families, self, and mega-projects in BC.

Performative Gender

Art, Activism and Community at La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse

Aneessa Hashmi and Felicity Tayler

She wears a surgical mask on a flight between the United States and Canada. Pacing up and down the aisles, she asks her fellow travelers — strangers — to videotape her performances in flight. In a post 9/11 environment of fear and restrictions, these seemingly innocuous actions take on a threatening or subversive dimension — surprisingly, few people react. Tania Bruguera presented *Vigilantes: The Dream of Reason Creates Monsters* as part of the sixth edition of *Le Mois de la Performance* at La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse. While Bruguera was in flight, Tangy Duff was dancing on a street corner in downtown Montreal. While she danced, earphones on, the surrounding pedestrian traffic passed her by or joined in the dance. Unbeknownst to the spontaneous participants, this performance was for the benefit of police surveillance cameras installed in the area to catch unwanted behaviour. In 2004, *Le Mois de la performance* explored the role of activism in performance art. Anonymous and clandestine, or in-your-face, performance art works challenge the world we live in through actions that provoke thought, and serve social functions beyond entertainment.

La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse was founded in 1973, and incorporated in 1974 as a non-profit artist-run centre in Montreal, Quebec. The originating purpose of the gallery was to disseminate the work of professional women artists who were excluded by galleries and museums at the time, due to prevailing gender inequalities in the visual arts milieu. Artistic practices represented at Powerhouse were experimental and non-market-based. This reflected an interest in emerging forms of art-making that were not tied to the patriarchal traditions of Western art history, and, as a result, acted



GUY L'HEUREUX

Les Fermières obsédées, Stars sur le boulevard, 2005.

as open forums for discussion of gender and identity politics. The gallery promoted younger disciplines such as performance art, video art and, more recently, practices based in digital technologies, new media, interdisciplinarity, and other still-undefined forms of artistic expression. Activism that has emerged from La Centrale has traditionally been relational or provocative rather than didactic or adversarial. Because the organization's activity is rooted in supporting artistic practices, the gallery prefers to subvert perceptions through the poetics of art, rather than effect social change through political action or education. The discipline of performance art has had particular influence on the development of community and activism at La Centrale; one reason for this may be that gender itself can be considered a performative action of identity and belonging.

Supporting a local community of emerging women artists has remained central to La Centrale's mandate, as has promoting communication across national and international networks. In addition, the gallery emphasized activities that provide contact between exhibiting artists and varied audiences. Community activities at the gallery in the seventies included daycare facilities and art workshops for kids, and group shows and collective events by gallery members. From 1976 to 1978 (until City officials shut it down), the Powerhouse Performance Space was annexed to the gallery, offering an additional space for live art exploration and thus proposing a new porosity among performance-based works stemming from various disciplines. The outreach, or interactive, aspect of performance art, often identified with artists' desire to be in direct, time-specific relation to the viewer and in

closer contact with their public, has continued to influence the activities of La Centrale. Today, many artists are increasingly interested in making their work resonate with diverse audiences through contributions to the community outside the gallery walls. Because of the organization's history and values, La Centrale is in a position to provoke this kind of exchange.

In the summer of 2004, La Centrale relocated to a section of St. Laurent Boulevard that borders on a vibrant and diverse neighbourhood. For the first time, the gallery is located at street-level, with a store-front window exposed to an expanding, curious, and new public. As a result of the gallery's relocation into a new context of an historic commercial boulevard, the gallery's programming has unavoidably become socio-politically engaged with the "outside world." The following are descriptions of some projects presented since the move that have successfully created a relationship with the plurality of communities surrounding the gallery.

In 2004, *Le 6e mois de la performance* was an experimental project that sought to create a direct relationship between artists and a spontaneous public. Nine artists from varied backgrounds and generations used performance art as a framework to collaborate together and engage the public directly. Throughout the duration of the event, people were invited to participate in the making of artwork based in intimate exchanges, such as allowing Essi Kausalainen to collect the hair that she had gently combed from their heads, or to compare their unique birthmarks to her own. Other artists infiltrated the local neighbourhood with daily happenings. For example, Margaret Dragu performed daily dances in the Parc du Portugal neighborhood, and fed passers-by with freshly baked bread. The offerings of bread were often accepted and many people returned each morning for another slice; those who refused seemed to be suspicious of a "sales catch." Aiyana Maracle engaged the public in discussions of revisionist history during a 36-hour performance culminating at the foot of the Jacques Cartier Monument on Mount-Royal, which commemorates the colo-

nization of her people's land. Through dialogue, members of the public were suddenly involved in a deliberately political and spiritual action. For many participants, this was the first time they thought of this familiar landmark as a sacred space stolen from the original inhabitants of the island.

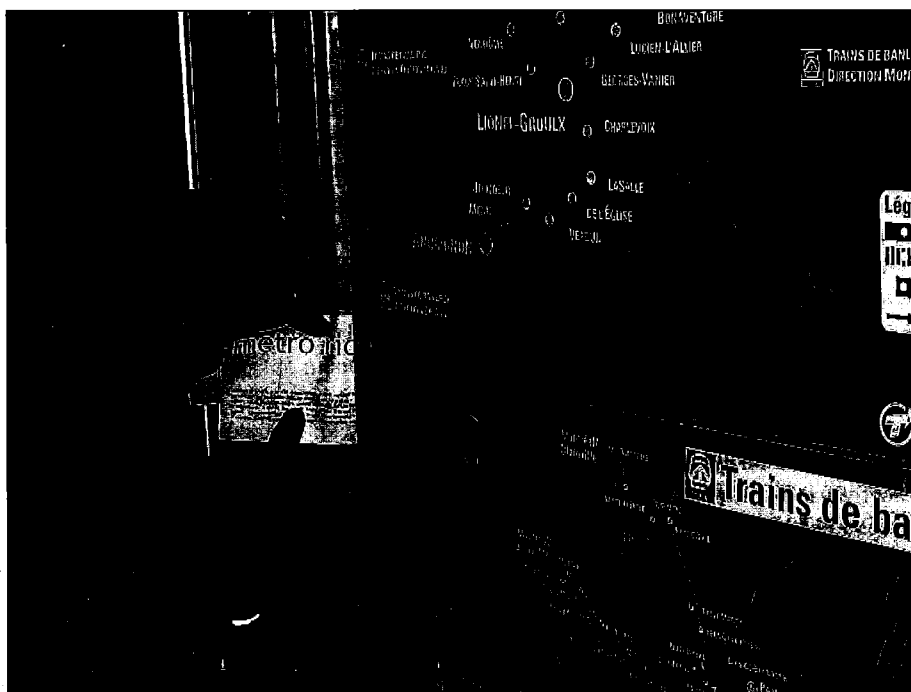
The Metro Rider project in 2005 was an exploration of the anonymous culture of subway commuters. However, it also had a surprising impact on the local community around the gallery. When the 598-hour metro rider intervention was presented at La Centrale, subway tickets were distributed and a trilingual text (in French, English, and Portuguese) was posted in the gallery window.

Metro rider rides the metro, she goes from anywhere to anywhere. She rides for about six months, logging five hundred and ninety-eight hours. At the end she doesn't want to come up, so she continues...

The addition of the third language solicited a significant response from the surrounding Portuguese community, and visitors who would not normally have entered the gallery expanded the discus-

sion on new forms of art, metro-riding, and anonymous metropolitan culture.

PAPERWALL: ANALYZING IMAGES, a 2006 multimedia exhibition of queer artwork from across North America, resulted in a discussion about community as an open system distinct from the exclusionary practice of clan-making. The exhibition gathered together documentary evidence of an independent, politicized movement influenced by punk-rock and DIY that has maintained a critical stance towards mainstream gay and lesbian culture. For the occasion, Judith "Jack" Halberstam, professor of English and director of the Center for Feminist Research at the University of Southern California, led a round-table discussion of participating artists. Underground and ephemeral works from the movement were displayed, including: silk-screened posters dating from the eighties to 2005, that promoted fly-by-night events; anti-war concerts and conferences; small-run 'zines or projects such as New York City-based feminist journal LTRR; and stickers made available to the public to label themselves as "he-she," "granny lezzie," "expired lezzie," and so on. The presentation of this material in the visible and publicly accessible space of a gallery pro-



METRO RIDER, 2005.

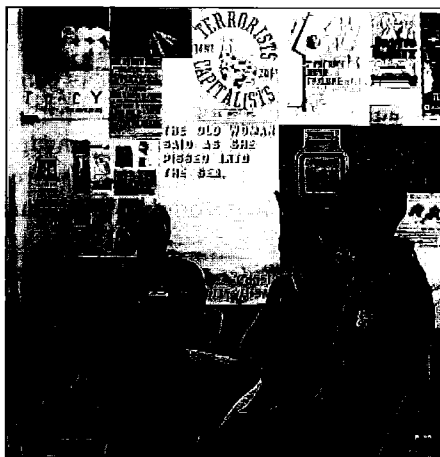
ROXANNE ARSENAULT

voked reflection on the archiving and collective memory of marginalized cultural production, the relevance of storytelling and transmission through community, and the deconstruction of dominant narrative forms. For many members of the public who participated in the events of the exhibition, this was the opportunity to learn the otherwise inaccessible history of a tacitly understood community.

St. Laurent Boulevard's iconic position in the economic and cultural history of Montreal often results in an expression of "community," driven by local businesses. One such example is the hyper-commercial Grand Prix weekend in June that shuts down the street to traffic. The Grand Prix is characterized by an influx of tourists, girls in skimpy car-racing uniforms, conspicuous consumption, and macho pride. In front of this backdrop, the Québec City collective Les Fermières Obsédées presented their parade-performance *Stars sur le boulevard: Drive Rodeo* on June 9, 2005, at 10:00 pm — the height of the Grand Prix festivities. All along the boulevard, the Fermières made a spectacle of themselves to the great discomfort of those around them. Accompanied by an oversized red pick-up truck and smeared in a messy mixture of consumer symbols, the artists' own anti-social behaviour mirrored the excesses surrounding them.

Despite La Centrale's non-commercial activity, the gallery has been incorporated into the boulevard's business community by default; this includes participation in the renowned annual St. Laurent street sale. The gallery's benefit event, *boom-chix-a-boom*, infiltrates the street sale, exposing the captive audience of shopping Montrealers to non-commercial cultural production, often in the form of participatory performative works. These interventions, including Hazel Myers' skipping performance at the event in June 2006, create a spontaneous and ephemeral community. This performance attracted over 100 strangers, who stopped shopping and joined in jumping rope to loud music in the middle of the street.

At La Centrale, there has been constant movement of women artists and cul-



Margaret Dragu, Sylvie Cotton, Essi Kausaleinen, *Le 6e mois de la performance*, 2004.

tural workers throughout the development of the gallery. These women and their various backgrounds and approaches to feminisms have driven the membership and orientation of the gallery over time. Every show and active participant in the life of the gallery impacts its evolution, thanks to a non-hierarchical organizational structure that encourages participatory leadership. La Centrale remains open to a plurality of feminisms across age, culture, class, and sexuality because of values based in inclusiveness and participation. The close ties between the gallery, feminist artists, and the development of performance art have extended these values to the larger public. This tendency has resulted in the support of outward-looking, socially engaged, artistic production that has relevance to communities outside the artistic milieu but also remains true to the theoretical development of the discipline. ❧

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The Lost Body

Recovering Memory: A Personal Legacy

Diane Roberts

Relache. Never a kinder word was spoken when, in Hervé Maxi's Haitian dance class, [held at Compagnie Danse Nyata Nyata, Montreal, Quebec ;]after deep bends and ballet toes I was finally able to "Relache, two, three, four...". I found my body challenged to its limit in Maxi's class, but in Zab Maboungou's Central African dance repertoire class, I was stressed beyond seeming repair in my attempts to master the Zeboula, a healing dance from the Congo. This caused me to question my bodily acceptance of the Haitian movement vocabulary over the Congolese. Why, when both dance classes share the same roots and origins and when both dance classes boast the same rigour, was it easy for me to embody the Haitian dance, with its commingling of European and African slave dance and ritual movements, but not the Central African? After much frustration, confusion, and deliberation, I realised that the answer lies within the contradictions housed in this, my "Antillean body." Derek Walcott describes this complex idea very well in his Nobel Laureate speech: Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape... This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. (1992)

Inhabiting this "reassembled" frame, just below its foundation, is an ancestral war dance between the coloniser and the colonised, between the slave-master and the slave, between the European explorer and the African warrior. The battle mani-

fest itself daily, in my mind, my hips, my knees, my feet, my ankles, my joints, my blood, my bones, my tongue — my being. In his speech, Walcott speaks of the pain of reconstructing ill-fitting pieces, and this makes sense. He speaks of sacred vessels and forgotten ancestral places, and this rings a bell. He speaks of a careful regathering and the pain of remembering, and my bones vibrate in recognition.

I have been, for some time, obsessed with a search for home, and fighting an overwhelming sense of rootlessness and, to my surprise, dealing with an inexplicable fear of exile and betrayal. Where do these feelings stem from? In my genera-

niment. For a brief moment, when the chant, the rhythm, and the movement aligned, I felt transported to another time and place — no longer feeling my feet or my hips or the floor beneath me, I entered what Frantz Fanon describes as the "permissive circle of the dance." In this circle, there was no fragmentation of body parts, no separation between myself and the other dancers, or between myself and the dance, or between the present and the past. In that fleeting moment, I heard the open call in the chant and my body's mother tongue response, and it felt like home.

The second remembering occurred during Maxi's class after a painful, but



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tion, and my parents' generation, I have yet to uncover a traumatic story that would fit this motif. Despite this fact, I'm left with a lingering belief that these predominant themes exist as main characters in my not-so-distant past. I mention this, not only for context, but also to expose how these themes drive my artistic practice: sometimes to its betterment, sometimes not.

There were two kinds of remembering that occurred for me in both the Haitian class and the Central African class. The first occurred during the Zeboula, when I finally captured the relationship between the movement of my hips and the rhythm of my feet and the vocal chant accompa-

necessary, theory session with Frantz Voltaire on slavery and its impact on the social dynamics of Haiti. Fresh from the pain of fighting the insensitive scepticism of a white French-Canadian classmate who had a hard time believing the lingering impact of colonisation on the black body, I entered the studio for dance repertoire. Maxi was drilling an old series of movements. I had performed them by rote many times before — a simple floor exercise: shuffle ahead on left foot while thrusting the upper torso outward, right leg dragging backwards, weight propelled forward, right hand supported on the lower back, left hand extended out front, body weight resisting backward... Yet, now,

these same movements resonated for me in a new way. In that repetitive dance gesture, I connected at once to a very old memory — older than my or my parent's generation. I felt as if I was re-enacting a symbolic moment in time — being dragged forward into captivity, my body experienced a yearning backwards to a time of freedom. Mastering the movement in that moment felt to me to be a ritual of reclamation — a ceremony of remembering.

*Then I imagine life would flood my
whole being
better still I would feel it touching me or
biting me
lying down I would see the finally free
odors come to me
like merciful hands
finding their way to sway their long hair
in me
longer than this past that I cannot reach
(Cesaire)*

Over the course of the last couple of years, working with artists from diverse practices, I have developed a physical/dramaturgical process based on a combination of West/Central African dance and story traditions — where the teller/dancer and the story/event are in a dynamic and changing relationship. Out of this, the Personal Legacy work evolved as an embodied process exploring ancestry. Originally designed for an introduction to acting course, its aim was to bring the actor into alignment with his or her authentic cultural-historic body as a grounding tool for subsequent character development work. In its evolution, however, this work has begun to reveal itself to be an important self-discovery/recovery tool that exposes questions of shifting identity during transmigration.

At the centre of this process is the acknowledgement that everything we need to draw on for inspiration is stored in our bodies as memory. The Personal Legacy work provides an entryway to access ancestral memory. There are three phases to the work: the research phase, the embodiment phase, and the discussion/feedback phase. Each of these phases requires a commitment on the part of the



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researcher/performer to enter the contradictory world of investigative research and embodied knowing. Also required are a facilitator, and an outside witness. After an initial character-profile-generating research phase, the researcher/performer enters the studio for the first embodiment. At this stage, the research serves as a map. The magic arises when the legacy subject/person leads the performer instead of the other way around.

A series of repetitive vocal and physical exercises designed to awaken the body — paying specific attention to rhythm, alignment, and spontaneity — prepares the performer physically. The use of chants and songs from inside and outside the specific legacy culture (i.e. West African song/chants, Indian Ragas, Hebrew prayer songs) can transport the performer to a particular time or space. These songs can also result in a more natural and open body/voice connection that can ultimately prepare the performer to receive story bits, images and, ideas passed on by the legacy subject.

The power of the Legacy work lies in its mystery. Participating artists have usually chosen to embody a family member from generations past. Over and again, they emerge from the process with the eerie feeling of having touched the core of their legacy person. They have reported a deep bond that has not only changed them as individuals but has, in some cases, begun to address family rifts.

“Madly, listening to impulses, interviewing people. I wake up thinking about this project and go to sleep with it in my mind... I have several (well, four) family members whose stories and beings have found me... I want to spend my time here

learning as much as I can about all four of them instead of just one. And as I hear more of their stories, it seems to me that they all want in!” (Sircar)

Ways of knowing: A transformative collaborative process

Coming to the Legacy work means you bring with you not only a legacy project, but also a desire to work from a culturally specific performance tradition. Up to now, the artists that have been drawn to work with the process have either participated in a group workshop or class or have heard a description of the process.

In January 2005, I met Heather Hermant in a workshop I conducted at York University in Toronto; in May of the same year, I met Lopa Sircar in a voice-intensive course in Vancouver. After working with Heather at York and hearing about Lopa's plans to research her own legacy, I agreed to work with them and they with me. In June 2006, during a residency at urban ink production's Fathom Labs retreat centre on Galliano Island, British Columbia, the three of us gathered to workshop and document the beginning stages of Heather's work, “ribcage: this wide passage” and Lopa's piece, “The Vermillion Project”, as well as to further explore the techniques of the personal legacy work. There were uncanny similarities between the projects and between their individual journeys toward realising the projects that couldn't be denied. Although our task in the Galliano workshop wasn't to explore the exchange of legacy stories, there was an irrefutable intersection between the two life stories that tapped into a larger archetypal landscape that was larger than their individual circumstances.

A significant principle governing the process is the dynamic relationship between the subject, the performer, the facilitator/animator, and the outside witness. To describe this relationship, I'll use the comparison of a spiral. There are three key positions on this spiral, which, when viewed from above, travels inward toward its centre point or “source”, representing the legacy subject. They include the inner loop, the mid- to outer loop and the outermost loop. Through the process, the per-

former attempts to travel along the innermost loop, closing in on the subject/source.

As facilitator, I find myself tentatively (if not instinctively) traveling one loop behind the performer, testing distance, approach, duration while questioning, lingering, mirroring breath patterns and shifting body weight, sensing and testing moments to provoke, and moments to allow and support. The witness remains stationary on the outermost spiral loop. Her vital role in the exercise is to observe and record key moments of intersection between facilitator, performer, and source, and interpret in feedback her own experiences as outside observer.

Doubts & Coincidences

"You may be disappointed to hear that while I am having an amazing and insightful time here, my ideas have become less clear, not more." (Sircar)

There is a certain uncertainty about the legacy process — it is like stepping into the abyss; this part of the process is as important as the final product. Unable to predict where the work will lead, we enter the dark spaces with a faith that our journey to the other side will reap much fruit: possibilities, insights, artistic source material, text bits, image strands...

"I discovered that the archive has incorrectly filed several documents pertaining to Esther. I found them by total sheer mysterious accident, I just happened to stop the microfilm reel at just the right moment..."

Some of the doubts that arise in the work can be gateways to further understanding. Our work is to stay open and enter the liminal space.

"I'm here and not here. I'm experiencing an altered consciousness — I know I've tapped the unconscious... but have I tapped the ancestral? From where do we learn to listen? Have we really discovered the profound breath open welcoming of the ancestral voice or is it just coincidence?"

What do we do with the "inch work"? Where do these minute internal movements lead us? Do they point toward a greater w/hole? How do we know we're headed in the right direction? Are these

found impulses connected to the subject/source or to our own habitual patterns or pre-existing assumptions?

"I can feel my blood clawing its way back through a larger, global history — red and bulging with life and potential — a sense that I can stretch backwards and forwards in equal distances — that I am a part of a continuum and that there is so much beautiful work to be done." (Sircar)

Despite the doubts, one thing I know for certain is that The Personal Legacy work makes history live again. It absolves the sinners, exposes the demons, personalizes deified heroes, and brings them down to human level.

The Personal Legacy work is a gate-

way from the outside to the inside, from the there and then to the here and now, from the political to the personal, from the you to me, from the them to us. ❧

Diane Roberts, as theatre artist and cultural animator, has worked throughout Canada, the U.S., Central America, Europe and the Caribbean. Over the past few years Diane's artistic passion has been to articulate, explore and practice African and diasporic forms of theatre in a New World context. She is a research partner in the international collaborative research project entitled VIVA!, focussing on creative tensions in popular education and community arts across the Americas and is currently coordinating CAO's community building workshop series, Weaving Tapestries.

Earth's Beauty is Fading

Mischievous Raging Grannies to the Rescue!

Carole Roy

They crash commissions and wreak havoc on politicians' carefully timed visits—they're the Raging Grannies, and they don't worry about respectability. Instead, they use their sharp, witty tongues to sound the alert on local and global issues. With plenty of life experience, they know the simple truth — human beings and other living things need healthy environments.

The Raging Grannies were formed in 1987 in response to the danger posed to the environment and people's health by the visits of nuclear-reactor-powered American warships and submarines carrying nuclear weapons in the waters of Victoria, British Columbia. Washington refused to say whether or not nuclear weapons were on those U.S. vessels, and the Canadian government conveniently did not ask. Ottawa's policy did not reassure the Grannies — especially in the absence of an emergency plan in case of accident (despite the recent Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe).

The Grannies take to heart Margaret Laurence's saying that growing old means

becoming more radical. Proud to be perennial thorns, they battle social and political dragons and dinosaurs with satirical songs, wit, humour, and creative mischief, inflicting giggles on unsuspecting audiences, and drawing attention to social and environmental issues both local and global. While some Grannies have trained voices, most do not. They often add their own words to well-known tunes and generally do not worry about singing in key, a liberating experience for those who want to join with others to sing about topics important to them. Other art forms used for outreach to a greater audience include costumes and skits. They believe in democracy and rattle the cage, urging people "off their fannies." They insist that they are not entertainers but rather "interveners" on the political scene. And intervene they do, with zest, flair and a dose of outrageousness. Being a persistent nuisance is to their taste.

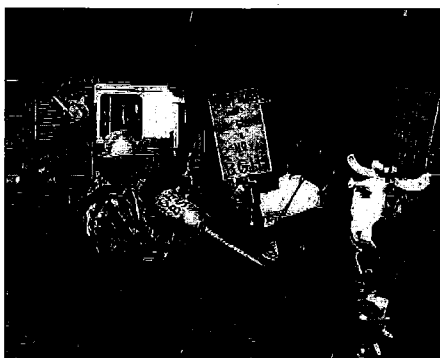
The Raging Grannies demonstrate what Maria Tucker called an "inordinate ability to mix disparate elements with wild abandon." Once introduced as super-cool

born-again teenagers, the Grannies are masters of the use of “theoretical subtext, comedic timing, and irreverence” (Gledhill 46). From the eighties up to the present, the Grannies have educated about and advocated for environmental issues with daring and humour. In 2005, Granny Jo Hayward cleverly asked, “How are you going to freeze up the polar ice caps?” Defiant, they sheltered under old ratty umbrellas full of holes to symbolize the stupidity of taking refuge under the nuclear umbrella; paddled kayaks out in the Victoria harbour to serenade immense American warships; scolded politicians; and offered large, broken hearts (“unvalentine”), all in the name of protecting the earth. Armed with a laundry basket full of their “briefs” (a clothesline of women’s underwear!), they waged war on uranium mining.

They battle the insatiable appetite of forestry companies for precious forests with satirical lyrics that suggest clearcuts and tree stumps are the new picnic grounds, the results of a “tree farming nut /who thinks like a chainsaw that’s stuck in a rut.” The Grannies then wonder if it is the “buzz of the mill that produces the thrill/worth a million trees” that keeps clearcuts growing.

Afraid for the cod and salmon, they sing the “flim-flam fish fumble” while opposing the “testing of the Cruise” that “terrorizes caribous.”

The Grannies question the corporate science that feeds “pork to beans,” and they cheekily offer to “auction off” their own genes, even though their “joints are kinda creaky,” their “livers passé,” the rest “kinda leary,” as they “still got DNA.” They wonder about “pig genes in the salad” and square tomatoes “re-arranging” and “estranging.” They suggest corporations, war, and agriculture are linked in an unholy alliance that Monsanto, the company who introduced Agent Orange, want us to believe is based on science. To raise awareness of genetically modified food, the Victoria Grannies went on a supermarket tour picking up items that, the manager agreed, likely contained GMOs (an admission that came to the surprise of cashiers, who then asked why such food was not labelled).⁴⁴ In



Saltspring Island (B.C.) Raging Grannies bring their “cow” to the Sea Capers Parade (1995) to protest the use of growth hormone on dairy cattle. Note the clever use of the glove.

MARG SIMONS COLLECTION

response, the Grannies sing:

*Tough regulations we have for our bridges
And specifications we have for our fridges
But labelling food products — not even
smidges*

They highlight the pervasiveness of chemicals in our lives:

*Insecticide, herbicide, fungicide, SPRAY!
Lin-dane, Di-az-inon, Aldi-carb, SPRAY!
Grrr-round UP, Weed-N’-Greed, Puri-
Lawn, PRAY!
Neuro-toxic, cardio-toxic, liver-toxic,
SPRAY.*

The environment is not just the sum of its physical parts — it includes ideology, culture, economy, politics, gender, health, and spirituality. It is a thread tightly woven across the fabric of life on earth, as interconnectedness is a principle of life. Women’s socialized caretaking roles often result in their being the first to notice the effects of environmental degradation. Women’s resistance currently includes passionate resistance to environmental destruction. Keith Howard wrote approvingly of the Raging Grannies: “Faced with mega-billion-dollar expenditures on instruments of destruction and an environment teetering on disaster, a passionate response is highly appropriate” (Howard 14). Elizabeth McAllister wrote of the double edge of rage:

To focus on rage alone will exhaust our strength, forge our energy into a tool of the patriarchy’s death-lure, force us to concede allegiance to the path of violence and destruction... [but] compassion without rage renders us impotent, seduces us into watered-down humanism, stifles our good energy. Without rage we settle for slow change, feel thankful for tidbits of autonomy... It is with our rage that we... find the courage to risk resistance. (McAllister 1982)

The Grannies temper their rage with humour. Regina Barreca points out that, by revealing the absurdity of a situation,

“Polychlorinated Biphenyls”

Po-ly-chlor-i-na-ted bi-phe-ee-nals
Will fry your brain and rot your
adre-ee-nals.

Concentrating in our fatty ti-ish-ue
It’s not a very glamorous i-ish-ue.
But may be if they bury it deeper in
the ground,
By the time it kills somebody, we
won’t be around!

Chlor-o-flour-o-car-bon production
Is causing ozone layer reduction.
When ultraviolet rays have seared us
to the bone,
We won’t get much relief from using
Coppertone!

Disposables pursue us no matter
where we roam —
Who could contemplate a life devoid
of styro-foam?

We all want our comfort and
convenience,
Which leaves us sitting squarely
right on the fence.

These things are very difficult to
believe,
It’s not the way that life’s portrayed
on our TV.

Our kids might all get cancer, and
have defective genes,
But they will be the best-dressed
mutants that you’ve ever seen!
Oh! Po-ly-chlor-i-na-ted bi-phe-
ee-nals

La la la, la la la la la la . . .

The Raging Grannies

humour is an expression of strength and vulnerability; "Turning embarrassment or unease into something to be shared instead of repressed is risky, but it is also often exactly what is needed" (Barreca 10). The Raging Grannies transform vulnerability, despair, and anger into humour, songs, and action. Humour and solidarity allow the Grannies to continue learning about the serious problems we face without being completely overwhelmed by the problems' magnitude. A group of Grannies armed with funny, but deadly serious, lyrics is a force to be reckoned with. ❧

i Mars, 2004, p. 23.

ii Granny Grapevine, Winter 2000, p. 12.

Carole Roy is the author of **The Raging Grannies: Wild Hats, Cheeky Songs, and Witty Actions for a Better World**. She currently teaches in Canadian Studies/Women's Studies at Trent University.

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Chinese Women Promoting Equality between Men and Women in the Field of Culture and Art

Lijian Song

China is a country that is deeply rooted in tradition. Since 1996, when the chairman of China announced equality between men and women as national policy, the government has held enormous training classes to publicize the policy and passed new laws such as the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women and the Infant and Maternal Care Law. However, in order to achieve equality between the sexes — tackling it at its roots — women must take action themselves. Many Chinese women have cultivated their voices and gained independence in the fields of culture and art.

Women have overturned traditional concepts of gender in their artwork.

During the nineties, female artists began to express their individual experience and feelings from the angle of female subjectivity, subverting the aesthetic standards in line with men's requirements: their works were more shocking and stimulating in vision, more straightforward in form of expression, and stronger in means.

Lu Xiao, a well-known performance artist, is skilled in reflecting and rejecting women's traditional situation with a most fierce method. In 1989, she shot at her work titled *Dialogue*, installed at the China Modern Art Exhibition held in the National Gallery. This work showed two standing figures, a man and a woman, in two telephone booths — each to their own booth. The images were symbols of her past emotional life — this caused a great sensation. Because she used a pistol to shoot at the figure in her work, she was

arrested and the exhibition was closed. In 2002, she presented another series of artwork, this one composed of twelve telephone boxes with images of women, and, once again, she shot into them. These works seek to show women's besiegement and anxiety, or misgivings, about their relationships with men, with a resistant attitude to traditional male dominance. Another artist, Ping Yan, created a painting named *Mother and Son*. The painting reflected modern women's confusion about undertaking social and family roles.

The painting titled *Prosaic Life* by Man Wen Liu expressed the painter's suppression from traditional culture in a focused way: the son in this painting regards his mother's contributions as natural actions, and as the center of the family; he also has the authority to order and supervise his mother.

The work *Women River*, created by Aimin Tao, is an installation consisting of washing boards that were used by Chinese women in their daily life. To create the work, Tao collected 56 pieces of old washing boards from the countryside, on which she printed figures of women. In the background of the installation, the sounds of washing machines were heard.

These works were displayed at March 2005's *Temperature*, the China Modern Art Invitation Exhibition commemorating the two-hundredth anniversary of Andersen at China century Monument Gallery. The work sought to elucidate the discontentment of women's traditional lifestyle.

In the field of literature, Bai Lin, Ran Chen, and Kun Xu lead the way in femi-

nist writing. The protagonists of their novels are independent and act in a non-conformist manner. Lin's novel, *Struggle of one Person*, audaciously revealed one woman's awareness of her physical and mental desires during her transition from a girl to a woman. The focus was on the character's inner world — something that was ignored in traditional representations of women in Chinese literature.

Chen, another important writer, pays close attention to subjects that offer conflicting viewpoints of men and women, and portrays men from a feminist perspective. Her novel *Private Life* describes the coming of age of a shy girl; she pays close attention to those delicate details that can influence a girl, such as a divorce between her parents, harassment and sexual abuse by a teacher, antagonism from her arrogant and conceited father, and the complicated relationship with a young widow who has loved her for many years. Moreover, some works written by Xu, such as *Fuck Football*, *Meeting in Liangshan Lake*, show the realistic life of women constrained by men, sending the voice of revolt against male dominance.

In 2006, the film *Infinite Moving* by female director Ying Ning stirred controversy in China. The film describes emotional betrayal among four middle-aged women and one hidden man. All four women are far from the virtuous wife and caring mother image expected by traditional society. They are independent, confident, perceptive, and stubborn, instead of weak, pale, delicate, and lovely. The introduction to the film states: "In one closed space, four

successful women coming back from overseas continue expressing their views about emotional experience and talking about sex impudently, making male audiences suffer disgrace." According to a study held by the web station sina.com and the East-South Express, 35 per cent of the male audience who viewed the film felt anger and disappointment with the female characters in this film, regarding them as ugly women. But the director indicated that she wouldn't be deterred from such viewpoints. Ning is representative of female artists inclined to decide what and how to express their own ideas, in support of the public changing their traditional views about women.

In the last few years, female scholars increasingly advocated rights for various women groups through their works and art activities.

A series of books discussing woman's rights have been published in succession. *Woman's Human Rights in China* analyzed women's personal rights; political participation; rights and interests relating to property; social, cultural, and educational rights; and status in marriage and family. Importantly, the authors pointed out the characteristics and existing problems of Chinese women's human rights protection, such as the low rate for women's participation in deliberation and administration, obstacles to women's employment, lower school and university enrollment rates, violence towards women in families, arranged marriages, and higher death rates of pregnant women caused by a lack of hygienic

facilities and health protection for women.

Additional books by Lijian Song, Xiaozheng Zhu, and Jing Yuan described the lives of single women, and announced that every woman has the authority to choose diverse lifestyles according to her own wishes without interference or discrimination. These books are gradually influencing societal ideas. Furthermore, on March 5, 2006, Dr. Yinhe Li, a sociologist, well-known for her research in the fields of marriage, family, gender and sex, submitted her Motion of Homosexual Marriage to Political Consultative Conference for the third time to promote the legalization of homosexual marriage. She said, "Although I know it's impossible for the motion to be adopted at present, I would like to advocate for them. I believe that law is a shortcut to eliminate social discrimination." Dr. Li was rated by *Asia Weekly* as one of the most powerful people in China. According to her research, China is growing more accepting of homosexual marriage.

The mass media is also an important front for safeguarding women's rights. There are more than 70 newspapers and publications directed at women in China, including the *China Woman Paper*, which is published by the biggest women's NGO, All-China Women's Federation. A full page of each printing is dedicated to women's rights issues, including a column on the topic of Media Watch, which provides a feminist analysis and commentary on images of women found in media productions and activities with the aim of giving the public equal gender coverage.

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community-based design.

More and more female folk artists have won societal recognition.

Folk art activities for women are widely organized throughout China; they are full of originality and diversity. Women's federations at all levels have held many cultural festivals and work of art commodities fairs to help folk artists showcase their work and benefit from it. These types of initiatives improve the development of both folk art itself, as well as the status of women folk artists. The government also encourages artists to create various art works titled "Supporting Girls" to widely spread the concept of equality between boys and girls. These works expose gender discrimination in an appeal to reduce it. Some of the art has gained the advanced prize, the Chinese Population Culture Prize. Through these works, girls are being treated more equally, particularly in the countryside. More and more, women handicraft artists are springing up, winning higher and higher positions in society. Hudie Zheng, a woman from the Inner Mongolia countryside, is one of the female masters of folk handicrafts in China. She began to learn paper-cutting from her mother when she was eight years old, and has been practicing the craft for the past 40 years, gaining widespread recognition for her delicate work. There are 68 paper-cut works created by her that are in the collection of the National Gallery in Beijing. Her works *Lucky Window Flowers* and *Deep Emotion between Mother and Son* were both awarded the first prize at the China Folk Paper-cut Century Reviewing Exhibition and the China Folk Custom Paper-cut Exhibition. Zheng was given the title of Outstanding Chinese Artists of the World by the 2004 Commission of World Chinese Art Exhibition, composed of the Artists Center of Ministry of Culture, Art Directing Commission of China Literature and Art Federation, China Pictorial, and People Pictorial. As a member of the China Research Society for Folk Paper-cut and China Association for Folk Artists, Zheng is active in promoting the exchange of different kinds of views about the arts among folk artists through forums and study tours. She has also opened paper-cutting training classes for Chinese people and foreigners.

With the efforts of Zheng and other women artists, women folk artists are gaining recognition and importance.

In 2004, the World HR Laboratory (WHL) and web station icxo.com ranked female artists among the 100 Most Powerful Women in China. They have not only improved their own living conditions, but have also improved the public's view of female artists. Because of their high profile, they are able to acquire resources to help other women accomplish their dreams and have their voices heard. Some influential female artists are working to create opportunities for girls to receive artistic education. The first female conductor in China, Xiaoying Zheng, and renowned traditional opera singer Xiao Xiangyu were included in this list. Zheng initiated and formed a Women Philharmonic Orchestra to perform

in schools and factories in order to popularize classical music. The singer Xiangyu sponsored Hope Art School, the first free professional art school, which only trains and educates orphaned children — especially girls from the countryside, to prepare them for a career on the stage and television.

Chinese women are actively promoting equality between men and women through their influence in cultural and artistic circles. Their activities will no doubt inspire future generations of Chinese women. ❀

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POEMS by Mary Edwards

The Last Species (01.31.06)

Defilement seeps
along estuaries
once spawning brilliant life

the birds have fled
the fish, profane
in silent blistering death

Blasphemy (04.04.06)

Mountainsides testify to the battles
For chopsticks and coffee cups

Remains of Ancient Firs, Spruces, Cedars
Neatly stacked in the personal care aisle

Having met the same fate
As the never-to-be-recovered Atlantic Cod,
Most abundant in supermarket freezers

Mary Edwards is a graduate of the university of Toronto in sociology, environmental studies and philosophy.

You Pretend to Be a Canadian

Exploring the Work of Kinga Araya and Camille Turner

Bojana Videkanic

In 1993, Guillermo Gomez-Pena, a Mexican/American performance artist, started La Pocha Nostra, a performance art and conceptual art laboratory. The goal of this artistic collective was to create a space in which performative collaborations that would deal with a variety of positionings and roles that artists play in today's world could happen. More than just a collaborative process, La Pocha Nostra became both an art production laboratory and a political and educational endeavor. Here, artists became agent provocateurs that mimic, play with, and undermine a variety of problematic discourses that exist in the world today. My intention in this article is to investigate the work of two Canadian artists — Camille Turner and Kinga Araya, two artists whose performative video practices follow a similar trajectory. Their work functions in what Pena calls a “poly cultural space.” Both artists engage in a specifically “Canadian” context with notions of gender, identity, nationalism, and multiculturalism, but from a particular standpoint — that of being inside and outside, as both artists can be considered diasporic in terms of their cultural relations.

Creating art in the “Canadian” context means challenging the ideas of multiculturalism, national identity and social identity. The questions of globalization, borders, transgressions, and inclusions/exclusions become pivotal in the discourse of the modern-day production of meaning. How do we understand our culture and society and where do we situate notions of identity, democracy, citizenship, responsibility or social justice in an overbearing world of NAFTA agreements, the war on terror, information systems, and the logic of rational production? In an allegedly “diversified” North America, with its specific, and often problematic, social, judi-

La Pocha challenges the traditional art world mythologies of the “Artiste” as a suffering bohemian and misunderstood genius. La Pocha artists perform necessary roles in multiple contexts including those of social critics and chroniclers, inter-cultural diplomats and translators/mis-translators, informal ombudsmen, media pirates, information architects, reverse anthropologists, experimental linguists and radical pedagogues. To us the artist is above all, an active, responsible citizen immersed in the great debates of our times. Our place is the world and not the Art World (Gomez-Pena 539).

cial, cultural, and immigration politics of segregation and surveillance, how is a sense of self created? And, finally, who is excluded and included in the larger politics of identity and belonging?

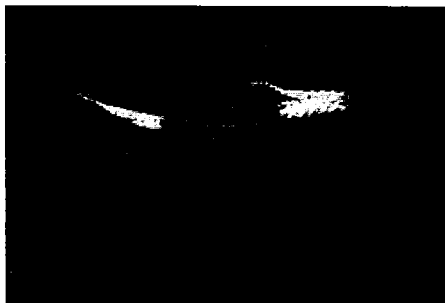
Two works will be looked at in closer detail — Kinga Araya's video work National Anthem, and Camille Turner's ongoing performance project *Miss Canadiana* — in order to investigate how the two artists engage with the above-mentioned issues. I wish to look at their works from two different, but ultimately related, positions. First, I want to examine their practices in the light of what theorist Peggy Phelan calls the position of the “unmarked.” In her seminal book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Phelan expresses her unease with the popular notions of identity politics, or politics of visibility, and says that, very often, that kind of visibility is highly problematic. Calling upon Lacan, she states that, “Visibility is a trap, it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession” (Phelan 6). She concludes by stating that, while there is a certain appeal in visibility, we should not fall into the trap of believing that the politics of visibility can afford power to those who

are marginalized. Popular contemporary socio-cultural discourse in identity politics argues that, if a society opens up its public sphere to a fair representation of both sexes, general opinions and attitudes of population will change. What this idea fails to address is that constructions of representation and difference are imbued with binary oppositions of male/female, normal/abnormal, and black/white. In such dualistic terms, the white male is always the normalizing, qualifying element, one that needs no marking or representation, while the female is constructed through a relationship to the unmarked, invisible ideological reality. In his excellent study of social movements, Canadian media theorist Ian Angus writes about gender and identity politics and argues:

It is through the marking of one side of a dualistic distinction that a hierarchical relation between them is reproduced in everyday life such that the relation of the unmarked term to the universal category is rendered unproblematic and apparently immediate, whereas the relation of the marked category is defined as non-universal, therefore mediated and questionable (147).

In a similar way, Phelan argues that the politics of identity fail because visibility is created only in relationship to that which is invisible and normal (in this case, the male.) Therefore, both Phelan and Angus call for a refusal to enter such binary oppositions, and propose as a strong political statement the category of “the unmarked,” where one refuses to enter the ideology of the visible and the surveillance it brings. How do the works of both Araya and Turner invoke the notion of “unmarked”, and yet clearly make themselves visible through socially and politically engaged artistic practices?

Second, I wish to look at how, by creating performances/videos that mimic and exist in a mainstream culture (which they ultimately subvert), their works play with what Homi Bhabha calls the “third space”. An example of this mimicry and subversion is Camille Turner’s performance work *Miss Canadiana*, in which she publicly presents herself as a so-called typical beauty queen — but one that is marked, through her awkward body language and, most importantly, her race, as an ultimate subversion of the notions that beauty pageants carry.



Kinga Araya, *National Anthem*, video still, 2002

There are two people onscreen; they are facing each other, and all we see are their mouths. A narrow piece of red and white fabric flows from one mouth to the other. The scene is visceral, and somewhat disturbing. The sound in the video is of several voices speaking the words of the Polish and Canadian (both French and English) national anthems. We hear three male voices speaking English, French and Polish, and one female voice overlapped several times. Three male voices are teaching (or, rather, correcting,) the female

voice on how to properly pronounce the words of each anthem. The female voice tries to pronounce each word properly over and over again. Polish-born Montreal artist Kinga Araya’s *National Anthem* video uses language as an intersection point, a point at which gender, identity, and nationalism come together creating a discourse of normality. As an immigrant woman and diasporic person living in Canada, Araya brings forth two very important notions: that of being a woman in a specific, often vulnerable, position (dependent on the state, social mechanisms, and often a husband or a family), and being dependent on one’s knowledge of language in order to become immersed in the Canadian culture.

Language, as Lacan argued, is how we enter social relations, and so, those who are learning to speak a new language are especially vulnerable, as they depend on their ability to learn a new language to survive. Most of the so-called newcomers never lose their accent, and so are forever marked by it as somehow different. As one’s accent is always present as a signifier of difference, to lose one’s accent and emulate the so-called native speakers becomes very important. Through the woman’s repetitive act of trying to pronounce each word correctly, Araya’s video emphasizes this need to fit into language. The woman is placed in the position of the unknowing, invisible subject who seeks to become known and heard by acquiring the language. However, this acquisition is not an easy task. The woman struggles as the male voices repeat the “proper” pronunciation. Phelan argues in her text that it is precisely visibility that makes identity politics problematic. When one becomes visible (through race, gender, class or language,) one is marked as different and possibly problematic by the social networks. Moreover, the politics of visibility, as Phelan calls it, also imposes notions of what is real and what is not real, equating that which is visible and marked with the “real” with the social order. Araya’s video uncovers these relations by making one aware of the difficulties of learning how to speak, and of all the problems related

to it, such as feelings of being ashamed for not speaking “correctly,” or feeling less intellectually capable because of the accent. Furthermore, Araya emphasizes that the woman is positioned between three male voices who correct her as she tries to speak. The woman is an object of both the state apparatus that demands the knowledge of language, and the male-dominated nationalistic discourse in which the woman is often depicted as a passive, child-bearing symbol of the motherland. The man is depicted as an active, political or military force, and, in this case, is, Phelan would argue, the subject, and the woman an object (upon which the male authority is exercised) that tries to become visible by learning the language and the national anthem, which will allow her to become a citizen.

Camille Turner’s work deals with the reframing of identity and politics of visibility in a similar way. Like Araya, Turner establishes close links between gender, race, and identity, as she questions Canadian national identity both within national borders and internationally. Performance art, Johanna Householder argues in her text on Canadian performance practices, “seeks to investigate existing conditions, includes human presence, and questions the purposes, apprehension, and experience of art while making it” (13). Thus, by taking it outside gallery walls, Turner’s performances question both artistic practice, and the socio/political circumstances in which this practice is exercised. *Miss Canadiana* is multidisciplinary work based on an alter-ego that she created several years ago. *Miss Canadiana* is a beauty queen who promotes Canadian national symbols. Turner, who was born in Jamaica and now lives in Toronto, presents herself with all the accoutrements of a real beauty queen. She wears a sleek red evening gown, high heels and a tiara. She has travelled to Parliament Hill in Ottawa and cities around the world, where she walks around in her dress, carrying Canadian national symbols (like flags, badges, umbrellas, and even maple syrup cookies.) The set-up for each of her performances resembles the “Canada House” found at

large international events, featuring stereotypical symbols representing Canadian culture including images of nature, Mounties, canoes and First Nations artifacts. Turner's performance looks and sounds like the real thing, yet she posits the role of the beauty queen in ideologically charged and rather awkward terms. Although she appears to be a beauty queen, she does not wear makeup, try to hide her blemishes and imperfections, or create a picture-perfect body. Thus, Turner subverts the popular representations of female sexuality in which the woman is the passive, highly sexualized object of the male viewers. Film theorist Kate Linker argues that the use of popular female representations (such as fashion models) serves "as an idealized image for the male gaze, or for a woman's narcissistic identification" (393). The sexualized woman on the cover of magazines or in other popular media therefore serves a normalizing discourse. Turner subverts this discourse by presenting herself as an "imperfect" beauty queen. Finally, and most importantly, Turner emphasizes the fact that, marked by her race and social positioning, she would never become a national symbol of Canada. When she goes to Regina to the RCMP headquarters she is pictured with the Mounties, symbols of power and surveillance.** She is smiling and seems accepted by the police, but, at the same time, she stands in for all the people who the police apparatus surveys (illegal immigrants or inner city youth, for example.) Thus, giving out cookies and Canadian flags to visitors is an ironic act of negating her own identity. In this case, the politics of identity and the politics of visibility have been turned upside down.

In both works, the notion of multiculturalist politics is questioned. On the one hand, ideas of cultural pluralism and globalization persist as overarching, normative and "benign" discourses, while, on the other hand, cultural, political and economic discrepancies become more rampant. Araya and Turner uncover such inequalities at work by questioning representations of national identity that simultaneously make visible and hide specific



Camille Turner. *Miss Canadiana*, photo from the performance in Montreal, 2003

cultures (an example of this are the First Nations cultures which become visible and represented as Canadian only as grossly exaggerated tourist spectacles, devoid of social and cultural context). As Gomez-Pena's quote at the beginning of this text argues, artists such as Turner and Araya question any and all discourses and stand in opposition to the bland concepts of multiculturalism in the West. Concepts such as "unification" under the umbrella of capitalist production and consumption offer globalization to specific individuals who are fortunate enough to have access to goods, services, or technologies and, in that way, become "visible".

Finally, Turner's and Araya's performances bring to our attention a different kind of practice that announces the artist as a "situated" citizen. Their work questions the now-popular terms hybridity and multiculturalism. Although such terms can be effective in certain contexts, they are also highly contentious because they are usually explained without mentioning their problematic sides—poverty, exploitation, and other inequalities that arise as the result of globalization. These problematic terms serve to further entrench cultural, social, and economic differences by creating vague and apolitical terminology. In this sense, Bhabha's notion of "third space" is important. For Bhabha,

who looks at the ways in which language (especially Western language) creates binary oppositions and establishes identity relations, identity needs to be looked at not from the oppositional practices of recognition (identifying people by saying, "you are white" or "you are black" or "you are Hispanic" or "you are Ukrainian"), but from "situated negotiation." He writes that "third spaces" can be defined as "discursive sites or conditions that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, and rehistoricized anew" (37). This means that the notion of identity changes, and is contingent on more than one aspect of an individual. When writing against visualization of race, Phelan uses these very terms when saying that "the same physical features of a person's body may be read as 'black' in England, 'white' in Haiti, 'coloured' in South Africa, and 'mulatto' in Brasil" (8). Bhabha proposes the "third space" as one that offers negotiation of identity in which no stable sense of self is created, but where one can change constantly. Transnational, diasporic cultures, where individuals are capable of negotiating several different identities at the same time, are a very good example of this.

The two artists discussed in this text both belong to the so-called transnational community, and they translate their experiences into specific art practices. Moreover, they also use their status as diasporic women to create a political discourse around these issues by crossing the borders of mainstream and sub cultures. Both Araya and Turner mimic mainstream cultures. Araya does that by reenacting the national anthem — something that all new immigrants have to learn in order to become citizens of Canada. Turner establishes this by mimicking often-reverberated Canadian identity through national symbols. However, both of them also subvert national symbols: Araya by literally eating the flag, Turner by creating an ironic, symbolic theater through recreating the Canada House and flaunting markers of Canadian state. The strategy Turner and Araya use in their work is similar to that

of the Cuban-American artist Coco Fusco, who, on numerous occasions, has created spectacles of the Other. Her strategy, and the strategy of those who collaborated with her (namely Guirellmo-Gomez Pena), was to purposefully construct stereotypical white fantasies of the Other, and, through those, engage the discourse of representation and visibility. Writing about one of her most famous performance pieces entitled "Two Undiscovered Amerindians," Fusco states:

Our project concentrated on the 'zero degree' of intercultural relations in an attempt to define a point of origin for the debates that link 'discovery' and 'Otherness.' We worked within disciplines that blur distinctions between the art object and the body (performance), between fantasy and reality (live performance) and between history and dramatic reenactment (live diorama) (148).

Like Fusco and Pena, Turner and Araya use a variety of tools to, as Bhabha suggests, present questions of gender and identity as needing more than just fitting into neat binaries or becoming visible. Identity, to use Phelan's argument, needs to look beyond the simple correspondence between visualizing practices and transformation or transcendence (such as, for example, the suggestion that more minority women are in the public eye could, on its own, bring change to the sexist/racist discourse). As the two works discussed here argue, being a diasporic woman of a certain race and class means being immersed in a variety of interconnected discourses — of power, economy, politics and cultural representation. Turner and Araya visualize the female as an object of the male/ institutional gaze, and, at the same time, refuse to surrender to that gaze by either hiding the female, eating the symbol of the institution, or creating a subverted image of the male sexual fantasy. The artists ask: who has the power to speak, and in what language? Who has the ability to immigrate to Canadian immigration and join its social system?

Who has the voice to represent Canada? A simple internet search of the term "Miss Canada" provided me with a partial answer to these questions. Apart from the hypersexualized, national fantasy portrayed through the pageant, I have discovered that, during the 53 years of its existence, the pageant has had a non-white, non-Anglo-Saxon winner only three times. Although very banal, the Miss Canada contest is just one example of how a specific kind of whiteness is still a measure of things in the popular public imagination. Turner and Araya create counter-images to these mainstream representations and pronounce themselves as unmarked — refusing to enter into the dichotomy of Western power relations. Their ambiguous and oppositional readings of gender, race, and nationhood show us artists who, as Gomez-Pena argues, are responsible citizens immersed in the important questions of their time. In his recent book *Ethno Techno*, Pena talks about authority and says:

Yes. I am at odds with authority, whether it is political, religious, sexual, or esthetic, and I am constantly questioning imposed structures and dogmatic behavior wherever I find them. As soon as I am told what to do and how to do it, my hair goes up, my blood begins to boil, and I begin to figure out ways to dismantle that particular form of authority (27).

We need such reactions to authority, especially today, when fetishization of gender and identity is an everyday occurrence, due to television news that instills a fear of Arab women and men as possible terrorists, popular entertainment that creates ever-thinner blond sex goddesses, and representational economies that offer young teenage girls plastic surgery and dieting as an answer to their need for identity. ❧

** I am unable to offer a visual reference for Turner's performance in Regina with the Mounties because she was barred from using visual documentation of the performance in any of her shows (or publications about her.) The ban occurred after RCMP established that there might be negative connotations in Turner's work and finally decided that it would be best to censor it altogether. Camille Turner's

example is only one of many—Maher Arar's case being the most recent one. This incident only furthers Turner's critique of the establishment as it provides a clear example of the power relations at work through specific governmental organizations and the kinds of policies that are endorsed.

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Transforming our World Through Song

The Power of Community Choirs

Deanna Yerichuk

Many of us adults within mainstream North American culture hold a lot of broken-ness in our singing voices, underneath which is a great desire to sing. Music surrounds us, but most of us are only invited to consume music passively; there are very few opportunities for most adults to engage in music-making.

This has two rather pernicious effects. First, music-making in general, and singing in particular, is professionalized to the point that only a few “talented” individuals are singers, while the rest of us believe that we should not sing, or, worse, that we can’t sing. The second effect is that, through our passive consumption of music, we no longer see ourselves as active participants in the creation of culture. If we do not see ourselves as creators of our culture, we have a hard time seeing ourselves as creators of our world. I believe it is an act of resistance when communities of adults raise their voices in song. The long waitlists for joining community choirs in Toronto suggest that there is a growing hunger to reclaim our singing voices, and to sing in community. Community choirs offer adults a powerful transformation from passive, consuming non-singers into active singers that create our culture, our community, and our world. I have the good fortune of being a member of Echo Women’s Community Choir, an 80-voice community choir based in Toronto. I am increasingly struck by the power and potential of eighty women raising their voices together in song, most of whom have not trained as singers, and many of whom did not consider themselves singers prior to joining the choir.

Singing in community is a physical act that demands we use our voices and listen at the same time — listen not only to ourselves, but also to the rest of the group, creating a space where all voices are raised and heard. Alan Gasser, co-director of



CLAUDETTE GRAVEL

Echo Women’s Choir, points out that, “in discussion, we can’t both talk at the same time, but when we’re singing, everyone can do it at the same time. We can simultaneously listen intently and sing.” Singing in community allows us all to find and use our voices, even as we deeply listen to each other. In a truly embodied way, we find personal strength and common ground through song without silencing voices.

Singing together lays the groundwork for social justice and the transformation of our communities. Echo’s mandate as a community choir is: to be accessible and inclusive; to build community; to foster musical excellence and passionate expression; and to celebrate diversity. Such a mandate deepens the potential of the group singing process to harness the power of collective singing towards creating new visions of our communities and our world. Becca Whitla, co-founder and co-director of Echo, distinguishes between two fundamental components of social justice work: tearing down injustice and building up community. Community music focuses on the latter, and, in Echo’s case, “the choir is an example of community. Its politics have grown organically, shaped by the individuals in the choir, but, more than that, by our experience singing together, creating

something together.” What Whitla describes as “organic,” I have come to see as a process of many conscious choices made along the road to develop a vision of community built on the following principles of access, equity, and diversity.

Community choirs build accessibility

Echo’s cornerstone is a commitment to accessibility. First and foremost, Echo is a non-audition choir, subverting the professionalization and exclusion in Western music practices by opening up participation in group singing to everyone that has the interest, because everyone already has the ability. As Gasser points out, “breathing and singing together are things most of us already know how to do.” Echo encourages the simple yet revolutionary fact that everyone can sing.

Accessibility, however, must also include supports and interventions that allow women from diverse backgrounds with varying needs and abilities to participate equally. Echo, by virtue of being a women’s choir, is particularly attentive to barriers that women face. Echo provides child-care at all rehearsals, removing a significant barrier to many women’s participation. The choir also ensures income is not a barrier to participation. While

Echo does charge membership fees for each session of the choir, the fees operate on a sliding scale, sliding right down to nothing, according to each member's ability to pay. Interestingly, Echo membership fees are presented as a sliding scale that slides up, as well as down, fostering an opportunity for women with greater incomes to contribute more to the development of the community.

Access occurs not only in the structure of the choir, but also in the pedagogy and content of the music we sing. Gasser makes an important distinction between exclusive and inclusive forms of music. "Music literacy is important, but in our community we don't want to oppress people who can't read music," he says. Sheet music is often provided to members, but songs are mostly taught by ear and through repetition until each choral section is confident in their parts. Community choirs recognize that many of the adults participating may not have the specialized, dominantly European, understanding of music that other choirs might expect and require. Musicianship within community choirs is therefore cultivated through diverse conducting and facilitating strategies that work for all of the diverse musical knowledge or experiences of choir members.

Community choirs build inclusive and diverse communities

Echo's approach to musicianship points to another key feature of the community choir, which is an emphasis on building community. Within a community choir context, music serves the community as much as the community serves the music, and both have developed hand in hand over the past fifteen years in Echo. "Echo was founded out of an interest to explore the rich and powerful sound of adult women's voices," Whitla remembers, "but, as the choir developed, members also found companionship and solidarity in the fact that the other members of the choir were all women."

Community choirs often demonstrate a strong commitment to building diversity within the choir, both in repertoire and in membership, which reflects the diversity of the larger community in which the choir is

situated. The repertoire of the choir reflects the diversity of cultural backgrounds and languages of our members. In fact, choir members are encouraged to bring songs from their cultural and personal backgrounds, a distinct departure from more traditional choirs where the artistic director has sole control of repertoire selection. As a women's choir, we subvert some traditions (for example, by singing Georgian music traditionally sung exclusively by men) and honour others (such as singing songs like "Bread and Roses" that are emblematic of women in the labour movement). While appropriation and co-optation are always a danger in singing songs from cultures differing from one's own, the songs we sing, many of which brought forward by members of the choir, are first presented to choir members, and then to our audiences, with explanations of the cultural, social, and historical context of the songs.

Echo also strives to build an inclusive membership that reflects diversity in race, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, age, and ability, with varying levels of success. Building an inclusive and diverse community of women is not without its challenges, and Echo experiences obstacles that make full inclusion difficult to achieve. The choir rehearsals are conducted in English, which can be a major barrier for newcomers. The predominant use of English is somewhat ameliorated when there are choir members willing to translate portions of rehearsals to newcomers. In addition, the diversity of repertoire sung in multiple languages disrupts a certain amount of comfort experienced by Anglophones within the choir, which levels the playing field in one small way. Nonetheless, for members, a working knowledge of English remains important to participate fully in the rehearsals and performance, which makes full participation by newcomers to Toronto more difficult to achieve.

Literacy offers another challenge in achieving a fully inclusive community choir. While the ability to read music is not necessary for participation, the choir does assume that members are able to read the words on sheet music and handouts distributed throughout the rehearsal process. A possible response to overcoming the lit-

eracy barrier might include recording parts to songs that can be downloaded from the Internet or distributed on CD to choir members to rehearse by ear; however, lack of financial resources makes this difficult to do for every musical piece Echo undertakes each season, and would also assume choir members have Internet access and computer literacy.

While Echo experiences challenges, the choir and community demonstrate a willingness to struggle with the challenges as a community. Echo has formed a diversity committee that actively works to implement initiatives, supports, and access points to encourage a membership that reflects diversity in socio-economic status, sexual orientation, age, ability, culture and race. Importantly, the diversity committee is open for any choir member to participate, reinforcing the possibility for women finding their voices through singing to use their voices to shape the direction and structure of the choral community so that it is more inclusive of many women's experiences.

In concert, eighty women of varying musical and personal backgrounds singing diverse repertoire is exciting to witness, in large part because many of the women have found their voices through their participation in the choir — the joy of this discovery is palpable. Community choirs offer the most transformative potential when they encourage adults to reframe their identities from non-singer to singer, offer opportunities for active participation in the choir and in the community, and are based on principles of accessibility, equity, diversity, and community development. Combine community-based singing opportunities with structures committed to social justice and singing in community is not just an act of resistance, it's part of a social transformation towards a new vision of the world. ❧

Deanna Yerichuk sings with Echo Women's Choir and teaches voice students at the Dixon Hall Music School and through her private studio. She's currently finishing her Masters of Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, where she is studying the connection between finding voice and enacting personal, community, and social change.

Transgressive Tools

The Liberating Power of Classification

Hope A. Olson and Susan Gold Smith

Classification is a defining force. It groups that which is defined as being alike and separates that which is perceived to be different. In so doing, it creates boundaries. The categories thus established build fences around concepts, homogenizing what is inside. Classification is also ubiquitous.

Classifications of jobs define job categories by identifying characteristics that are deemed valuable to the employing organization. Defining characteristics may be factors such as educational requirements, previous experience required, consequences of error and the independence expected of a worker. If the factors favored are gendered — say, leadership is valued over cooperation — the resulting rewards are inequitable. The job categories come to define the people who are in them. Inequities resulting from the ways that classifications are constructed contribute to the discrepancy between women's and men's earnings and opportunities.

Libraries use classification schemes to organize books and other forms of informa-

“[C]aptured, solidified, and pinned to a butterfly board. Like any common living thing, I fear and reprove classification and the death it entails, and I will not allow its clutches to lock down on me, although I realize I can never lure myself into simply escaping it.”

— Trinh T. Minh-ha

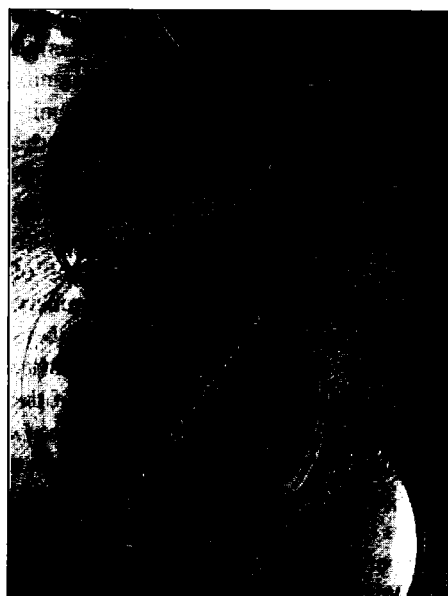


tion of the classification (305.4201), interspersed with topics as varied as feminist perspectives on public policy, communication theory, and eco-feminism. However, when browsing the philosophy section located in the 100s, feminist philosophy is largely invisible.

Mental illness is defined through classification. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association names which conditions are mental illnesses. For psychiatrists, mental health professionals, insurance companies, and, ultimately, patients, only conditions that are present in the DSM are mental disorders.

Classification identifies why people die. The International Classification of Diseases (ICD) of the World Health

Organization is used for browsing shelves and databases. The Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), the most wide-spread system in the world, is used in nearly all public and school libraries in Canada and the U.S. Although regularly updated, it still reflects its 1876 origins. For example, in organizing information about workers, you will find female workers between “older workers” and “prisoners and ex-convicts.” There is no category for male workers, suggesting that they are the norm. The DDC also ghetto-izes some topics — for example, all works on feminism are located at 305.42 — a subcategory of social groups within the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. Even feminist theory's major contributions to philosophy are found in this sec-



Organization (WHO) is employed globally to track causes of death. In this way, the WHO can track epidemics and coordinate public health strategies. The ICD's tracking of HIV/AIDS was initially problematic because it lacked a specific, stable code, which may have slowed public health response. However, distinguishing death due to illegal abortion from death due to other types of abortion complications (both therapeutic and natural) is a positive source of data for guiding public policy.

The categories of any classification are typically structured into a hierarchy. Broad categories encompass more specific ones. The higher levels of the hierarchy define or have authority over the lower ones — this is called hierarchical force. It further confines already restricting categories. Hierarchical force, a product of Western logic that we inherited from classical Greece, is now being globalized by us.

But does classification always have to be confining? Could it be restructured as liberating? In his text, *The Location of Culture*, postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha offers the concept of a "third space." He states that meaning is determined not only by the content of the statement, but also by its context — "its cultural positionality, its reference to a present time and a specific space. ... [the] pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You ..."ⁱⁱ



Meaning, the interpretation of a statement is not just a negotiation between the statement, the person originating it, and the person perceiving it. There is a space in between — a context — that shapes the meaning of the statement. This is the "third space". Bhabha posits that the third space is a place of enunciation. It is the "structure of symbolization" or "process of language" that gives a context to a statement. In terms of connecting information and people, the process of classification is a third space. More particularly, classifications, in defining the boundaries of our categories, constitute a third space. It is a dynamic space, and, therefore, it



can be a space of ambivalence in which meaning is constructed. In this sense, classifications and their application form a cultural practice of authority.

Classifications are not static. Actively used classifications are regularly revised. The WHO recently added a specific category for bird flu to the ICD, and the DDC is working to reduce its Christian bias. However, change can also be instigated from outside. Protests by activists helped to remove homosexuality from the DSM in the 1970s. Likewise, lobbying by patients and psychiatrists influenced the addition of post-traumatic stress disorder. By changing classifications, we can put in our own content, create our own structure, and constitute our own meanings. Because classification has power, it can

be used to instigate social change. We can encourage change by recognizing and allowing the signification or representation of cultural differences in all of their dynamic, boundary-crossing, hybridization. We may find that we need to change even the most fundamental aspects of the structure of our classifications. What is needed is thought not only outside of the category, but outside of the hierarchy. We need to take charge of classification as a defining tool and transgress its boundaries for our own liberation.

Image Description:

The images throughout the article are from "Sights of Science," a mixed media installation by Susan Gold, and are an exploration into scientific systematic classification. The off-site installation took place at Artcote's Artscene 11, in 2003 in Windsor, Ontario. Artscene is an annual project of Artcote, Windsor's artist-run centre; a unique site is organized each year. Windsor artists, and artists from all over southwest Ontario and the Detroit region, bring their positive creative energy and set up site-specific installations that remain in place for several weeks. Artscene is a successful unjuried, culture-building, community-building activity; it has been housed in a vacant police station and jail, an old downtown office building, a pre-rented newly built office building, an old warehouse, a fac-



tory, a vacant post-office, a vacant school, and a vacant bank. ❧

i Minh-ha, T.T. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

ii Bhabha, H. K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Hope A. Olson is a professor in the School of Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her teaching and research focuses on access to information (particularly classification theory) from a feminist and postcolonial perspective.

Susan Gold Smith is a visual artist and professor of visual arts at the University of Windsor School of Visual Arts. Her recent mixed media projects explore the common origins of the artist's studio and scientist's laboratory.

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Coping With and Preventing Environmental Loss Through Art

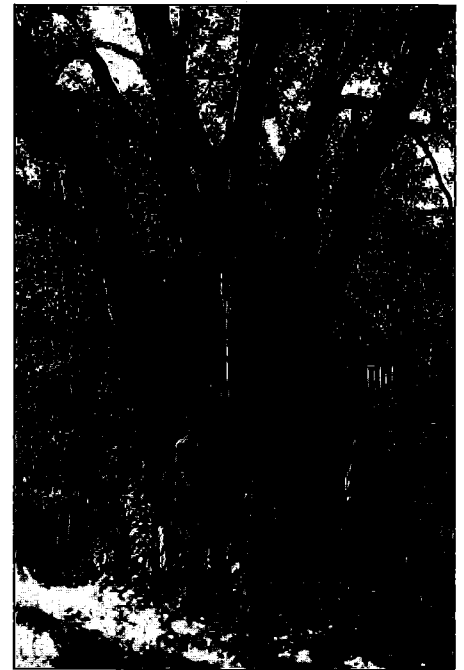
A Tale of Two Cities

Heather Saunders

Although they have never met, Toronto's Laurie Kallis and Liz Lott, from North Bay in Ontario, have a lot in common: both are single mothers, self-proclaimed feminists, and activist artists. Kallis became an environmental artist activist as an immediate response to negative environmental change in her then-neighbourhood of Port Credit, Ontario. Lott, meanwhile, developed her environmental art activism as a deliberate plea for positive environmental change in North Bay, Ontario.

In 1998, when Kallis began using a barn as a studio, she had no idea that her canvases would be co-opted for makeshift protest signs only a short time later. The rented property, which also boasted a heritage house and trees that Kallis describes as "unusually large for Mississauga", was slated for townhouse development. History seemed doomed to repeat itself — when the Loyalists settled on the land of the Mississaugas, they burned trees up to 20 feet in diameter for farmland. Kallis laments, "The contemporary developers investing in the Port Credit area retained the same animosity towards existing trees."

Kallis and her then-husband, Ed Troscianczuk, decided to take action when the developer announced that the trees would be felled, but they were unable to cease construction. After the first tree was taken down, they blocked Mississauga Road with two cars to get the attention of police and stall the cutting. As word spread, people expressed dismay that there was no by-law on tree-cutting. Weekly community garage sales, a strawberry social and a music festival brought



ED TROSCIANCZUK

more and more people to see the trees.

When a cutting at a neighbour's property was announced, Kallis said, "We have to get more extreme for a better news story." Wearing a costume based on the Dr. Seuss character, Lorax, who speaks for the trees, she perched in a 250-year-old tree for over 24 hours. A news anchor joined Kallis in the tree, as did firefighters and police officers who tried to coerce her to come down — courteously, she emphasizes, as her children were looking on from below. Fortunately, she had attended an Earthroots session on civil disobedience training the week before, so she knew how to speak in media-appropriate sound bytes and also how to avoid criminal charges. When she returned to solid ground, she was charged with trespassing and resisting arrest. Three trees were immediately cut.

In the aftermath, Kallis assumed an anonymous role very different from her former media-intense one. Working overnight, she and her family tied white ribbons

around countless trees along Mississauga Road as part of a sculptural installation. A video documents the haunting image of a ribbon flapping in the breeze. Fellow activists followed suit, sporadically adorning trees throughout the city. Taking the time to wrap one's arms around tree after tree was an intimate process, Kallis reflects,



ED TROSIANCZUK

minds, rather than prescribing a specific ideology. She lives in North Bay, a city with a population of 56,000, approximately 330 kilometres from the urban centre of Toronto. Many artists live in the area, inspired by the rugged landscape of the Canadian Shield, as well as the beauty of Lake Nipissing, the fourth-largest inland lake in Ontario.



LAURIE KALLIS

and it captured the interest of the community. Kallis describes her art as “an appeal to the intellect through the senses that does not raise the defenses of the observer.”

In a race against time, Kallis became a voice not just for the trees, but also for the community. In contemplating the process of the action, Kallis emphasizes that, “these issues were about life, [the] future life on this planet, and the health and happiness of our community. We did not approach these issues as abstract, theoretical arguments.” Hitting the issues head-on brought tangible results: on June 14, 2000, Mississauga City Council approved and passed a tree protection by-law.

Kallis has become much more community-based as a result of this experience. The environment is no longer merely a concept of “wild” nature. She is drawn to the concept of the environment as a base on which communities develop.

Artist Lott also strives for more community-based activism by opening people's

Lott feels that, in North Bay, people take the natural landscape for granted. “Only after development do people seem to express regret,” she says. For example, the old railroad tracks and their elevated support system have both been removed, killing milkweed, an important food source for monarch butterflies. This causes residents to lament, “If only we had made them into walking trails.” While the city is surrounded by wilderness, Lott is surprised by the lack of trees in the city proper. There is, she says, “not enough shade, not enough mature trees.”

When, in 2005, a photography festival was announced in North Bay, she proposed a body of work that would combine painting and photography. Lott had been experimenting with remaking the urban landscape on giclée prints on canvas: by painting on top of familiar scenes, a parking lot transforms into a park with trees, and the main street becomes pedestrian-only, with trees lining its centre. She describes the process

of painting fictitious scenes fuelled by both hope and cynicism as cathartic.

Lott says, “The audience of my images plays a major role.” She recounts that, while she was painting outside, “I sat on the sidewalk and every person who walked by said, ‘That’s a great idea. You should put that in City Hall.’” Some of the images have a cautionary theme, like flooding. These have a new layer of meaning after a severe storm hit North Bay in the summer of 2006, causing fatalities and incredible damage. Lott hopes that darker images will jolt people into environmental awareness. At the same time, she prefers images that reveal green potential. “There’s not enough hope out there,” she says. “It could be our ultimate downfall.”

Lott’s ability to envision potential for the future can be traced to a three-month stay in Indonesia with Canada World Youth. The pervasiveness of animism (the close connection to spirits and the earth) changed her way of thinking. She now sees trees as having symbolic value, important to our emotional wellbeing. Her connection to trees increased when she apprenticed with esteemed Canadian landscape painter Lawrence Nickle, who introduced her to plein air painting.

The work of Kallis and Lott is responsive. For Kallis, it’s a response to an unexpected public battle over rapid environmental destruction. For Lott, it’s a response to slower environmental destruction, also situated in a public forum. As they continue to promote environmental awareness through their art, both Kallis and Lott find strength in womanhood — Kallis says her rallying of families is “an approach that I attribute to my being a woman and a mother,” while Lott says, “The future becomes much more of a gigantic reality when you give birth to and raise your own child.” These women artists have put their cities under the microscope, prompting viewers to explore their own values for the sake of their community. ❧

Heather Saunders is a former director of White Water Gallery in North Bay. She is presently completing a Masters of Library and Information Studies at the University of Toronto, after which she hopes to be an art librarian. She is currently the associate publisher of **FUSE** magazine.

Women Survivors of Violence

Re-Authoring Trauma Narratives through Clay

Suzanne Thomson

We are strong and fragile like the clay we work with. It soothes and calms us, connecting us with our creative passion, moving us forward in our lives. (Excerpt from collective statement, *Metamorphosis*, 2006 exhibition, Toronto, Canada).

Community agencies *Sistering* and the *Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic*, that serve women survivors of violence, collaborated with the *Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art* to raise awareness about how violence against women is a critical community issue. Over the past four years, women have participated in four expressive arts projects, where they sculpted their trauma narratives in clay, transforming their pain and reconnecting with their strengths. After they completed their sculptures, the women designed and installed an art exhibit, each one offering the public a unique and compelling window into their reflections on and hopes for healing. The women and all of us participating in the projects were transformed in several surprising ways.

The women in the project came from diverse perspectives on age, race, class, culture, and sexual identity. Their experience working with clay differed, as did the effects of trauma on their daily lives. They did, however, share a common desire to tell their individual stories and project a collective voice. Clay seemed the most accessible medium, surmounting differences and harnessing the varied and valuable insights of the group's diversity.

"I had many ideas that came and went," said one woman. "And I chose to trust that the process itself would tell its own story. As much as I shaped the clay, the clay shaped me". Indeed, each woman would surrender to this process, connecting with her core beliefs and values, to re-author an alternative, more hopeful story for their future.



SUZANNE THOMSON

From the 2003 exhibition, *Out of the Mud the Lotus Blooms*, Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art.

As another artist wrote, "The sculptures illustrate this progression of healing from my lowest, most painful time, to the middle coping stage, and the top, when I am able to stand tall, strong and look forward to good things to come, while being supported by my past experiences."

Susan Low-Beer, the artist guiding the project, had a strong influence on the design of the women's ceramic totem-like structures. When the idea of a stacked sculpture was suggested to the Gardiner's director of education and programs, she was reminded of Low-Beer's exhibit, "Still Dances," composed of ceramic pieces stacked on metal poles. That body of work explored contemporary and historical responses to the female body. In her role as project artist, Low-Beer helped the women give three-dimensional form to their emotions through their artwork.

The four exhibitions opened a dialogue with the community about preconceived beliefs regarding art and human experience. Through their artwork, participants

found their voices authoring an alternative story of hope, and challenging histories that have previously oppressed and silenced them. The women took great risks to promote a dialogue between divergent sets of values, creating opportunities for new ways of thinking for themselves and the communities to which they belong. As one woman so aptly noted, "I was given the chance to grow, learn, and be me, which allowed me the opportunity to grow, learn, and contribute to society".

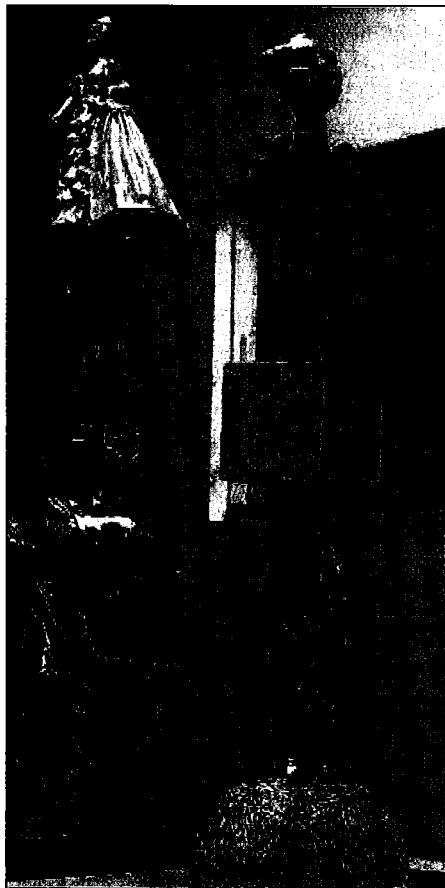
The museum is committed to creating enriching experiences that inform and transform. The museum's Director of Education and Programs notes that, "The institution belongs to the community, and one way for people to feel a sense of belonging is to have something meaningful happen for them here." The museum, often a place of assumed privilege, actively supports courageous individuals in finding their unique path of healing, and invites the institution to be transformed in the process.

From the onset, the women collaborated with the museum, educating staff about their unique cultural and support needs. The museum, like the clay, was shaped and transformed to hold and contain the women's stories. Indeed, clay is uniquely suited for people who have experienced trauma. It has soothing properties that grounds people in their art-making process. The women, collectively, shared, "We are strong and fragile like the clay we work with. It soothes and calms us, connecting us with our creative passion, moving us forward in our lives." Clay allowed the women to see their unique imprint with every movement.

Using art as a means of therapy is, by art's very nature, a very intimate, vulnerable, personal process. On the other hand, the purpose of the exhibitions was to educate and enlighten our community about violence against women. Not surprisingly, there were many challenges balancing the respect for the healing process of the women with the community activism mandate of the exhibitions. It was an evolving process with a dynamic tension that required constant reexamination and adjustment.

The exhibitions also had to present in a collective voice about their common experience the very individual healing process of each woman. We wanted to reflect a unique sense of each woman's trauma, inherently shaped by many marginalizing factors. At the same time, we also wanted to create exhibits with one cohesive theme. In order for the process to be truly collaborative, all of us (including myself as the art therapist, the artist, and the counselor) had to be mindful of how our power and privilege influenced the projects. Crossing the boundaries of art therapy and community activism compelled the facilitators and partners to ask important questions about trauma therapy, systemic change, and social justice, and that, in itself, was a catalyst for transformation.

The process was not perfect, but every challenge and obstacle informed and shaped the next step of the journey for everyone involved. At the end of the projects, the women saw themselves as artists with a valuable story to share in their sculpture. They accessed their strengths, their capacity for growth, and experienced their contribution to the broader community.



Top & Bottom: From *Clay Has a Memory and So Do We*, 2004 exhibition at the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art.

TIMOTHY NEESAM

Likewise, a multitude of communities were transformed by the women's artwork. At the opening nights' celebrations, invited friends and family witnessed their loved ones sharing their worlds with other women. Songs were sung, poems read, dances shared and speeches given, each reflecting on how the experience had touched and transformed them. In turn, the public who came were clearly moved. "Your towers make me think about how, as we explore ourselves, we find beauty and color and strengths we could never have believed we had", said one man who attended.

This expressive arts project crossed boundaries in so many ways — for women with lived experience, for service providers, and for their communities. While from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, all of the women experienced positive transformation. Each of these unique groups found, they said, collectively, a group voice "to raise awareness of abuse and violence to remove the stigma that keeps us silent and to honour those who do not have a voice." Their courage was an inspiration to all of us involved. ❧

This is our creation story — a bonding of women.
 No more fear of abuse stealing our hopes.
 Expressive hands moulding, healing;
 a sculpting journey in time.
 Realizing women's inner strength,
 we found self-worth in sandcastles and stone.
 Our struggle has not been in vain.
 Others will learn from us.
 Our powerful voices freely heard,
 our dreams now seen, we are silent no more.
 Finding a safe place within ourselves
 and in the world.
 The birth of a new beginning.

(Collective statement, *Vessels of Hope; Moulding My Future Firing My Dreams*, 2005 exhibition, Toronto, Canada).

Suzanne Thomson, B.A., D.T.A.T.I., has 17 years of experience in the field of expressive arts, using a variety of modalities to facilitate the assessment and treatment of disenfranchised populations. She provides clinical consultation to treatment agencies, facilitates treatment groups, conducts staff training in expressive arts programs, and designs treatment tools and curriculums. Thomson is the creator of *Hero's Journey*, a game of adventure for children learning about woman abuse.

Transforming Space Into Place

Liz Forsberg, Leah Burns, Clare O'Connor, Laura Reinsborough, Jill Tomac

In the fall of 2004, York University's Faculty of Environmental Studies moved into the old business school digs, challenging the historical purpose of the building with a program that questions the increasingly corporatized environment and promotes environmental and social justice. Entering the renovated Health, Nursing and Environmental Studies Building (HNES), we were suddenly confronted with a stark environment and with new neighbours, the Nursing, Health Policy, and Critical Disability Studies Departments.

Within the first month, we put out a call to students, staff and faculty to join an initiative called Transforming Space into Place and were overwhelmed when 40 people signed on, proposing 17 projects that would make the new space our own through art-making, ecological, and community-building activities.

The process of transforming space into place is a deeply ecological and political notion that challenges a narrow view of environment, and recognizes the interrelationship between the natural, built, organizational, political, cultural, and spiritual environment. Place is space imbued with meaning created by human (and non-human) interactions.

The Plants of Many Pots Project

Jill Tomac

Who tends gardens planted in transient places?

The Plants of Many Pots Project emerged as a means and metaphor for bringing the HNES community together and is an intermingling of diverse endeavours that plant roots through place-making arts. We invited faculty, staff, and students to contribute donations of favourite plant cuttings or potted plants, along with creative notes about the plant donor and instructions for care.

The FES common area became the



site of several community workshops, including faculty member Ray Rogers' facilitation of the building of plant benches and several repotting and propagation sessions held throughout the year. Community participation and generosity soon filled the benches with plant donations. Due to their schedules, many student volunteers were unable to commit to regular upkeep, and eventually a graduate student was employed to ensure the plants were watered weekly.

Despite difficulties in maintaining the longevity of the project, due to the movement and flow of this transient community, the presence of the plants provides a counterpoint to the normative, institutional feel of the space. As project facilitator, my roots also dug into this wild garden, converging and diverging with the plants and participants.

The HNES Community Scarves Project

Laura Reinsborough

For five days in February 2005, a rotating cast of more than 70 people knit six large, loopy scarves. Needles clicked and clacked. Stories were shared. Strangers met strangers.

The process of creating the scarves carved out a space for socializing and play. On a commuter campus, where many travel the same paths every day, the knitting station invited students, staff, and faculty to

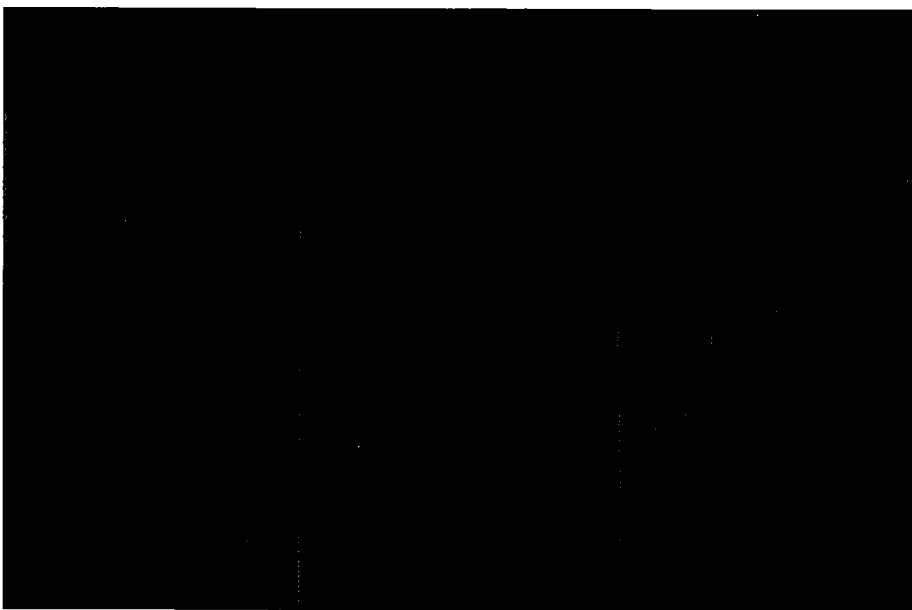
dwel. Set in the main stairwell, it abruptly transformed a space of transit into a place of creativity. The absurdity of the oversized needles lent a playfulness to the project. Free knitting lessons were offered, attracting a richly diverse crew. Spontaneous conversation, which might not necessarily make its way into the classroom, filled the appropriated stairwell.

The HNES Mural Project

Leah Burns

As an artist, I engage in community-based practices because, to me, being healthy means connecting to and sharing experiences with other people. Sometimes in community arts practice, the nature of the creative process has a visible impact on the shape of the final product. The focus of the HNES community mural project was to represent community conceptions of health, and to foster connections between the various groups inhabiting the building. To represent a theme as broad and rich with meaning as "health" is a daunting task. Over 300 hours, the artists maintained a running dialogue and negotiation with each other and with responses from community members. "What is health to you? Are you healthy?"

Attentiveness to the importance of relationships emerged as a vital concept. Relationships have been fundamental, both in terms of the mural production process, and of the on-going processes of



conceiving of and enacting health. This concept of health includes relationships between and among human, non-human, natural, and built environments. The visual imagery symbolizes ideas of interconnection, juxtaposition, transformation, and care. The mural is only a trace of some of the meanings and interpretations of health that we have encountered during this process. As a composition, it cannot hold everything we might desire, but we hope it may act as a starting point for further dialogue and interpretation.

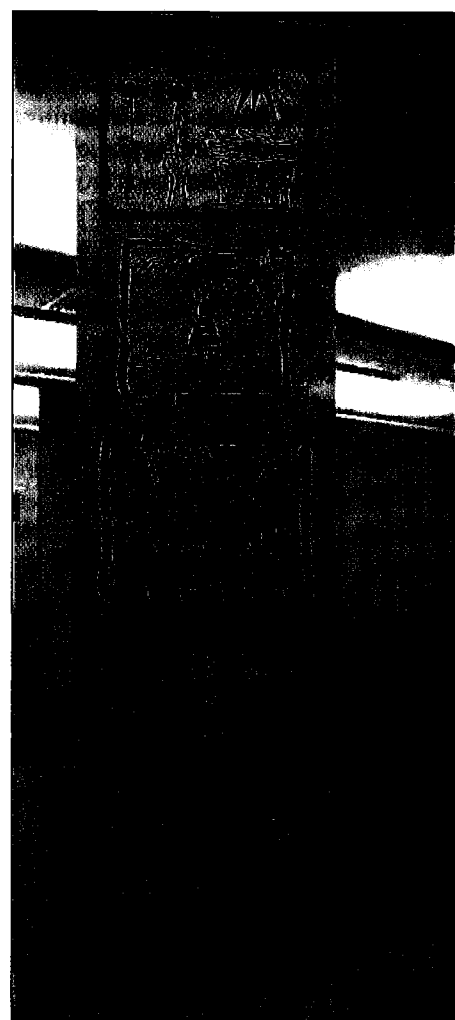
"I have small hands, especially for a sculptor. Very small hands. How can they hold the earth?"

— Alexandra Keim

Banners and Butterflies

Clare O'Connor

The final products were then hung in the common lounge, needles still attached. The scarves' haphazard colours and textures tell a story of the HNES community coming together. Whether or not all 70 participants met in person, they share an



artistic act and a social space. The scarves represent our continued community-building in a space of transit, across boundaries of race, age, gender, discipline, academic position, and level of knitting expertise.

On campuses today, one obstacle to place-making is the notion that education occurs only within the classroom. At York, this obstacle is exacerbated by the administration's rigid regulation of campus space. Bureaucracy and exclusive policies discourage and prevent certain groups from attaining space. Some community members experience this as an infringement on their rights to freedom of speech and assembly, and a constraint on their creativity and play.

TSIP offered approved weekly banner-making workshops over five months in 2005. The formal objective was to create art similar in form but different in content to be indications of our inhabitation in

HNES. The informal objective was to create a place for community members to interact and explore the potential for unconventional teaching and learning. One recurring dialogue among participants concerned feelings of exclusion from the campus. Collaborating participants articulated their desire to feel that campus space was theirs. Their displayed banners represent and partially fulfill this desire.

In this context, formal approval compromises the integrity of political action; approval entails following the rules that initially alienated you. There is no regulation outlawing midnight artistic interventions of hanging 100 handmade paper butterflies from the ceiling...

York's political climate made the banners and butterflies, like the other projects described in this article, acts of reclamation of space in the interest of holistic education. ❧

Leah Burns is an interdisciplinary artist and researcher interested in issues of equity, diversity and public engagement in the arts. She is currently completing her PhD at the University of Toronto in association with the Centre for Arts-informed Research.

By day **Liz Forsberg** works towards a master's degree that explores the intersection of community-based art practices and popular environmental education; by night, she has a regular gig doing readings of Maurice Sendak and Ezra Jack Keats and plays shows with her

band the Phonemes.

Clare O'Connor has her undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies from York University, and is currently a graduate student in the joint York/Ryerson program in Communication and Culture. She is a visual and vocal artist, and lives in Toronto.

Laura Reinsborough is a BES graduate and an MES candidate in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University, studying the intersections of Community Arts and Environmental Education. She comes from Sackville, New Brunswick.

Jill Tomac will receive her Master in Environmental Studies from York University in November 2006. Her research interests are in environmental thought, ecology and arts-informed research.

Random Acts of Motherism

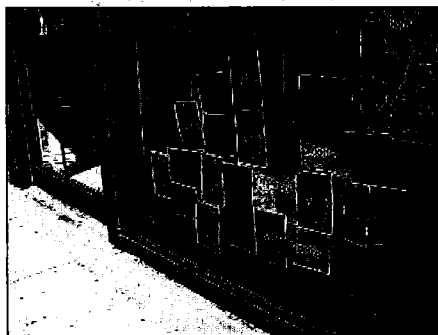
Using Self-Definition to Resist Dominant Discourse and Take Collective Action

Trish Van Katwyk

In this article, I will examine the utility of self-expression as a resistance to the dominant discourse that exists in Western society about motherhood. Three mothers spoke individually about their own experience of motherhood. They then came together as a group, bringing with them artifacts from their family homes. These artifacts represented each woman's experience of her own motherhood. They spoke to one another about the objects they had brought, and then began to share their stories about motherhood. With shared stories came a group consciousness, and the women began to strategize an art project that became political, dubbed "random acts of motherism" by one of the group members. Not one, as originally planned, but four art pieces were designed to be placed, without permission, into the community. This particular strategy was in response to the ways in which the mothers felt unwelcome in public places. The women were energized by their actions and by the political nature of their action. The actions sprang out of the self-expression of the individual narratives, which were further

represented in their art.

One of the individual narratives was provided by "Anne." Anne began her story by positioning herself as a stay-at-home mom, and justifying that position. She then began to describe what her life as a stay-at-home mom is. She spoke about the importance of her role in the family, a role that was, indeed, central to the functioning of the family. She was the "mama bear." Her family was on a "precipice," and it



Postcard display: These postcards were eventually removed from the places where they had been posted. The mothers continued to replace them until there were no postcards left. In some locations, the cards were removed within a day; in other places, they remained for a few months.

was her responsibility to make sure they did not fall off of it. Her home was "the den," a place she created to provide safety and nurturance. The struggle for Anne was in the paradox that such a motherhood is central and yet entrapping. She was afraid that she had forfeited her personal identity in order to be so central to her family. Yet, she could not feel good about another way of being mother.

Anne expressed a great deal of ambivalence about central/entrapped mothering. She appreciated the ability to focus on others that motherhood had fostered. At the same time, she begrudged the patriarchy and violence that entrapment entails. She referred to this entrapment as the "Leave It To Beaver thing," describing the marital relationship that accommodated such motherhood as "controlling and almost kind-of abusive," her husband serving as "king of the castle."

Anne's art piece incorporates a baby's blanket that, as her mother and her mother's mother had done before her, she had sewed and hand-stitched while pregnant. The blanket is formed into a circle, along-

side text that spirals in contradictory words to express the paradox of her experience. There are small twigs in the blanket, branches of activities and responsibilities that come out from the central position that is, for Anne, motherhood.

Another mother, "Kathleen", also identified in her personal narrative some of the paradoxes of motherhood. For her, motherhood had been presented in public images as easy and natural. She was unprepared for the difficulties many of her women friends had with even becoming pregnant, and became uncertain about her own ability to conceive, carry a pregnancy full term, and then deliver a healthy live baby. Once her baby was born, she was unprepared for how difficult and challenging her mother-work was, something that "no one really tells you."

Kathleen was particularly struck by the way in which her ideas about time were altered by motherhood. Initially, for Kathleen, time was a linear concept, in accordance with Western culture. Time was a commodity, a product to be exchanged, given, taken, stolen, or lost. Her motherhood responsibilities were resented at her workplace, as they constituted time that was stolen from work, and given instead to her family. Kathleen struggled with this commodified time, experiencing guilt for doing something on her own and fearing that she had taken time that she owed her children. She was beginning to note that the passage of time may fluctuate and move in a way that is not uni-directional or exchangeable.

Kathleen's art piece also represents paradox. It is a suspended, upside-down water bottle. Spilling out of it are the words "invisible," "tasteless," and "odorless," yet also "vital life force," "basic," "important," and "essential to life."

The third mother, "Judy", did not refer to paradox as she told her story of motherhood. For Judy, her experience of motherhood was one of claiming agency over her own life. She described a childhood with a mother who was unable to care for her. When Judy left her family home as a young teenager, she felt she needed to sever ties with her mother, in order to be well.

Much of Judy's personal identity as a



Blue painting: This art piece has been placed inside an abandoned utility box, alongside a nature trail. It has been treated with great respect. Flowers, branches, and stones have been added, so that it has begun to resemble an altar.

mother has been related to a reconnection with her mother. She feels a responsibility to her children to have their grandmother in their lives. Becoming a mother has meant to Judy that she must unite her history to her future.

Judy spoke positively about choice, consequence, and sacrifice. For instance, when consequences were the result of personal actions with a sense of personal choice, Judy was able to feel that she was the driving force behind her own experience. When she became pregnant, she had a strong awareness of her own agency: "And I didn't worry. I knew that whatever was going to happen was going to happen, and things were going to work out." Judy made some important choices about her pregnancy, and she claimed both a personal agency and self-definition as she

made these choices.

Her art piece was made from the silkscreen of a book cover of one of her mother's favourite children's stories. The silkscreen was torn into strips of fabric, which were formed to become links in a chain. The chain was immersed in a fabricated riverbed. Her work expresses the links she has made in order to follow the current that is her motherhood.

Judy, Kathleen, and Anne began their group discussion by showing one another the objects they had brought from their homes. They spoke about the meanings attributed to these objects, and how their motherhood was being represented. As their stories were shared, the creation of the art expanded to become the development of a political strategy. The strategy was to claim a place in a society that did not accommodate or provide compassion for or understanding of their struggles to mother with authenticity. A collective art piece was designed with this particular concern in mind. It was a collection of 200 postcard of children and children's art. These were randomly posted (and re-posted) in public places.

The art pieces remain in various places in the community, to be encountered unexpectedly. They are obstinate, present, and beautiful. As unique self-expressions, they become political: they are a resistance to the uniformity of a dominant discourse of motherhood. ❧

Trish Van Katwyk is a 2nd year PhD student at the School of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. Her research focuses on the social construction of motherhood and the interaction of social policy, as social identity, and personal identity. Trish is a practicing family therapist with offices in Elora and Guelph, Ontario. She is the mother of three young children.



The Beautiful Women Project

Art as Teaching and Healing

Laurie J. Gordon

People told Cheryl-Ann Webster that she could make a living as an artist, but if that meant making mugs and napkin rings, she was having none of it. For Webster, art has always been about social messages. Her creations are visual voices for stories untold, silenced, or forgotten. This is especially true of the Beautiful Women Project, a sculptural exhibition of the torsos of 120 real women.

In 2003, prompted by her thirteen-year-old daughter's comment that a friend was saving for breast implants, Webster began to investigate body image. She realized that young girls' role models come predominantly from media images that have been manipulated to achieve a specific purpose. Frustrated that girls were aspiring to achieve these stereotypical beauty ideals, Webster wanted to show them that natural bodies come in all sizes and shapes. She intended to make plaster casts of real women, and use the casts as molds to create clay replicas of their torsos. Thus, the Beautiful Women Project was born.

In June 2004, having received permission from a women's drum camp to approach the registrants, she set up her tent with all the supplies she needed to cast the women she hoped would support the project. She expected five to 10 volunteers, and was overwhelmed when 48 signed up. Each day, she cast from dawn to midnight, applying strips of moist bandage to the front torso of each woman from the neck to the hipline to create a plaster cast.

Although the only question Webster asked was why the woman had decided to help the project, she found that her models often shared very private experiences and feelings, and none more so than Sarah. Sarah had been diagnosed with breast cancer and was scheduled for surgery in three days. Eyes welling with tears, Sarah shared her hopes, and her grief about losing her breasts and her womanhood. Webster was totally unprepared for the profound emotion of the moment. An hour later, she had produced two casts: one for the Project, and one for Sarah, in celebration

of her body that was about to be altered to save her life.

Listening to Sarah's anguish, Webster realized that it was not only the diversity of women's bodies that was important to the project, but the stories of the women themselves.

Webster had hoped that the Beautiful Women Project would have a positive impact at the exhibition stage, yet women were benefiting even during casting. One woman found the cast to be a shield, allowing her to feel safe for the first time in her life; for an abuse survivor, the cast was a symbol of self-acceptance; for some, the cast honoured the memory of a loved one who had succumbed to an eating disorder or to cancer; and others felt that the cast challenged their preconceived images of their own body.

Although all her models had volunteered for the project to support the message to young girls, their comments about their own weight, scars, or stretch marks revealed that they, too, had body image issues. Many women were sure that these



Wall sculptures. All photos courtesy of the project supporters and volunteers.



Row upon row of Beautiful Women plaster casts waiting to be clay sculptures!

features would make their body instantly recognizable, yet most could not identify their own likeness among the casts placed in the dining hall to dry.

Drum camp was an epiphany; not only did Webster realize the importance of the women's stories, but she came to understand that her audience was composed of women of all ages. Reflecting on her experience, Webster realized that Sarah represented all that the Beautiful Women Project had become. What started as an art exhibition with a message for young girls had evolved into a dialogue about body image and self-worth, and had the potential to teach and heal. At that point, Webster made two important decisions: she would work on the Beautiful Women Project full-time, and, to reach the widest audience, it would be a not-for-profit exhibition that would tour public free-admission galleries in Canada and beyond. The magnitude of the task was daunting.

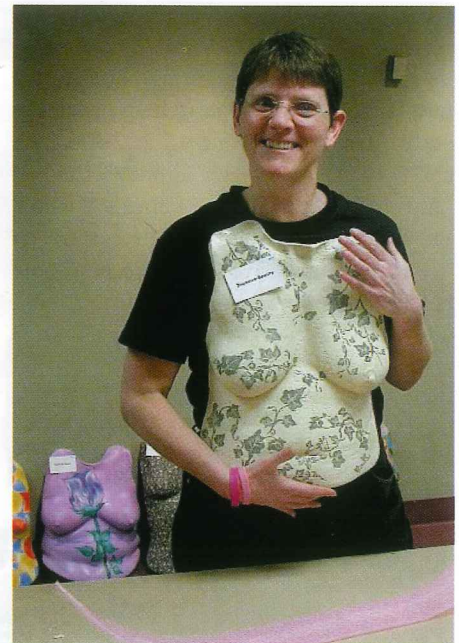
Still raw from her mastectomy eight weeks earlier, and perhaps to confirm that she was still a beautiful woman, Sarah arranged a second casting session in her hometown of Kingston, Ontario. She organized a two-day schedule so that other women could be cast. Each had words of support and suggestions for pro-



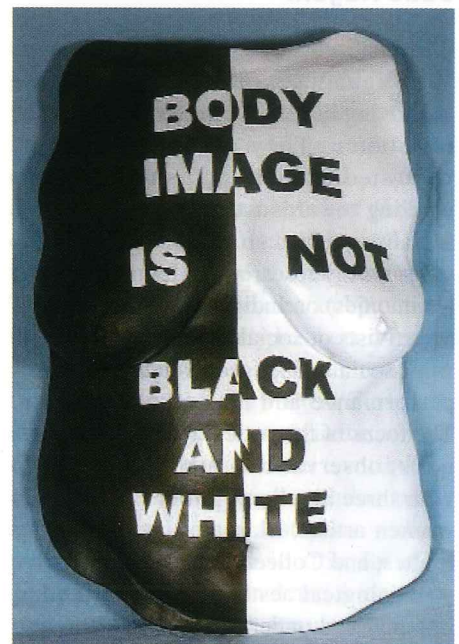
The artist, Cheryl-Ann Webster, working in her studio in 2004.

motion and fund-raising.

By October 2004, Webster had cast 120 Canadian, American, and British women, aged 19 to 91, from different races, cultures, and backgrounds. After making some test pieces, Webster began creating sculptures of each woman's torso by lining the casts with white clay. Originally, she had planned to leave the sculptures their natural colour; however, her test pieces looked sterile, and did not truly represent the vibrant models. After seeking their advice, Webster decided to decorate the sculptures to honour the spirit and story of each woman, based on the notes she had taken after each



Sarah with her "before" sculpture. She tries it on one more time before packing the sculpture away softly in the newly donated crates.



"Body Image is Not Black and White."

casting session.

Sarah continued to be a dedicated supporter of the Beautiful Women Project. After the cancer spread to her bones, Webster made a pact with her: Webster would do her utmost to finish the Project as soon as possible, and Sarah would survive to see the exhibition.

When the Beautiful Women Project

was accepted at The Studio Gallery in Kingston, Webster and Sarah were delighted. Despite fracturing her arm in a fall, Sarah was on-hand to help install the sculptures. On January 22, 2006, she attended the vernissage, although she had only been released from treatment of a lung infection at the hospital an hour earlier.

The Beautiful Women Project has now been exhibited in Kingston, Vankleek Hill, and Cornwall, Ontario. Thousands have

attended. Even more have participated in curriculum-based workshops. Webster has organized personal casting sessions to help breast cancer survivors heal emotionally after surgery. She has made presentations to high-school classes, university students, and social service and community groups. The Beautiful Women Project has truly become a teaching and healing tool, and a means to raise social awareness about the link between body image and self-worth.

To quote Webster: "Our bodies tell our life stories. They are portraits of our journeys and experiences. Knowing that our body is beautiful just as it exists is a message more people need to see and hear." ❧

Laurie Gordon is a freelance writer who lives on a lake north of Kingston, Ontario. She is a former elementary school principal, and is currently working as project manager for the Beautiful Women Project.

Transforming Indigenous Cultural Politics through Art and Dialogue in Rural and Remote Manitoba

Julie Nagam

In localized areas of Manitoba, there are Indigenous women artists that are moving beyond a counter-discourse, or resistance. They are in the state of "untested feasibility,"¹ since they are working towards a dream, or a vision of socially-engaged art. This article concentrates on my research (including personal testimonies) on Indigenous women acting as activists or social change agents², their work socially engaged in current political performance and dialogical discourse. The focus of this article will be on the artwork, observations, and conversations with three rural and remote Indigenous women artists, Margaret Dumas, Cathy Mattes, and Colleen Cutschall.

Dialogical aesthetics³ is a method to interpret and understand artwork through conversations and dialogue-based aspects, instead of focusing solely on an object created by the artist. In order to set the framework for dialogical aesthetics, the reader must envision an artform locked into a collaborative process that is socially engaged and applies "a performative, process-based approach" (Kester 1), and can challenge aesthetic concepts of the avant-garde object-based art⁴. In order to comprehend dialogical aesthetics, one has to have a compara-

tive aspect, so avant-garde art is the contrast nevertheless. I am not stating that either type of aesthetic is superior. However, the works I will be discussing still have elements of avant-garde object-based aesthetics; it is the analysis of these artworks that will differ. In order to begin comprehending the framework of dialogical aesthetics, it is important to note the following:

In dialogical practice, the artist, whose perceptions are informed by his or her own training, past projects, and lived experience, comes into a given site or community characterized by its own unique constellation of social and economic forces, personalities, and traditions... What emerges is a new set of insights, generated at the intersection of both perspectives, and catalyzed through the collaborative production of a given project (Kester 95).

This type of art practice shifts the primary focus of an individual artist or object, image, or system that is challenging the viewer's expectations into a collective or dialogue based upon disruption of per-

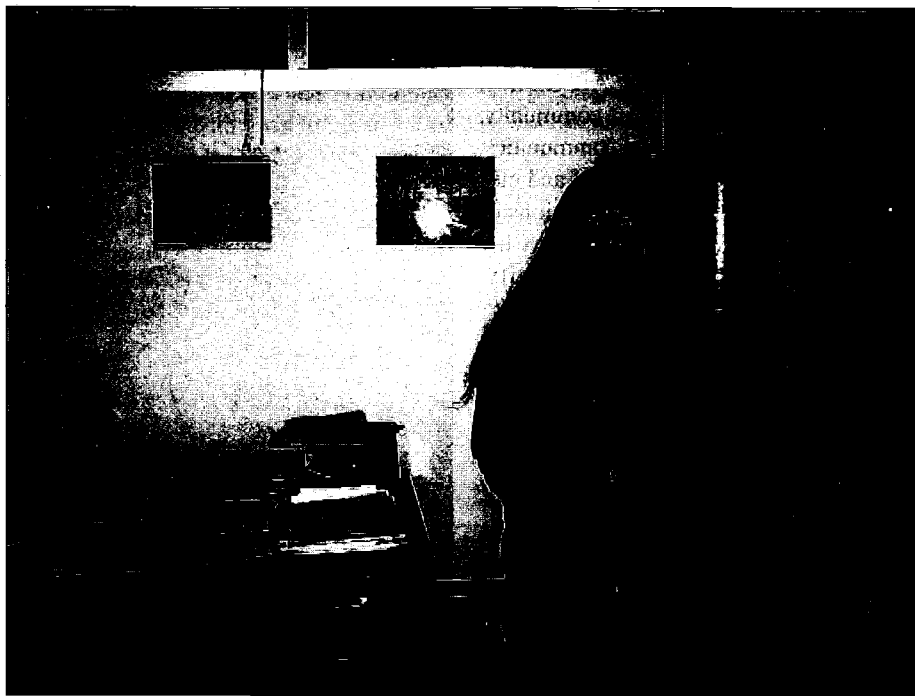
ceived social norms. In avant-garde aesthetics, the social norms are transformed into social practices, which include the notion that the artist is the sole creator, the main concept is created by the artist and is considered to be a new idea, and that artwork is an object to be viewed. A dialogical aesthetic rejects these norms and practices through the artists' ability to become part of a process where they listen to people, and participate in the overall collaboration of creating a body of work. The final work becomes a "collective interaction" (Kocur & Leung 81) rather than a final shocking project, and the whole process ultimately transforms the role of the artist and artwork.

The first example of "collective interaction" is in the creation of the first Cree immersion school in Thompson, Manitoba. The artist, elder, and educator, Margaret Dumas, who is a resident in the area, envisioned a need for a community-concept Cree immersion school. In this northern community, where the majority of the population is Cree, there was no educational institute that taught Cree as an immersion language. The dream was to stop watching people in Dumas's community lose their language and cultural ties to their Indigenous roots. Therefore, the goal was to

create a space where key individuals could speak openly about issues surrounding the complexity of loss of culture and language that was simultaneously contributing to high suicide rates, crime, substance abuse, family breakdown, and domestic abuse for Indigenous people.

Dumas and others transformed a small group into multiple discussions resulting in the Wapanohk Cree Immersion Community School. They brought elders, principals, school board members, parents, and government officials to a table to discuss these issues and advocate for the creation of this school. The dialogue that happened formed a community concept school, creating a new space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous children would have elders teaching traditional art forms such as beading, sewing, and painting within the standard Manitoba school curriculum. The goal of the school was to empower people with a strong Aboriginal identity for the upcoming generations of children who would be taught dancing, fiddling, drumming, and, through an outdoor camp, how to live with the land. The new syllabus will include community feasts and regular pow-wows to celebrate community spirit and build strong, healthy families. This transformation was built on Dumas's creative vision, which has revolutionized her community by collaboration and valuing everyone's contributions and thoughts in the process. These attributes are typical of dialogical projects.

A second example of collaboration is a project that fused breakdancing and traditional Métis dance. After hearing the voices of the Aboriginal youth at a conference, Mattes decided to go back to her community and begin a conversation about the possibilities of an Aboriginal youth dance group with Manitoba Métis Federation Youth Coordinator Jason Gobeil. They then brought various people to the table, including government agencies, arts organizations, Aboriginal groups, and community members, which triggered a dialogue dealing with the issue of youth not being interested in traditional Métis dance. This discussion transformed into a new kind of dance, a fusion of breakdancing, hip-hop dancing, and traditional Métis dance. This sparked a cohort of young people participating in this



Colleen Cutschall with Artwork

new dance genre. This creative endeavor was made possible by collaborating, listening, evolving, and respecting the youth, people with knowledge and a vested interest in passing down and sharing these traditions.

Both works of Dumas and Mattes are rooted in their political engagement. Each project involved the creation of a temporary group of people that was linked to the broader community interested in social issues that were impacting their area and people. In the case of Dumas's work, many of the people at the table were required to be there and did not necessarily share the idea of change, but they understood there was a growing problem with Indigenous youth in northern Manitoba. Therefore, this awareness caused them to work collaboratively and in a respectful manner. None of these projects could have taken place without the commitment to social change and radical brainstorming of all the people involved.

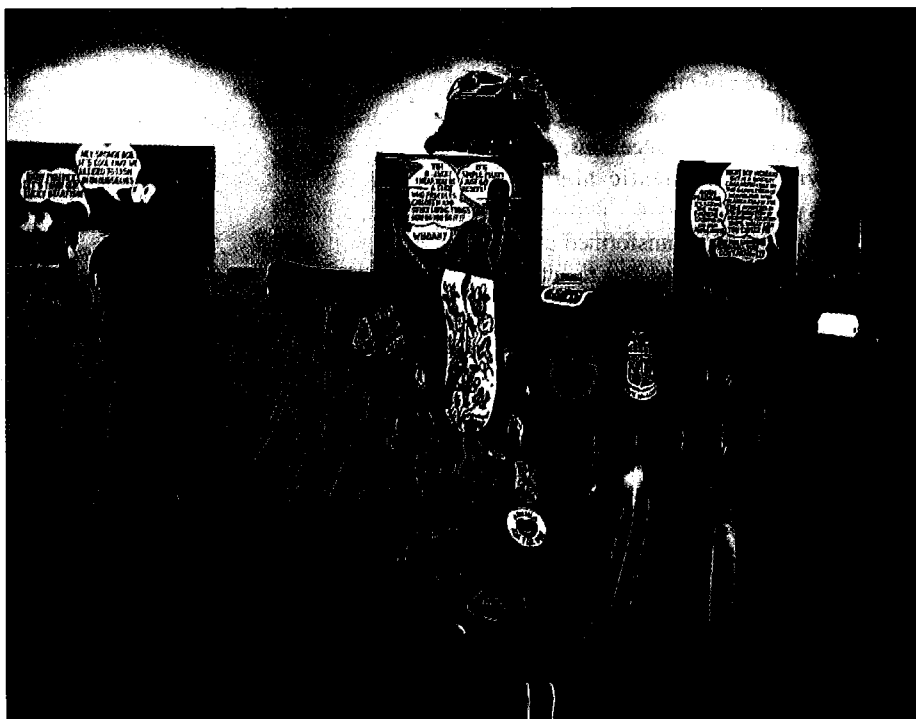
Dumas's philosophy is that "everybody plays a role and everybody is important, by what gifts they bring to the table. That's how Aboriginal people saw it: everybody has a gift, and this was acknowledged". The principles that inform dialogical aesthetics are closely linked to

that of Indigenous values and epistemologies. As Dumas has explained, Aboriginal values include collaboration, respect, giving, understanding intergenerational effects, and building community, which are all built into the framework of dialogical aesthetics. Therefore, dialogical aesthetics are a good fit with Indigenous art. The concern for art theories and practices to incorporate Indigeneity has been a major issue for Indigenous artists, curators, and theorists; by analyzing Mattes, Cutschall, and Dumas and their artwork in the context of dialogical aesthetics, I am contributing to the fusion of Indigenous philosophies and values, and art and aesthetics, without perpetuating Eurocentric attitudes. The possibility that traditional and contemporary Indigenous values are encompassed within the principles of dialogical aesthetics makes for an easier transition into representing Indigenous worldviews in the realm of art.

Another example of socially conscientious art is Rielisms, curated by Mattes. This show was a piece of work that dealt with the historical figure Lois Riel. The goal of the exhibition was to facilitate cross-cultural, "imagined", and inter-community dialogues, and to raise important Indigenous issues and

concerns. Mattes's intent was to bridge the cultural divide between systems and institutions such as The Winnipeg Art Gallery, political organizations, the art community, Indigenous people, imagined communities, and art theory with Métis people and culture. Mattes suffered the repercussions of using the controversial icon Riel; it gave her a greater appreciation of community, activism, and politics.

The backlash of events inspired a process that allowed various participants and stakeholders to speak, listen, and respond to the complexities that surrounded the icon Riel and the contested history of the Métis people and culture. The dialogical aesthetic of the work was the communication among the participants, Métis community, art community, and major stakeholders. Few leaders in the Winnipeg region of the Manitoba Métis Federation supported the show and instructed members not to attend, and, somehow, the Riel Foundation withdrew any or potential financial support for the project. The relatives of Riel did not support the show, and made their displeasure known, while the Winnipeg Art Gallery cancelled relevant programs and activities that might have broken some of this tension. Yet Mattes's goal was to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue about Indigenous issues surrounding the controversial icon Riel. Therefore, not only did the art in the exhibition display the complexities of the perceptions and experiences of Riel, so too did the dialogical aspects in the process of the work. This project dealt with the complex ideologies we as a Canadian society have within contested Indigenous histories and knowledge. Not only did the Eurocentric art gallery institution snub Mattes, so did part of her imagined political community of the Manitoba Métis Federation. This demonstrates the multiple layers that Indigenous people find themselves embedded in. The active participants took on their own role and had agency to speak, listen, and respond to the artist, the institutions, community members, and the political organizations. Rielisms is a success, due to its ability to create dialogue around Indigenous issues and to deal with the absent Indigenous person in institu-



Barry Ace's exhibition curated by Cathy Mattes

tions, imaged communities, and politics.

To contradict the negative impact that Rielisms had in Winnipeg, the Dunlop Art Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan, insisted on taking on this show, which turned into a huge success. The gallery, unlike the Winnipeg Art Gallery, gave Mattes agency in the project. The Dunlop Gallery coordinated a Métis Advisory Committee, which was supported by well-known local Métis people such as Maria Campbell. This gave Métis people some agency so that they could feel a part of the show; there was discussion around food, music, and entertainment, issues that Mattes wanted to be part of the Winnipeg Art Gallery show. They had bannock, a fiddle player, youth dancers, and a large turnout of Métis people. The show was successful in creating a space where Métis people could demonstrate their culture and learn at the same time. This exhibition at the Dunlop Art Gallery did not continue the "historic exclusionary museum practice, in which exhibitions are about a culture, and not for a culture" (Mattes). This performance was for the Métis culture, and demonstrated the support needed by the gallery or institutions to create an inclusive space.

The last work I will examine is a

Colleen Cutschall monument, Spirit Warriors, erected to honour the Indigenous people who fought or lost lives at Little Big Horn. The Spirit Warriors sculpture at the Little Big Horn Battlefield is located in Montana, and was erected as a tribute to those Indigenous nations who fought for their land and freedom. Colonization has a long and relentless history for Indigenous people, which created a politically loaded situation right from the monument's inception. Therefore, the community members of several different nations had a vested interest in the outcome of the project, as did the National Parks office, general community members, and the group Friends of Little Big Horn.

In order to comprehend the dialogical aspects of this artwork, it is important to understand the issues surrounding it. First, Friends of Little Big Horn made reproductions of the image of the monument on t-shirts and other consumer goods without the permission of the artist. Second, there was some backlash from the communities in the area because they felt that the monument did not represent their nation or Indigenous background, which brought forth the issue of cultural and Indigenous

knowledge. Finally, the National Parks Branch did not want Cutschall or the architect, John Collins, to sign the work, which brought up issues of copyright and intellectual property rights for the artists⁵.

Amidst of all of these issues, how could dialogue and political performance not be embedded in the artwork? In Cutschall's case, Indigenous peoples were lobbying and exhibiting their commitment to addressing past colonial wrongs, showing that there was community involvement from the beginning. Once the monument was erected, people from the outlying communities and other nations placed offerings (such as sweet grass, tobacco, sage and ribbons) at and on the artwork. The dialogue and written comments of the artist, participants, stakeholders, and community members were documented, allowing for continuous self-reflexivity. It was less about the individual artist or object, and more about the community members, colonialism, and marking land that rightfully is Indigenous-based. Encompassing all these issues at once will cause backlash from any number of stakeholders; this is why dialogue is crucial for a space where all people can speak, listen, and respond.

I am arguing that Cutschall's, Mattes', and Dumas's artwork is enhanced by their status as affected Indigenous persons from the area and their ability to become a member of the politically coherent community as an artist. In framing political performance and socially engaged art in Indigenous terms, the reader must understand, as artist Agard said, "'Art' described in indigenous terms ... is not separated from tribal life. We make art and we are art" (Farris Dufrene 56). In conversations and observations, these three artists felt that their artwork was a part of them and impacted their community, since there was no segregation between the roles of artist and community member. All of the Indigenous women artists discussed did not envision themselves as isolated individual artists; rather, they believe that art is not a total production of culture or produced as 'high art' or for their own individual sake. Their artwork is a site of "critical intervention,"⁶ as it is infused with refer-

ences to social and outward emotional issues. These sites are where the critical dialogue is taking place, where community members are reflecting on the concept of "untested feasibility." It is artists that are rising to the challenge of performing the role of activist and social change agent.

Dialogical aesthetics is not the sole reading of their artworks, but one aesthetic that complements and contributes to Indigenous art and values. The framework provided in this paper for the reading of each artwork discussed is only a potential beginning of understanding Indigenous art. The artists and participants see past the concept of self-interest or self-gain — they see past themselves and into the future. As explored throughout this article, these selected Indigenous women artists are pushing the boundaries of collective and collaborative work and are creating socially engaged art. Hence, the dialogue that is taking place in localized areas of rural and remote Manitoba is creating new kinds of knowledge and ways of educating people about social issues. These women, by engaging in dialogical aesthetics and political performance, are working towards a more "nuanced model of collective identity and action" (86). ❧

1 Discussed in Ana Maria Araujo Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope*, which is about her research on the history of Brazilian illiteracy.

2 As discussed earlier, the concept of activist and social change agent (I have developed the term "social change agent" in order to find a different ideology that is not embedded in social constructions of frontline radical activists) were developed out of my understanding that the role of an activist and social change agent is to transform the dominant racist, sexist and colonial Canadian (or any) society by providing individuals with tools to resist in local struggles.

3 Rooted in Feminist artists and critical thinkers Susan Lacy and Lucy Lippard.

4 Abstract, oppositional, and reductive is the framework that we as scholars and society members use to understand an area of avant-garde art. I will be arguing there is a new way to view art based on the work by Kester in dialogical aesthetics and interactive community art and activism.

6 The show *...dies again* included digital photographs based on *Spirit Warriors*. The art show was held at Urban Shaman, an Indigenous run gallery in Winnipeg and the curator was Cathy Mattes. This show dealt with the copyright and intellectual properties rights.

Julie Nagam is a person of multiple locations in community, race, class and identity. She has just begun the PhD program at York University in Communication and Culture.

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Description of Speak

Voices of Young Women: Gender Inequality in South and Central America

Melanie Schambach

Within my artistic practice, I explore subjects concerning some of the social struggles people resist in South America. Through painting, I attempt to open a voice for these people, and I also honor these cultures constructively. Instead of building illustrations of ideas and concepts, I strive to create something powerful enough to make one think critically and become active from their beliefs. After I challenged myself to push painting into activism, *Speak* started taking shape in the spring of 2006.

Six young South and Central American women, aged 19 to 27 years old, committed to participate in *Speak*. They all reside in Vancouver and enjoy the privileges of education and housing; therefore, their view about their countries might be somewhat different from the majority of citizens from South and Central America. However, they have witnessed and experienced some effects of repression, inequality, and war. Hence, they need to be heard, they need to learn about the strength of their voice, and they need to use that power in their future when they return to their home countries. Having them together and sharing their viewpoints on gender inequality — articulating about their diverse cultures,



Speak, acrylic on canvas, 11X13, 2006.



Nicole Vigoda painting. Still-image from *Speak* video-documentary.



Doing the underpainting of *Speak*.

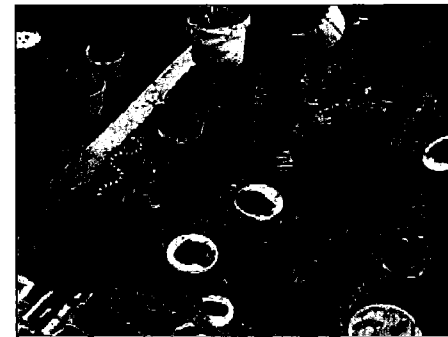


Carolina Guimarães speaking. Still-image from *Speak* video-documentary.

religious beliefs, careers, families, traditions, languages, and goals — is what shaped *Speak*.

In a period of two months, the group of six women met once a week. Within the general topic of gender inequality in South America, the group was encouraged to participate in discussions based on subtopics, like tradition, religion, and sexuality. Each time we would meet, I would introduce a subtopic, offer them extra written material of known authors linked to the subject, and launch a round-table discussion of personal experiences. These gatherings were held in a studio with an 11-foot by 13-foot canvas stretched on the floor; 10 gallons of colorful paint; a collection of brushes, rags, and rollers; and tons of enthusiasm. The experience of *Speak* was not only documented with this canvas, but also with a ten-minute video-documentary that summarizes some of the key points of our conversations and interviews.

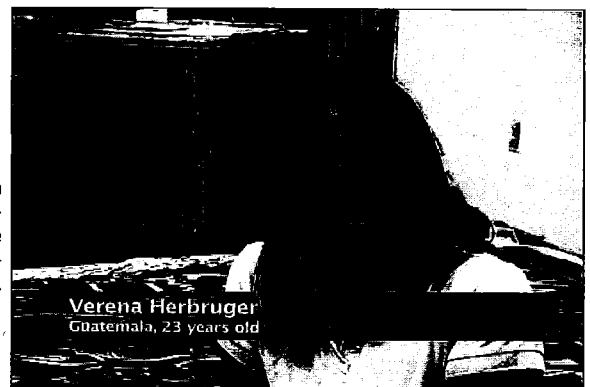
When analyzing the women's oppression, there were subjects that kept looming; for instance, the very complex binary opposition of nature versus culture. We came to realize that a lot of the fixed meanings that religions recognize as nature can be argued to be culturally constructed. These fixed meanings that shape our morals and way of thinking do not always



Everybody painting. Still-image from *Speak* video-documentary.



Left: Beatriz Asturias interviewed. Still-image from Speak video-documentary.



Right: Verena Herbruger interviewed. Still-image from Speak video-documentary.

Beatriz Asturias
Guatemala, 26 years old

Verena Herbruger
Guatemala, 23 years old

follow the proposition of equality between men and women. Then, we found that the culturally constructed meanings around gender differences are what create most of the oppression against women in education, tradition, sexuality, and family values.

As the director of Speak, I contemplate my position of authority. I ask myself: Until what point should we interfere with cultural differences? Until what point should those differences be respected? Who is responsible for underlining the destructive aspects of our cultures? Who

defines the boundary between productive criticism and offensive judgment? How much can I arbitrate tradition without offending or intruding? I do not expect people to use the activist tool of interactive painting to rebel against their fixed meanings of life, and I do not anticipate women to revolt against their family traditions. My goal is to raise awareness of the existence of choice. Whether you are influenced by religion, tradition, social pressure, or by a political initiative, we should all treat each other equally with respect.

We completed Speak with some answers and plenty of new questions. I learned that a project like Speak has no finish line. We could possibly continue doing these forums and layering the canvas endlessly. ☸

Melanie Schambach intends to turn painting into activism by encouraging critical thinking and discourse. An Emily Carr Institute graduate, she was born in 1981 in Bogota, Colombia; lived fifteen years in Cali during the Colombian Civil War; five years in Guatemala City; and five years in Canada.

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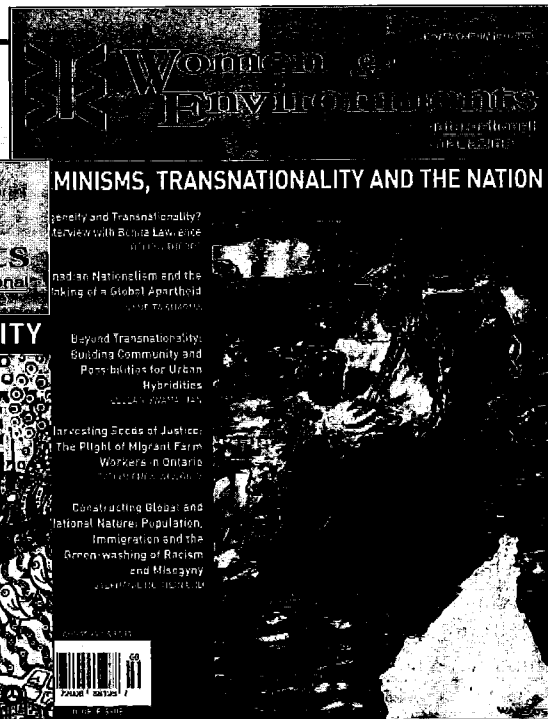
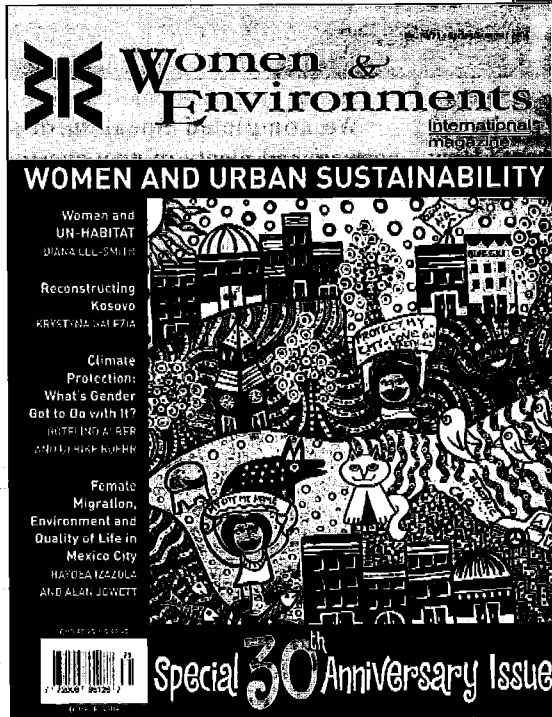
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WE Research

The Cutting Edge and the Corporate Agenda

Maria Dumlao, Elaine Kaufmann, Danielle Mysliwicz, and Anne Polashenski

The art world is cutting edge.

Or so says the art world's ongoing advertising campaign. From gallery press releases to museum literature, art events and artists are promoted as avant-garde alternatives to the vapid and tired mainstream culture of mass consumption.

But, as with any myth perpetuated for commercial ends, this appealing statement obscures a more complex truth. The art world is driven by financial concerns. Though artists, curators, and dealers claim to be radicals far ahead of the mainstream in demanding social change, equality, and even revolution, they are currently a mere simulation of the avant-garde. The art world has become conventional, and that is a triumph of the corporate world.

The absorption of the corporate agenda has resulted in systemic discrimination against female artists. Even though similar numbers of women and men pursue careers as artists, women are far less likely to be represented by dealers, and are included in fewer group shows and museum exhibitions. The responsibility for the perpetuation of this systemic form of discrimination falls on a rich network of dealers, curators, institutions, and even artists themselves. Each party denies any responsibility for bringing about change and instead tries to benefit from the status quo, their decisions guided by the bottom line.

We must examine how this network operates before asking individual players to reflect on whether their use of the avant-garde is to promote a true alternative to the mainstream or is a mere marketing strategy.

Dealers and curators of contemporary art make decisions based solely on artwork quality. At least that's the response typically given when asked to explain a

show or roster dominated by male artists. Such statements deny the inherent subjectivity of evaluating art and the possibility of discrimination. Other artistic fields such as classical music have experienced a similar shortage of women and have acknowledged that there is bias in their selection systems. In their article "Orchestrating Impartiality," Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse argue that the introduction by symphony orchestras of blind auditions helped to reverse discrimination faced by female musicians.

Curators who claim to focus on quality really offer a red herring that distracts our

attention from the perpetrators of discrimination and the power of the market.

The reality is that art made by men sells for more. In his candid *New York Times* article "The X Factor," Greg Allen reveals that the difference in price between men's and women's artwork is "sometimes tenfold or more." He concludes that "[a]sking why women's art sells for less than men's elicits a long and complex answer, with endless caveats, entirely germane qualifiers and diverse, sometimes contradictory reasons. But there is also a short and simple, if unpopular, answer that



BRAINSTORMERS

none of those explanations can trump. Women's art sells for less because it is made by women." This fact resides in the collective unconscious of dealers. Representing men in the commercial art world is a smart business decision, while the avant-garde is simply good marketing.

The influence of the market is also evident in the discrepancy between the pool of artists that dealers draw from and the artists they show. Professional dealers find fresh blood in MFA open studio events and thesis exhibitions. MFA programs act as a first-stage filter of "talent" by pre-validating artists. A January 2006 press release for "School Days" at New York's Jack Tilton Gallery in typifies this process:

"School Days" includes works in widely diverse styles representing the best of the graduate programs at Columbia, Hunter and Yale. At a moment...when every gallerist is looking to find the next hot art star before they've even finished graduate school, the Tilton Gallery is taking a more open approach, showcasing a cross-section of innovative work by a new generation of artists.

Putting aside that showcasing several "hot art stars" from three graduate schools follows the very trend the gallery pejoratively dismisses, the real issue here is that dealers "discover" new talent in MFA programs. According to our 2006 study of graduate art programs, the majority of MFA students in the tri-state area are women. The "School Days" press release mentions that 50 per cent of the show's art work is by female artists, a point that should be unremarkable, given the pool of artists they draw from.

Unfortunately, a show where 50 per cent of the artists are female is remarkable. In our 2006 study of 198 New York galleries, we found that less than 35 per cent of the artists who have gallery representation are women. This inequality has also been noted in the press. In his *Village Voice* article "Inky Depths," Jerry Saltz states that, "When only 17 per cent of gallery shows are one-woman solos, everything is skewed. It's worse with

artists of color. Regardless, it needs to be pointed out that, right now, when it comes to women, the art world is more conservative than the Bush administration." Defenders of sexism might argue that such numbers reflect remnants of discrimination from years past, since the statistics include blue-chip galleries that represent an older generation of artists. Shockingly, however, the 30 per cent ceiling prevails even in galleries that represent primarily emerging artists. Well-known galleries from Gagosian and Mary Boone to the up-and-coming Leo Keonig, Clementine, and John Connelly Presents all have rosters that include at least 80 per cent men. It is disheartening that dealers are largely excluding the current generation of female artists.

Dealers are influenced by the market and curators are influenced by the opinions of dealers. Having given up the tiresome and risky role of finding and backing unknown artists, curators typically define the term "emerging artist" as one who has gallery representation. By relying on the commercial system for their vision, curators inevitably reproduce the gross discrimination that lies within it. For the "Greater New York" show of 2005, PS1 announced an open call, suggesting a desire to look for artists outside the gallery system. But most of the artists they chose were represented by New York galleries and only about one third of those artists were women. Even well-known, curated events, such as Documenta in Kassel, fail when they include a significant number of female artists: Documenta markets itself as a liberal, socially-conscious forum for expression and has dedicated exhibitions to issues like consumerism, politics, the environment, and globalization. It has even held panels on feminism. And yet its 2005 Jubilee exhibition, celebrating 50 years of Documenta, included a paltry 10 female artists out of 90 artists chosen for the Jubilee show. While the subject-matter of an exhibition may be socially responsible, the curating is not.

It is insufficient to point fingers, though. We must also ask curators, dealers, and artists to take responsibility for eliminating discrimination from the art world:

Curators, you cannot be content to add the support of your institution's brand name exclusively to artists with dealer approval. Which voices are not being heard, and where can you find them? How can the practice of blind auditions used by orchestras be applied to curating?

This photo was taken during our performance, "Point," in front of PS1 at the opening to their 2005 show "Greater New York."



Do you track demographic information for each stage of the shows that you curate so that you know where in the process women are being excluded?

Dealers, we recognize that you are running a business and that you need to make money in order to continue showing art. Keeping this in mind, how can you foster a true avant-garde instead of the pre-digested version? Do you seek recommendations of female artists to show? Do you focus on showing only the newest artists or do you seek out those whose decades-long commitments to art have brought a gravity and depth to their work? How can your gallery become an outlet for activism and political expression?

And if you are an artist, do not nod your head in resignation at the discrimination perpetuated by others. You are not exempt from responsibility. Live up to the rebellious identity you flaunt on your neighborhood streets.

If you became an artist believing that you would not "work for the man," then check yourself. Are you willing to dissent, irrespective of the consequences on your commercial career? Are you willing to direct our course back toward equality and the public good?

"We live in a capitalist world and we deserve to get paid for our work," you say, and this is true, but not if your paycheck squelches your desire to speak out for social change. The sacrifices that accompany the pursuit of art are substantial, and few artists achieve resounding success. Don't be seduced by the art world's

promise of fame and fortune and silence yourself for a dream rarely realized.

Are you a visionary or are you simply looking the other way? ❧

Maria Dumlao, Elaine Kaufmann, Danielle Mysliwiec, and Anne Polashenski collaborate as the Brainstormers. Founded in March 2005, this activist performance art group raises issues about gender inequality in the art world.

Further Reading:

www.brainstormersreport.net

Allen, Greg. "The X Factor." **The New York Times**. May 1, 2005

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The Tundra Needs the Snow

Common Plants and Connective Aesthetics

Laura Levin

For centuries, we have worshipped at the temple of the lone artist. Curators exalted him, launching his solo shows and reveling in his alluring singularity. The art market rewarded him, turning his creations into commodities for consumption. Sustained by the myth of art's autonomy — its self-sufficient meaning and independence from the social — the artist was celebrated as a romantic entity radically separate from the world, divorced from the many publics in which he might be productively enmeshed. You will notice that I am deliberately using the pronoun "he," as the self-contained artist is surely a patriarchal construction. No doubt a convenient fiction, the ideal of autonomous art props up those overly familiar and fishy patriarchal claims of ideological neutrality.

In recent years, this form of art-making has started to buckle under a number of outside pressures. Following the advent of feminist and poststructuralist critiques, the idea of a stable and self-generated identity has become more than suspect. Since we can no longer assume that shared meanings adhere to identity categories like race, gender, nationality, and class, our confident "I am" statements ("I am a Canadian artist") are less likely to secure us solid grounding when we identify ourselves to others. Add to this our growing awareness of and dependence on global systems. This emerging systems consciousness maps the solitary artist into a



Jolene Arreak, Celina Kalluk, and Sylvia Cloutier doing Judith Rudakoff's *Four Elements* work.

larger world picture, inevitably displacing him from its formerly imagined centre.

Rather than experiencing these changes as a paralyzing vertigo, a number of contemporary artists have seized this moment to rethink the relationship between self and environment, and art and the public sphere. In a practical sense, this involves a turn to what Suzi Gablick has called "connective aesthetics." Connective art-making builds bridges over romantic moats, leading collaborators into art's isolated castle. The monologue gives way to dialogue, singularity to multiplicity, and uniformity to difference. According to Gablick, this relational

form of creativity more easily accommodates the anti-patriarchal values of "care and compassion, of seeing and responding to need." An environmental ethic of care extends beyond our responsibility to individual human beings by recognizing our interdependence with nature and the communities we inhabit.

Common Plants, an interdisciplinary project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSHRC) Research/Creation Program, investigates these evolving parameters of art-making in the process of creating a transcultural cycle of site-specific performances. Under the direction of York

University professor and dramaturge Judith Rudakoff, an international team of scholars and practitioners is developing a performance methodology that explores questions of cultural identity from an environmental perspective.

The age old question, "Who am I?," thus becomes, "Where am I? How am I situated in this environment and how does the environment situate me?" Pushing the ideal of connectivity even further, the Common Plants workshops take place in disparate geographical sites — Iqaluit, Nunavut and Cape Town, South Africa — and are linked through an interactive website. This site, acting as a kind of virtual salon, also hosts blogs and forum discussions on differing cultural ideas of location, home, and identity. With participants from around the world (including Europe, Cuba, and Russia), the website serves as a network for an even wider set of artists and researchers, each with the ability to move the project in alternative directions.

At the end of a two-year cycle, the resulting transcultural work will weave together multiple voices into a hybrid digital tapestry. Yet the primary goal of Common Plants is not a final polished performance; rather, it can be found in its ongoing conversations and exploratory workshop processes. Here, self and community are intricately entwined in a virtually, physically, and environmentally connective performance process. What follows are a few vignettes from the 2006 workshop in Iqaluit that offer a glimpse of these connective practices in action.

Grounding your partner...

We are in Atii Fitness Studio, a community space at the edge of town, across from Iqaluit's bright yellow, caterpillar-shaped airport. (It is rumoured that this is an emergency landing site for the space shuttle, one of many myths circulated by "Southerners" about the Canadian North.) The research team — Judith Rudakoff, Nina Schriver, Belarie Zatzman, Myles Warren, and myself — meets with our artist collaborators from Iqaluit: Jolene Arreak, Celina Kalluk, and Sylvia Cloutier, three women who are working as visual and performing artists in Nunavut. It is the second day of the workshop, and the per-



Jolene Arreak holding an ulu.

formers are developing a movement vocabulary for the pieces that they will create this week. Schriver, a physiotherapist and body researcher from Denmark, leads the performers in movement exercises.

The exercises are about communication. They push the performers to experience their bodies as part of a shared environment. This takes the form of experiencing touch in new ways, sharing points of contact (forehead to forehead, back to back), and learning how to support the movements of other bodies. The performers challenge each other to get outside of their physical habits and engage in actions not normally attempted in everyday life. At the centre of this work is the act of "lifting," an intimate movement that requires total cooperation and trust between partners. Schriver gets down on her hands and knees to demonstrate, and Arreak lies across her back. While keeping her legs still, Schriver lifts her upper body, lengthening along the spine. Arreak is slowly borne into the air. Together they look like an Inukshuk, an Inuit figure comprised of stones piled on top of one another. The Inukshuk, which acts as a guide for travellers in the wilderness, is a symbol for safety and a reminder of our dependence upon others.

The image of a performer physically supporting another's weight is extremely powerful. The act of lifting conveys the sense that one performer is providing the ground for another's physical experience, an embodiment of the connective method. The idea of "grounding" is especially important here, as we are working with women whose art is strongly influenced by their experiences as mothers. Schriver reminds us that, as humans, we are always lifting (lifting ourselves and our loved ones); in this sense, lifting could describe the work that mothers do. Our mothers raise us, providing us with

the ground on which to stand. Is environment only a feature of the physical landscape? Isn't it also the people who lift us up, who furnish the conditions for individual self-expression (the hidden precondition for an artist's autonomy)?

Arreak, who is several months pregnant, is balancing on Schriver's back. This action reverses the traditional image of motherhood (of a mother transporting a baby on her back). In this unexpected reversal, the practices of grounding and carrying suddenly collide. The mother carrying the child is now being carried.

There are stories about...

Rudakoff has asked the performers to bring in a series of objects that represent "home." Each object presented allows the larger community into the enclosed rehearsal studio, helping to construct a shared sense of place. Kalluk's vision of home comes out of her experience as a mother. She shares images drawn by her children, along with one of her own paintings. Arreak and Cloutier's objects are more about time than space, space being the condition often associated with home. Cloutier brings imagined objects, memories of her grandparents' kitchen, while Arreak shares physical objects connected to the past: her first ulu, a knife used by Inuit women; a stone from a beach near her childhood home in Pond Inlet; and a letter she wrote as a child, recently printed onto a decorative fabric as a gift from her aunt. A filmmaker concerned with recording the legends of the Nunavut elders — stories quickly disappearing, along with Inuit language and culture — Arreak expresses in her objects a desire to forge cultural links between past and present, elders and youth.

This exercise is later followed by writing and movement activities. First, Rudakoff asks the artists to create movement sentences that transform these fragments of memory and material culture into performance. Arreak lies down and makes circular movements with her limbs, picturing herself on the beach at Pond Inlet. Cloutier develops a physical ritual, gathering objects and releasing them to each side of the room. This represents the values embodied by each of her grandparents, which she has picked up and brought into

herself. Kalluk is running on the spot. This is a story about the footsteps of her children, a part of life that Kalluk, like many women performers, normally leaves outside of rehearsal. Including this movement, she says, allows her children to be present even though they are at school.

The women are then partnered up and are asked to physically follow and support each other's stories. As Kalluk runs, Schriver pushes on Kalluk's spine and bends her legs, lifting them up higher and higher. Arreak changes the direction of Cloutier's gaze, and rocks her shoulders back and forth. They are moving together as one person. Having another performer involved in the making of one's own story provides a valuable alternative perspective and a new experience of self. Cloutier says that Arreak helped her to physically fill in parts of her story, stretch it out, and make it bigger. This is important because she is working with memories

passed down from the elders and not whole stories, cultural memories to which Arreak would also have partial access.

The session concludes with a writing activity that poignantly links individual expression to collective representation. Drawing upon an exercise from her Four Elements dramaturgical method, Rudakoff asks the performers to jot down all of the stories that they need to tell. They must introduce each item with a set of words, a phrase that both honours the personal, and intimates a connection with the experiences of a larger community: "There are stories about."

Kalluk: *There are stories about little feet. There are stories about little noises. There are stories about comforting sounds.*

Cloutier: *There are stories about the yellow stove. There are stories about family love.*

There are stories about silliness. There are stories about the box of cereal on the table.

There are stories about the rocking chair making noise.

Arreak: *There are stories about the sound of the ocean. There are stories about the smells of the ocean. There are stories about blue sky. There are stories about Grandma wearing sealskin. There are stories about Grandfather putting up the net and taking all of the fish into the land. There are stories about hiding candy in sand to save for later.*

The tundra needs the snow...

This sentence is taken from a journal entry posted to the Common Plants website by Seané, a student at Inukshuk High School. Seané is responding to a class exercise organized by teacher Renata Solski in which students are asked to con-



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sider "how the land speaks to them." One of the interventions of Common Plants has been to introduce its eco-art tools to teachers in Iqaluit and Cape Town in order to exchange ideas about pedagogies of place and extend the artistic community that is being built in a particular location. In Seané's blog entry, the experience of adolescence is connected to cycles found in nature, showing a keen understanding of ecological interdependence:

The tundra, which is lying still, covering the Earth, is like a child. Precarious and helpless, the tundra needs the snow, which is like family. It reflects light onto one's life, filling every corner because it is a positive omnipresent force. During the winter months, the snow blankets the tundra, hugging it closely, careful never to let it go until spring comes, releasing the snow of its lovely burden.

This student writing activity mirrors the ecological orientation of the performance pieces created by Cloutier, Kalluk, and Arreak at the end of the workshop week.

On the final day of the workshop, the group moves onto the frozen ice of Frobisher Bay. Here, the three women create site-specific responses to the environment that are videotaped and posted on the website for our collaborators in South Africa.

One action is based on throat-singing, a vocal technique developed by Inuit women as a form of entertainment while men were away hunting. Normally performed by two women facing each other, throat-singing is an intrinsically connective form. Originally, they would stand so close that their lips would almost touch, allowing them to use each other's mouths as resonators. One woman leads by producing a rhythmic sound and the other quickly responds. The relay of sounds continues until one person runs out of breath or starts laughing. While this vocal game connects the bodies of the two singers — they are described as sharing the same breath — it also links the performers to their sonic environments. Throat-singers imitate the sounds of animals (seagulls, dogs), the elements (wind, water), and the noises of everyday life

(cooking, running sleds). In the workshop, the artists enhance the communal nature of the activity by adding a third vocalist and experimenting with new bodily constellations. Each time, the three women are physically linked, first in a sculptural position based on Schriver's "lifts," and then in a circle standing back to back.

The other site-specific action is narrative-based. Cloutier stands on her head, flanked by Arreak and Kalluk, who slowly lift their arms up and down. Their bodies take on features of the land-

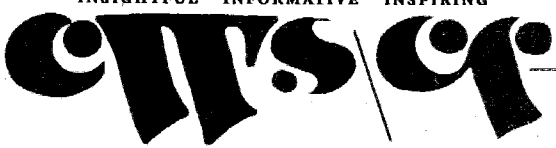
scape: birds, trees, water, and air. Cloutier speaks: "My roots come out of my head like my hair making its way through the ice." In this story, the human body is an extension of nature. The landscape is no longer something "out there," held at a distance and looked at like a tourist picture. The landscape is not something to be nostalgically retrieved. It must be survived, a challenge we are reminded of by the awkward movements of the performers, now bundled up in unwieldy parkas and protective outerwear. The piece ends with an offering to the Cape Town respondents. Cloutier drags her hands along the ice, lifts her head, and throws snow in the direction of the camera.

• • • •

Working in a connective manner requires that we shift our expectations about what performance is and does. Who is the performer? Is it the person telling the story or the one following it? Where is the actual performance located: in the studio, on the land, or on the Internet? Who is the audience: the researchers, the artists in Cape Town, unknown website visitors, or the performers themselves? And, if we are indeed engaging in a community-building project, which community are we building? An existing community located in one place, a community of artist-researchers spanning several continents, or something as of yet undefined? Are these communities based in shared values or rooted in examining multiplicity and difference? The act of collectively struggling with these questions serves as the most profound link and challenge for participants in the Common Plants process. By embracing this spirit of interrogation, Common Plants pushes the ideal of autonomous art-making to the brink and opens up alternative geographies of connection, routes mapped across bodies, identities, borders, and time zones. ❧

Laura Levin is an Assistant Professor of Theatre in the Faculty of Fine Arts at York University. Her current research focuses on contemporary theatre and performance art, site-specific and new genre public art, and networked performance.

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In the Field

Into, Out of and Away

An Artist Project/Installation

Asma Mahmood

The proposed artwork is an installation comprised of a video and sculptural installation of shalwars donated by various South Asian women. The project addresses the topic of place and displacement. Individuals may be displaced from their culture of origin by consciously trying to assimilate, or by unintentionally being influenced by the dominant culture.

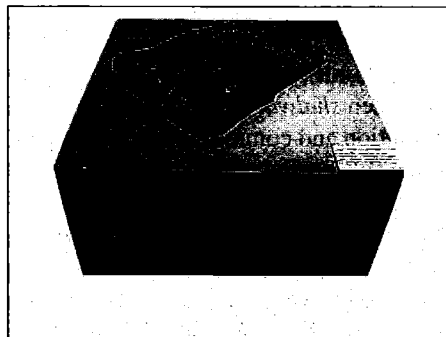
The three components of the project were on display in Laidlaw Hall of the Living Arts Center, Mississauga, from April 28 to May 28, 2006, during South Asian Heritage Month. This project spearheaded the inauguration of the multidisciplinary arts festival, which takes place in a city where people of South Asian descent are the largest visible minority. The issues the project addresses are both contemporary and contentious in the South Asian community.

The installation/video revolves around the process of objectifying and politicizing a garment within a cultural context. In this instance, the garment is a *shalwar* (pants designed to be worn with long shirts), a common clothing item in the subcontinent of India and Pakistan. By wearing a shalwar in North America, a woman is perceived as stating her close connection to her cultural heritage. It is this connection between values and clothing that I hope to question.

The shalwar is a unisex garment that originated in Turkey, and is the Eastern equivalent to pants. In some poverty-stricken regions, a shalwar grows as more and more patches are sewn into it. It is not unusual to see young girls wearing a shalwar that has grown along with them. These take on a quilted quality as time passes, and often end up as cushion covers or wall hangings due to their elaborate

stitching and patchwork. Men wear a simple style of *shalwar* made from three meters of cloth. It can go up to 10 yards, depending on in which region the individual lives, and their status. Despite the complicated design, there is not an inch of wasted material in the construction of the shalwar, just like the Japanese kimono.

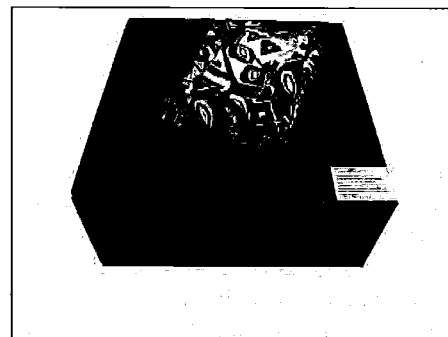
The *shalwar* is as personal as undergarments are in the typical Western dress code. Due to their very private nature, folded female shalwars are a strong image of hidden sexuality. They are not hung out to dry in public and are traditionally folded to conceal the inner portion of the garment. This is in keeping with the modesty around sexuality prevalent in South Asian culture.



The video depicts a cropped view of the feet and ankles of a woman stepping into and out of her *shalwar*. A pair of men's hands is then seen on another screen folding the garment. The action of male hands folding a distinctly feminine, brightly colored *shalwar* suggests a sensitivity unusual to South Asian males. The only man to usually touch a *shalwar* would be a tailor. It is of interest to me that it is also the men in South Asian culture that set societal rules. In my video, the man is not only touching a personal space, but he is out of his usual space through this engaging in a domestic task not associated with South Asian males.

Through the actions of wearing, discarding, and folding a garment, the piece abandons the past, packing it away and leaving it quietly behind.

For the sculptural component of the installation, I approached various South Asian women from different fields, asking them to donate their used shalwars. These were folded by the donors and displayed on shelves with the women's name and a small text of their own making. To me, their careful folding represents a ritualistic attitude to many all-important issues, including rights, religion, women, politics, and family. This collection is more than just a donation of garments — it involves giving permission for strangers to see their



private space and personal items. The *shalwars* objectify traditional ideas of modesty and heritage, but presenting them publicly was a political statement.

Introduction by Sarindar Dhaliwal

"Into, Out of, and Away" is the first public showing of a project that Asma Mahmood has been developing over the last three years. Its beginnings ("Into") originated in her observations on the generational tension between the mothers and daughters in her own family around codes of behavior and dress. The piece has expanded to include other artists, underlining both the universality of cultural

strictures and Mahmood's commitment to outreach and community projects ("Out of"). This more recent focus on the socio-political being expressed through multi-media disciplines demonstrates that the content of her work can no longer be served by the modernist tradition of painting; her current practice encompasses audio and video installations, and interventions. It is these sites of experimentation where Mahmood's research and imagination take flight ("and Away").

Donors' Remarks

Aparita Bhandar (Canada)
Journalist and writer

I was looking into stories of the Partition for a university paper when I came across a book of stories by Sadat Hasan Manto. The volume was slim, but it was one of the most powerful works I have read. One of the short stories was by Kali Shalwar. It's about a young woman who is gang-raped by Hindus and Muslims during the violence of the Partition. I was left shaking after I finished the story. I could not imagine the pain of the girl. I give this *shalwar* in memory of the many girls over whose bodies men have written history.

Farida Khan (U.K.)
Arts administrator

For me, the *shalwar kameez* is one of the most elegant costumes of our time. Looking back as I was growing up in the U.K., it highlighted difference, both generational and cultural, as well as an imposed identity, which alters perception, behavior, and notions of femininity. This is perhaps why I sent my most unassuming, but much loved, *shalwar*, which is also very practical in Manchester's cold and wet climate, yet neutral enough to blend in!

Asma Arshad Mahmood (Canada)
Visual artist

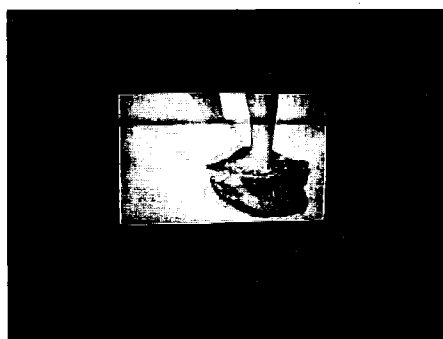
My black *shalwar* is the tribute to Munto and his famous trial in fifties. It is an acknowledgment of the times when discussion and debate could be carried out as acts of freedom of expression, and honesty of creative process was considered

worthy of intellectual discourse without violence in thought and action.

Nigar Nazar (Pakistan)
Cartoonist

My *shalwar* maintains my cultural and religious identity. It is [a] respecting garment that meets all the requirements of modesty and values that are a part of Muslim society.

However, I would display my *shalwar* in a movement as I feel that woman's work is never finished. She is always doing something or... other proving to be [S]uper [W]om[a]n and [a] *shalwar* does not seem to slow them down in any way.



A Peaceful Resolution
Sadia Jamil

My green *shalwar* comes to offer a resolution and coming [to] terms to adapt to the sudden and often drastic changes faced by immigrants.

The new lifestyles, [and] cultural and moral practices of the western world come as a shock to the new immigrants. The colour green signifies the arrival of spring and renewal of life. It is an offering of peace and celebration to welcome and embrace "change" in a positive way.

Shamshad Bibi (Pakistan)
Domestic help and maid

I am a simple person. People wear fashionable clothes but I always wear the same kind of dress and I would be embarrassed wearing anything else other than [a] *shalwar*. Although it is just a garment, ... it is not something that makes people better or worse. Being good or bad is just a choice of people. A *shalwar* is just a *shalwar*.

Shelly Bahl
Artist and educator

I have a *shalwar* that was made from a sari that belong[ed] to my mother-in-law. It is a beautiful vintage red and gold brocade fabric. It is beautiful, but I never wear it. Nor can I bear to throw it away. I often think that my body gets lost in a *shalwar*, and I never feel quite at ease.

Tazeen Qayyum
Visual artist and arts administrator

Regarding your project and the request for my *shalwar*.... As much as I appreciate your project/concept and would like to support it, I am not comfortable in lending my *shalwar* for display. From the day you asked me for it, to date, I have been giving it a lot of thought and to some extent have been stressed about it. The disturbing aspect for me is to put my *shalwar* on display in an exhibition that would be attended by [m]en I know, [causing me to be] ... once again ... subjected to the pervert male scrutiny and touch that we left "back home" (though that is the idea this project examines). Strangely, if you would have asked me to lend a worn-out pair of jeans, I would not have even thought twice about it before giving [them] to you. Your project made me realize ... how deeply embedded our cultural conditioning is; ... throughout our lives we are constantly reminded to cover the *shalwar*. I hope you would understand. ❧

Asma Mahmood moved to Canada in 1999 and has been exploring the contemporary practice of installation and multi-media art besides painting. Mahmood plays an important role in activism through the arts. She has exhibited her work at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Royal Ontario Museum, and Harbourfront Centre in Toronto.

In My Voice

"Re-writing the script?"

Salima Bhimani

There is something deeply exposing about telling your story, a story that can speak to the hearts and minds of many. I felt that sense of exposure and vulnerability when sharing some of my life experiences and the life experiences of the women I had danced with in life. I felt pressure, and a sense of social responsibility that begged me to question what stories I would tell and for what purpose. As a South Asian Muslim Woman, I felt the burden of representation on my shoulders. I would not and could not claim any kind of universal experience of being a Muslim woman because life is not monolithic, or linear. All the women in my encounters spoke of unique lives, and yet their narratives were familiar, and, perhaps, even something one could intimately relate to.

"Re-writing the script" began as a series of images in my mind over the course of two years. I would often find myself imagining scenes themed on God's unity, body politics, and women philosophers. "Re-writing the script" was purely an activist endeavor. It was another way to get Muslim and non-Muslim communities to consider and, perhaps, re-consider the ways in which Muslim women live and think about their world and navigate through it.

Having been raised in Canada my whole life, my experience of being Woman, Muslim, and of colour is uniquely shaped. Racism, Islamophobia, and gender injustice arise out of my Canadian experience, as much as they may arise from being a part of a particular faith and ethnic community. The dichotomous struggle between "East" and "West," between religious and non-religious, and between Canadianess and ethnicness (as if they are clearly separate identities) has not been my journey. This made writing *Re-Writing the Script* and conceptualizing



FERENAZ LALI

the production all the more important and all the more challenging.

What script was I re-writing?

A man from a Muslim organization called me to "check" which script I was re-writing — just in case I was talking about the script. Soon after that, I got a call from a journalist who asked me if the play was going to expose the oppression of Muslim women in Islam. I had to explain that "Re-writing" was a protest against silence, against imposed identities, and against being rendered marginal in shaping our world. To re-write this script meant I would be present, tangible, and woven into a world of intangible thoughts and internal explorations.

My "Muslim-ness" needed to be present without any apology, challenging those who could not reconcile Islam and a Muslim woman's spiritual empowerment, and those whose religious dogma could, in an instant, erase my journey with Islam. My relationship to Allah had

to be the root from which all my life experiences emerged. I needed to share this. "I have come into this world to journey within and towards the Divine."

I wanted "Re-writing the script" to share my internal Jihad of searching to continuously experience and expand my humanity, as I reached towards the edges of fa'naa (oneness). This was not a play about oppression or liberation; it was about the questioning, the searching, the longing — the constant sense of being involved in one's self and in one's environment. This was yet another attempt in my life to share how I, and millions of other Muslim women, are real people, with real lives, real aspirations, and real thoughts.

"Re-writing the script" presented ideas, tensions, joys, and philosophical and spiritual explorations on various themes. From reclaiming the story of creation as the starting point for equality to women as intellectuals, the interdependent relationship between the sexes, the



taboo topics of body and sexuality, and, ultimately, exploring our relationship to the Divine, are themes of global resonance, parochial intensity, and personal value. None of what we were sharing was absolute, nor was it my intention to be controversial or offensive. These were considerations I had hoped would incite discourse and dialogue, rather than conclusions or answers.

Why theatre?

Theatre has the potential to touch people at every sensory level. I wanted every aspect of these women's stories to leave a taste in the mouths of the audience, a stirring within. Whether that stirring was pleasurable or not, the experience would compel people to intellectually and spiritually wrestle with everything they were absorbing. By leaving people with layers of thoughts and feelings that hopefully inspired, challenged, brought discomfort, erupted joy, or evoked divine ecstasy, I was assisting in undoing Muslim women's captivity in previous forms of narrow representations. I wanted everyone to leave questioning what they thought they had known about Muslim women.

"Re-writing the script" was also an opportunity to create more room for Muslim women to engage in the arts and have their stories shape the cultures of our society, not as "other" but as architects of

the visible. Also, it seemed to me that the art scene in general, and theatre in particular, continues to be dominated by white men and women, so "Re-writing the script" was a way of carving out spaces where marginalized artists could have a platform.

The artist, activist and faith

July 9, 2005, was the first day of auditions. I was not completely clear about who would be right for the roles, but what I did know was that I was not simply looking for actors and dancers. I wanted actors devoted to gender justice, to their inner journey, and to Allah. So, the artists that ended up in this production were people that were, in fact, creating their own waves in the world. We ended up with a predominantly Muslim cast, and, as they sang, danced, or spoke onstage, they themselves felt they were a part of "naming who they were and who we are." They became igniters of dialogue — the goal of the silenced. As we took the last bow, and the audience rose to their feet, we felt affirmed that this endeavor of re-writing the script was only the beginning, that our lives had meaning, and that that meaning was felt, and perhaps even shifted other peoples' sense of self and being in the world. Perhaps this was affirmation that Muslim women are present, alive, and fiercely committed to their faith and Allah. Through that commitment, we are



a part of justice-making for all. ❧

Salima Bhimani is a community development consultant, educationist, author, artist, public speaker, and activist. She has worked locally and internationally for the last 11 years on gender justice, youth issues, inter/intra-faith dialogue, media and representation, social justice and the arts, international development, Islam and Islamophobia, educational development, and equity and diversity issues. She has a Masters degree in Environmental Studies, and she has been a fellow at Harvard University with the Pluralism Project, doing research in the area of Muslim art, activism, and faith.

Other Writing by Salima Bhimani

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Acharya, Meena (2003). **Efforts at Promotion of Women in Nepal.** Tanka Prasad Memorial Foundation, Kathmandu, Nepal.

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Wilderness Women in Black

Jeane Fabb

In the early nineties, I read about women of opposing "sides" gathering together in public spaces, in the Middle East and in the former Yugoslavia, to express their dissidence against the violent military regimes of their respective countries. Dressed in black at weekly vigils held in silence, they made their presence known and their protest visible. The women were part of a growing worldwide antiwar movement called *Women in Black*.¹ Struck by their courage and the symbolic power of their gesture, I was inspired to make a related action in the context of the region where I live, Québec's boreal forest. Here, the war is against the land: the extraction of natural resources and the unbridled development of tourism has scarred and irreparably altered thousands of square kilometers of landscape. Here, the land is generally perceived as male-space: the voices publicly heard are those of forestry companies, loggers, hunters, fishermen, developers, and politicians. The *Wilderness Women in Black* art-actions are meant to give voice to other ways of perceiving our relationship to the land. They are gestures created in counterbalance to the dynamic of destructive industrial encroachment.

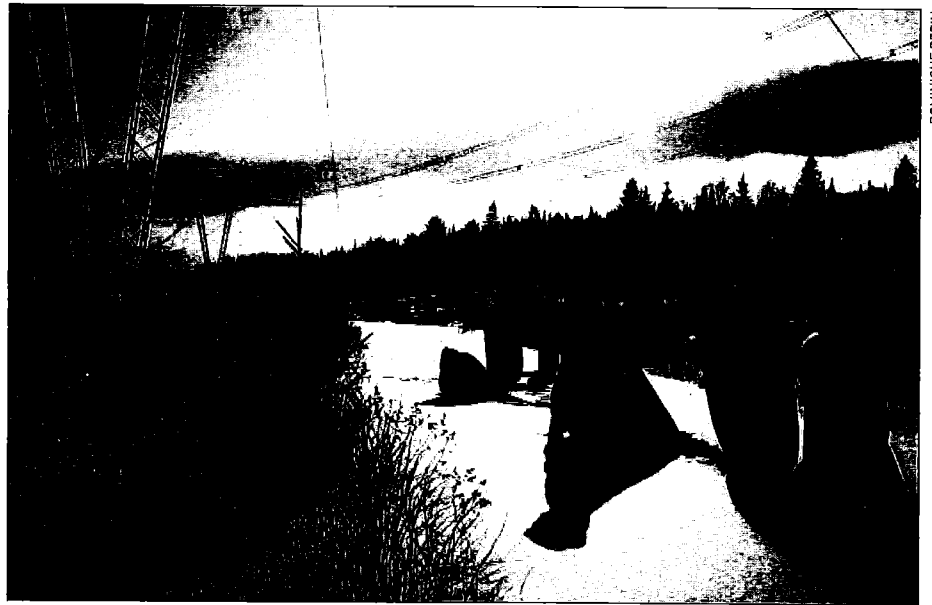
In the winter of 1995, *Wilderness Women in Black* was initiated on the banks of the Rouge River, a major artery in the Upper Laurentians, north of Montreal, used by lumber companies in the nineteenth century to float timber southward to the wood-mills. On the shore, a long black table was laid with upturned roots, and with bowls containing wood ashes. A small group of women from the community, and from Montreal and Toronto, were invited to participate. When gathered, we focused on our concerns about the environment and exchanged information about the story of the Rouge. In preparation for this art-action, I asked the women to feel the connection of their body with the land, to slowly open to the underlying energy of

this particular place, and to respond silently in whatever manner they felt. In the cold wind, we moved over the snow as in a trance, back and forth between the river and the table. At one point, I was impelled to take the roots off the table and give them to the women. Without words, we each placed the roots on our bellies.²

Within each art-action, the interaction between the site and the women produced a unique dynamic. Underneath the gigantic energy transport lines that cut a 1000-kilometer corridor through the Laurentian

Unlike moving through a natural forest, every step was predictable, stage-like.

Specific places seemed to call for concern and attention. There is a huge open gravel pit on the side of the road between my village and the next. When some women of a local theatre troupe offered to participate in an art-action, I brought them to the pit. For hours, the women dramatically interacted with this monstrous gaping hole in the ground. The following year, the forest behind my house was severely cut. First, I did a solo action. In the pho-



In the Energy Transport Corridor. Canton Marchand, Quebec, 1995

forest from James Bay to Montreal, the women reacted intensely to the electromagnetic field emanating from the suspended electrical cables. Some women just froze, others crumbled to the ground. One woman stood arched backwards shaking a caribou antler at the hissing lines. Another art-action took place between the straight rows of a pine plantation. For five days, another woman and I moved up and down the alleys of this monoculture forest. The lack of plant and animal diversity was numbing.

tographs, it looks as if a strange ghost is running through the left-over debris. Later, an artist from India was visiting and saw the cut forest. She teamed up with my neighbor, who was eight months pregnant, and they performed a healing ritual on the cut tree-stumps using turmeric and sage.³

Two years ago, in an effort to stop the cutting of the forest on a mountain in the nearby Papineau-Labelle Wildlife Reserve, I helped organize a manifestation directly on the site. Before television cameras and

DOMINIQUE PEPIN



On the Shores of the Rouge. L'Annonciation, Quebec, 1995



Running through the Cut. La Macaza, 2004



In the Cut. La Macaza, Quebec, 2002

journalists, elders of the community, as well as youths, expressed their passionate connections to this mountain. Afterward, people were brought to the area where the cut had begun. In absolute stillness, *Wilderness Women in Black* stood like dark statues amongst the stumps. A full-page photo of this action was published on the front page of the local newspaper with the headline, "La nature en deuil" (Nature in mourning). This battle was eventually won.

The black capes are still hanging in my studio, ready to be worn when called upon. For some who took part in the actions, it seems that the capes provided a sense of inner protective seclusion and anonymity, inspiring their expression of connectivity with place and with the other women. Those who witnessed the actions remarked how the image of black-clad women in the landscape called up not only the conventions of mourning and ceremonial grief, but also mythological themes that evoke the inner mysteries of the land. As Anne Hollander remarks in her book *Seeing through Clothes*, "A lady in black is not only dramatic and dignified, but also dangerous." ❧

1. "Our actions often take the form of women wearing black, standing at a public place in silent, non-violent vigils at regular times and intervals..." www.womeninblack.
2. The actions on the Riviere Rouge, under the hydro-line and in the pine plantation were documented by Dominique Pepin. I photographed the other actions.
3. Installations of the photo documents and the capes have been exhibited locally and elsewhere in Quebec; they were also exhibited at Lancaster University in England in 2000, during a symposium called *Between Nature: ecology and performance*.

Jeane Fabb is a multidisciplinary artist who has lived in the boreal forest of Quebec since 1975. Her art practice includes site-specific actions realized in remote natural sites in the Americas and Europe, and exhibitions of installations, photo documents, and video shown internationally.

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Common Occurrence; **The Impact of Homelessness on Women's Health, Phase II: Community Based Action Research — Final Report**. Prepared by Kappel Ramji Consulting Group. Toronto: Sistering A Woman's Place, 2002.

Transformation in Toronto

The Projects of Dyan Marie

Joanne West

Dyan Marie is a well-respected multimedia artist who is using art intervention to improve the environment in her Toronto neighbourhood, and give women *le droit de la ville*; the right to fully inhabit their community's public spaces. Her belief is "the best way to make safe, healthy, vital communities where things get noticed, improved, and celebrated is by encouraging people to walk their neighbourhood. If you create destinations and programming, you make people want to get out and use the amenities."

She has created a series of public art projects to unite and activate her community.

Marie lives in the Dupont West area of Toronto, a former industrial centre once recognized as the most toxically polluted neighbourhood in Canada. The area is plagued by shootings, open crack use, prostitution, slum high-rises, and piles of garbage. Cut off from the rest of the city by active rail lines, it has few amenities or services, and is unique in Toronto for its lack of tree canopy. The two small parks that comprise the area's green space are dominated by dealers and users, leaving children to play in the streets, resulting in regular accidents. This is not a neighbourhood where women feel connected, or safe.

At the same time, it is a densely populated area, filled with working-poor families who have 50 per cent more children per household than the Toronto average. Drawn to the area by cheap rent, Dupont West's many new Canadian families often face cultural and linguistic barriers to community inclusion.

Marie's daily walk through this neighbourhood from home to studio allows her to connect to, and reflect on, her surroundings. It influences her art. Her photographic project, *Asphalt Garden*, documents photographs of native plants squeezing through cement — nature asserting itself in the urban landscape. ON

THE CORNER invites the viewer into the shoes of a sex worker to experience her point of view. These works are intended to illuminate issues, open up questions, and make space for people to reflect on issues. But Marie didn't foresee her art growing to become a force for social change. "I never intended to do a [community] art project: [things] began simply as a reaction to the cutting down of trees," she says.

In 2003, in the space of one week, one of the few remaining trees on her block was illegally cut down, yet another child was struck by a car while playing in the street, and Marie's calls to police about a bloody assault-in-progress went unanswered. When she called later to complain, the police were dismissive.

She has created a series of public art projects to unite and activate her community.

Marie would later describe this as her "dig-in moment." She had the choice to either dig in and effect change in her neighbourhood, or move out. She chose to dig in.

On the spot, she created a then-fictitious community organization, the Dupont Improvement Group, also known as DIG IN, with a mandate to make the neighbourhood Green, Clean, Safe, and Civil. She called police again, this time as the director of DIG IN, and everything changed. The police offered to help address safety concerns in the neighbourhood, and the community's first and only improvement group was born.

Marie quickly made DIG IN a reality. She posted flyers, contacted politicians at all levels of government, and arranged community meetings. With community-wide participation, Marie created a community and cultural neighbourhood master-

plan, calling for the creation of a green walking system through the neighbourhood, park improvement, traffic calming, bike paths, tree planting, cultural intensification, and requirements that new development "improves and relates positively to the area." The group's mission is to make the neighbourhood interesting and vibrant, and to get residents out of their homes and into the streets. Says Marie, "We just pretended we could do it with little funding, and without government or planning support".

Today, DIG IN has a dozen or so board members, and an advisory board that includes local councilor Adam Giambrone, and Toronto's Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art.

DIG IN's first initiative was WALK HERE — a green walking system connecting the neighbourhood's two small parks and enhanced by community-generated art. Marie's intention is that "the walkway will become a source of attraction, pride and indigenous expression." Imbedded in the surface of the path are three groups of artifacts created by local

residents, making the community both audience and participant.

Steel sculptures based on school children's sketches make up WALKING WALK HERE. CONTAINED features crushed, recycled glass and mirror fashioned into bottle shapes by high school students in a school-based project, while CONSTELLATION saw talented local artists contribute images that were then impressed into bronze medallions suitable for rubbing. "By linking the parks with a clearly signaled walkway, we expand the sense of neighbourhood, create destinations for walks, encourage exercise, foster relationships, and keep more eyes on the streets, helping to make the area safer and more engaged," says Marie.

GREEN HERE is a DIG IN initiative focused on establishing "a citizen arborist movement" to facilitate local reforestation

The mission is to make the neighbourhood interesting and vibrant, and to get residents out of their homes and into the streets.

by planting 1000 new trees in the area, increasing the tree canopy by 25 per cent, and providing local youth employment in partnership with the city parks department. The group will also establish green education in the neighbourhood through the development of tree stewardship programs, and a network of food gardens at local schools.

LOOK OUT LOOK HERE is the DIG IN project Marie organized following the 2003 kidnapping and murder of Holly Jones, a local ten-year-old. DIG IN distributed 250 disposable cameras to Holly's classmates, friends, and neighbours, and invited them to take pictures of their favorite things in the area. The project brought the neighbourhood into sharp focus and stimulated communication and action. Fourteen-hundred images were generated and exhibited in part of Marie's studio, the Dupont Projects exhibition space, where residents were invited to choose a favorite, and place it within the exhibit. LOOK OUT LOOK HERE created an opportunity for fearful residents to get out of their homes to rediscover and reclaim their streets.

This year, DIG IN's work gained an international profile when it was selected to participate in the UNESCO-funded International Tile Project. Tiles created by 20 renowned international artists were installed in 40 countries, and WALK HERE was chosen as the only Canadian site. The tile installation extends the walk's physical presence, and connects this sometimes-isolated community on an artistic level to the wider world.

DIG IN's significant online presence also reaches out to the world. Marie has created a sophisticated website detailing the group's concerns, projects, and plans. Individual projects are featured on more than ten separate sites, and DIG IN's Yahoo discussion group has up to 150 daily users discussing the issues facing the Dupont

neighbourhood, and possible solutions.

Marie continues to envision new projects for DIG IN. She is currently working on a project to fill abandoned Dupont West businesses with signs heralding the arrival of wished-for amenities, like a coffee house, bookstore, or police station. Unlike the "Potemkin villages" created to convince Catherine the Great that her empire was prospering, it is hoped that, by showing what may be possible, these imaginary businesses could become realities.

Marie is using her considerable talents and energy to transform her corner of

Toronto. This passionate and determined artist sees creation, rather than control, as the catalyst for social change. She is modest about her accomplishments, saying simply that, "things are possible, so you find yourself doing them." Dyan's socially engaged practice invites her community to share in this creative, transformative process. ❧

Joanne West is a writer living in Toronto

Further Resources:

dyanmarie.com

DIGIN.ca

WALKHERE.org

LOOKOUTLOOKHERE.info

GREENHERE.ca

onthecorner.biz

talkhere.org

LOOK OUT : LOOK HERE

Dyan Marie



CREDIT DYAN MARIE

WEI Mag invited artist Dyan Marie to talk about *Look Out: Look Here*, a community-based art intervention project that acted as a memorial project for the death of Holly Jones and a community-building event for grieving local residents.

LOOK OUT: LOOK HERE was a community-based photographic activity and exhibition initiated in May 2003 as an outlet for Toronto's Dupont West community to express its concerns and grief over the brutal murder of local ten-year-old Holly Jones. In the aftermath, residents felt both ashamed and fearful of their community. The press painted the neighbourhood as a dangerous place, with 300 pedophiles living in the vicinity (which was later proved untrue). Parents kept their children inside, and people talked about moving away.

I initiated this project with Dupont Improvement Group and the Dupont West neighbourhood as a way to get people out walking again, rediscovering and claiming their neighborhood, and as a way of support for Jones's family. Two-hundred-fifty disposable cameras were distributed to Holly's classmates, friends, and neighbours, together with a general invitation to the community to participate, via community-distributed flyers, the DIG IN website and e-mail group, a story in local newspaper *The Villager*, the Perth Dupont Library and as part of a community-wide festival. The project used photography as a way to look at the neighbourhood in the sharp focus that framing through a viewfinder demands. People were invited to make a photographic record of things that caught their interest and attention. The results created a community portrait archiving concerns, delights, events people were proud of, and situations that alarmed them. Images included: a newspaper front page asking if anyone had seen this man (a sketch of Jones's suspected killer); someone's collection of stuffed toys; the inside of a fridge full of food; prom pictures of girls in fancy dresses; family members; pets; gardens; and 1400 others.

I initiated this project as a way to get people out walking again, rediscovering and claiming their neighborhood, and as a way of support for Jones's family.



The project encouraged the activity of walking, so as to reap its wide-ranging positive effects for both body and mind — it provides an opportunity to focus attention on the local (where things can be noticed and changed), builds community, and makes neighbourhoods safer and more vital. In the process, local businesses are supported and neighbours become friends. In this case, the act of walking was intended as support for the grief-stricken Jones family

An exhibition of the images provided another opportunity to participate. The photographs taken on walks by hundreds of local residents were developed, printed, placed in containers, and set on chairs arranged in a circle in my gallery space, Dupont/Dyan Marie Projects. Gallery viewers were invited to examine the stacks of photographs and select their favorite images taken by residents. They then attached their image to spiraling wire armatures on the gallery walls. The images became a sculpture, a memorial, an event, a document, and another reason to feel the neighbourhood was a caring community. ❧

Dyan Marie has a background in sculpture, public art, community interventions, art organizations, teaching, curating, and art writing. She co-founded C Magazine and was the founder of Cold City Gallery, ARTATWORK and DIG IN: Dupont Improvement Group. Represented by Wynick/Tuck Gallery in Toronto she also directs her project and gallery space, Dyan Marie Projects. www.dyanmarie.com

Look Out Look Here was initiated by Dyan Marie (www.dyanmarie.com) with DIG IN: Dupont Improvement Group (www.digin.ca), and the Dupont West Community.

Support from Ed Burtynsky, Toronto Image Works and Kodak Canada Inc., Agfa Inc., Colourgenics, Ilford Inc., Lee Valley, City of Toronto Crisis Fund, Perth Dupont Library.

Exhibition May 16 - July 17, 2004, Look Out Look Here at Dupont/DyanMarie Projects: 1444 Dupont Street, unit 31, Toronto, Ontario M6P 4H3, www.dupontprojects.com

Look Out Look Here: www.lookoutlookhere.info, www.dyanmarieprojects.com



Stories from the Badlands

The creation of a multimedia performance about neighbourhood transformation

Maggie Hutcheson

Throughout the winter of 2006, I collaborated with two other young women to create a performance piece that critically examined attempts by a residents' association in the Bloor/Lansdowne area of Toronto to "clean up the neighbourhood." Concerned that the discourse of safety employed by the group further marginalizes sex-workers, drug users and people living on the streets in the area, we embarked on a process of collecting neighbourhood stories, taking photographs, and engaging in lengthy discussions about our own perspectives on home, safety, belonging, and neighbourhood change in order to develop a response to such discourse. Our determination to create a piece that could begin a critical dialogue about neighbourhood "improvement" initiatives, without vilify-

ing those involved in such initiatives, resulted in a multimedia performance piece, *Stories from the Badlands*, in which voices from the media, members of the residents' association and diverse members of the targeted populations were juxtaposed. The piece was initially conceived of and developed with the help of Dr. Bonnie Burstow and fellow students in a course at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. It has been performed publicly once and continues to take shape.

The process of creating *Stories from the Badlands* has raised many questions for us as activists and artists, which this article aims to explore. It has become clear to us that the voices on all sides of the issue of neighbourhood change (including concerned homeowners, com-

munity activists, street-involved people, and sex-workers) are, disproportionately, women's voices. Considering the diverse and divergent needs of these women, what does a feminist perspective on the issue of neighbourhood transformation look like? If the intended audience of *Stories from the Badlands* is homeowners and residents' associations, how can we challenge their notions of neighbourhood improvement in a way that opens up dialogue, rather than shutting it down? How can the arts, and specifically this performance, act as a catalyst for more progressive community action on these issues?

This article situates the critical questions raised through the process of creating *Stories from the Badlands* within the broader context of community arts practices, the current promotion of art as a force for urban development by politicians and prominent theoreticians, and the continued gentrification of downtown Toronto. Even a cursory look at this context suggests that a feminist vision of community art, now more than ever, requires an analysis of power, a commitment to exploring the impact of dominant discourses on marginalized populations, and a willingness to remain self-reflexive throughout the creative process.

"Community art" is a nebulous term, connoting group participation in an art-making process by non-professional community members, although it is open to a broader interpretation. In recent years, community art has burgeoned in North America, as arts funding (while still minimal) is increasingly directed towards such practices. Community theatre (the creation of theatre with non-professionals), mural-making, spoken-word, storytelling, and participatory video-making are but a few of the community arts practices that continue to develop.

If an increasing recognition of community art indicates a growing respect for the capacity of the arts to communicate and transform, I believe it is a trend to be celebrated. Certainly, as an activist artist, I have been drawn to community art by a deep respect for how sophisticated, nuanced, and powerful artistic responses

to social issues can be. I believe that community art processes have the potential to deepen relationships in and across neighbourhoods, making them safer, more beautiful, more reflective of their diversity, and more communal.

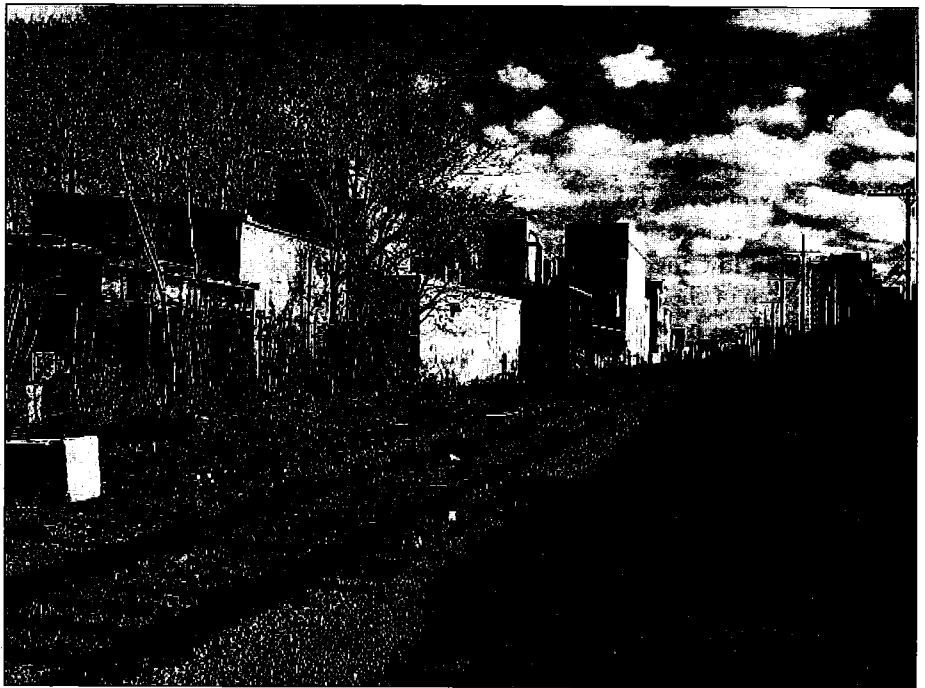
But does community art's increased popularity necessarily reflect increased efforts to catalyze social change through the arts? And will the increasing popularity of community art necessarily lead to progressive social change? I worry that some community arts practices are being initiated with the intention of transforming neighbourhoods in ways that will continue to marginalize already-marginalized populations. When community art is used to beautify affordable downtown neighbourhoods, who benefits? Without accompanying struggles to keep the neighbourhood affordable and safe for all of its current residents, community "beau-

tification" projects, whether intentionally or not, run the risk of displacing swathes of community members.

Community-based artists remain committed to work that is challenging and still massively under-funded for a variety of complex reasons. Some community artists are driven by a desire to stimulate social dialogue, others by a desire to saturate public culture with non-commercial aesthetics, others still by the desire to share art-making practices with broad sectors of "the community". Whether aesthetics, politics, or a commitment to the practice itself lead the art-making, the roots of many community arts practices are in a commitment to social transformation and social justice.

In recent years, however, participatory art-making practices and public art have been promoted as a force for urban development by politicians and prominent aca-

How could we remain respectful of the experiences of fear on the part of these residents, primarily women, while at the same time critically countering their vehemence towards street-involved residents?



MAGGIE HUTCHESON AND CATHERINE MCLEOD

demics. Entrepreneurial theorist Richard Florida's proposal that cities ought to embrace the arts in order to draw wealth in the form of a "creative class" to their cores has gathered speed across North America. Florida and his followers argue that successful cities must function as talent magnets (drawing "high capital" individuals) by offering diverse cultural attractions, amenities, and creative energy, amongst other things¹. Place matters, proponents of the creative class theory argue, and the development of local cultures is key to attracting creative (young and mobile) people. But what of less mobile populations? While they may well be artists, visionaries, or committed community members, those who aren't young, entrepreneurial, moneyed, and hip don't count as members of the desired "creative class" that Richard Florida praises.

Unfortunately, it seems that some community arts projects initiated by groups of homeowners in low-income neighbourhoods stem from similar impulses to improve such neighbourhoods by drawing "desirables" to them. The often unspoken subtext behind these initiatives is the wish to remove "undesirables" from the area. It was in response to such subtext in the literature of a Toronto residents' group (a group that employs community art practices to beautify the neighbourhood) that Catherine (Cat) McLeod, Leah Houston, and I (three activist artists) created *Stories From the Badlands*.

Beginning work on *Stories From the Badlands* necessitated recognition of just how complex our own relationships to neighbourhood change are. As artists, we often move to low-income neighbourhoods in search of cheap studios and living space, acting as harbingers of gentrification. As women and feminists, we relate to the desire to live in a safe and thriving neighbourhood. As activists, and again as feminists, we are committed to looking critically at dominant discourses on safety and home, and to challenging notions of community that disenfranchise and exclude. Our goal has been to create a performance that respects all of these positions simultaneously, and that challenges the disenfranchisement that we see



MAGGIE HUTCHESON AND CATHERINE MCLEOD

I worry that some community arts practices are being initiated with the intention of transforming neighbourhoods in ways that continue to marginalize already-marginalized populations.

some neighbourhood "improvement" initiatives perpetuating.

Over a period of three months, Cat, Leah, and I collected written material about the Bloor and Lansdowne area, drawing primarily from mainstream media, websites, and public listserv dialogues between local residents. The dominance of an anti-crime, pro-development discourse was soon evident, as was the tendency to blame sex-workers, drug users and other street-involved people for a lack of safety in the area. Listserv discussions and newspaper articles alike were rife with stories of criminal activity, and fear of criminal activity on the part of local homeowners. Distinctions were sometimes made between those residents of the neighbourhood perceived as hard-working, but still poor, and those perceived as threats to the community (again, sex-workers, drug users and street-involved people). Discussion on how to maintain the neighbourhood's affordability in the face of gentrification was scant. Condo development, new lofts, and an increased police presence in the neighbourhood

were overwhelmingly celebrated as steps in the right direction.

Concern about the ramifications of development for low-income people in the neighbourhood², and a deep uncomfortableness with the vilification of street-involved people in a number of texts, compelled the three of us to spend many hours analyzing both the discourse facing us, and our own feelings on the issue of neighbourhood safety. Leah told us how fearful she had been upon first moving to the neighbourhood because of the crime stories that circulate in the media. Were these stories simply fear-mongering? How could we remain respectful of the experiences of fear on the part of these residents, primarily women, while at the same time critically countering their vehemence towards street-involved residents? We asked ourselves, just whose safety is compromised in this neighbourhood, and why? We agreed that an increased police presence in the neighbourhood was likely to make the area less safe for many, if not most, community members, including people living and working on the street,

and youth of colour. After much reflection on these questions, we spent a number of weeks speaking with the very people targeted during initiatives to “clean up the streets.” Women from a local shelter, drug users, and other street-involved people shared their impressions of the neighbourhood, their thoughts on what makes the area home for them, and their desires for neighbourhood change. Most of our interviewees were women. They, too, expressed the need for increased safety in the neighbourhood.

The stories and impressions we gathered from our street interviews deepened our own questions about neighbourhood improvement. Improvement for whom? To what end? What are the points of overlap in the diverse wishes of community members, and where are there schisms? With the knowledge that an increased police presence increases safety for some citizens, while targeting others, and that neighbourhood development in the form of lofts and condominiums will result in the eviction of many current residents, we opted to create a piece that honoured the voices of community members for whom such changes will be the most devastating.

Our first performance of *Stories from the Badlands* was in the spring of 2006 at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The words we spoke were taken verbatim from the media, public listserv discussions, websites and the interviews that we conducted but were rearranged and intermingled, at times in a kind of choral montage. Limited rehearsal time necessitated that we remain the sole performers of the piece. The performance began with rapid-fire testimonials about the need to remove “dysfunctional residents” from the neighbourhood, which were later challenged by moving stories and quotes from the very people disparaged in these testimonials. Projected on a large screen behind us were images of the neighbourhood, overlaid at times with words from the script. The rotation of the images sped up as the performance went on, flashing rapidly at its climax. Response to the piece varied. From the mixed crowd of homeowners, drug users, educators, sex-workers, students, and ten-

ants, we received both positive and negative feedback. That the piece was emotionally evocative was not in dispute. Our first performance of the piece left us hopeful that, with further work, it could produce the effect we were striving for.

Stories from the Badlands is still in development, and our biggest challenges lie ahead. How we might integrate our own voices into the chorus remains a crucial question for us, as does the question of how to present the piece in the very neighbourhood from which it originates. We worry whether the testimonials of homeowners in the piece might, in fact, perpetuate harmful stereotypes of already-marginalized people, and continue to think about who ought to be onstage performing these stories. Our biggest critics are likely to be the audience we most desire to communicate with; planning a forum within

which constructive dialogue can follow the performance will require much thought and planning. There are many questions and few definitive answers, but we are committed to and excited by what we have created so far. It is our hope that *Stories from the Badlands* will contribute to a socially just and feminist form of neighbourhood transformation. ❧

1. Memphis Talent Magnet Project “Technology, Talent and Tolerance: Attracting the Best and Brightest to Memphis.” www.creativeclass.org/_flight_creativityexchange.shtml. (Accessed July 20, 2006)

2. The majority of residents in the area are tenants, and, as of 2001, the area’s average household income was disproportionately low in comparison to the Toronto average. City of Toronto. “Ward 18 Profile Report.” www.toronto.ca/wards2000/ward18.html. (Accessed July 20, 2006)

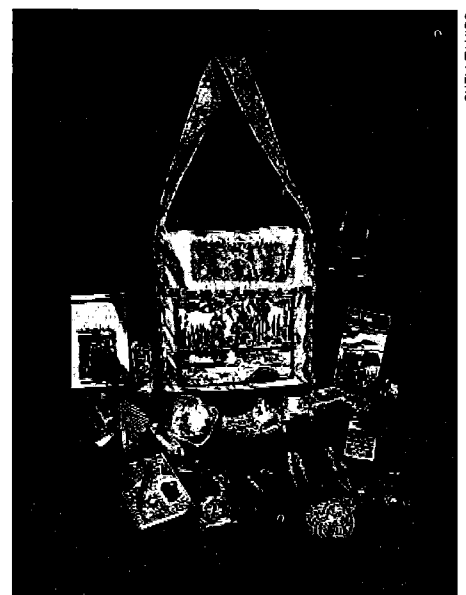
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Running Beyond the Group of Seven

Sally Frater

In 2005, 29 art galleries and museums across Ontario held Group of Seven-themed exhibitions across the province to commemorate the group’s first year of exhibiting together in 1920. The Cambridge Galleries took a somewhat different tactic from other galleries in their approach. The premise behind the *Group of Seven Revisted*, the name given to the exhibition held in their gallery spaces, involved inviting seven contemporary artists (including multidisciplinary Mohawk artist Shelley Niro) to respond to works created by original members of the collective. Niro chose the oil sketch *Sand Lake Algoma* (by Group of Seven member Lawren Harris). Harris hailed from Brantford, Ontario, the city where Niro currently lives and works.

Widely recognized for their lush landscapes, the Group of Seven’s imagery of the unfettered wilderness became synonymous with Canadian identity. Believing



SHELLEY NIRO

Preparing a Runner for the 3rd Millennium

that the country did not possess a true national identity, the group set out to document what they believed defined authentic

Canadian experience. Their renderings of dense forests, still lakes, and icy Northern scenes were most often devoid of any human presence or activity, a fact that not only reinforced the notion that Canada was a vast unspoiled territory, but hid the fact that many of the collective's members lived or were trained in urban areas.

In Iroquoian cultures, when chiefs from one village wished to meet with a leader in the next, runners laden with wampum were sent ahead to announce the desired meeting as a sign of respect. The activity of the runner forms the impetus of Niro's work. In the artist statement in the accompanying exhibition brochure, Niro states: "In this piece, I am projecting into the future. What will the landscape look like 1000 years from now? Using Lawren Harris' *Sand Lake Algoma* as a symbol of time passed, it serves as a memory of when life was abundant with unaltered and unviolated pieces of land." The resulting work, *Preparing a Runner for the 3rd Millennium*, updates Harris' isolationist and static view of the landscape. Whereas Harris' two-dimensional fecund landscape belies the increasing industrialization and urbanization in less remote areas of Canada that paralleled his artistic production, Niro's three-dimensional piece acknowledges the detrimental effects of human activity on the natural environment, both in the present and not-so-far-off future.

The runner in Niro's piece carries goggles, latex gloves, a surgical mask, and a manual hand, conveying the artist's prediction that, in the future, humans will have become so toxic due to contamination that we will no longer be able to physically touch one another. In the future scenario of the artist's imagination, we will also no longer be able to have unmediated interactions with the natural world.

Other articles carried by the runner are a comb and a tube of lipstick, humorous indicators that future humans will still be preoccupied with personal appearances; however, they also allude to the fact that the runner in question is a woman. Traditionally, runners in Iroquois culture were male, but, inspired by scientific reports that speak of dwindling male pop-

ulations due to lower rates of XY chromosomes in male sperm counts (again, a result of pollution), Niro posits that, by the third millennium, only women will populate the earth.

The runner also carries a dreamcatcher and the seminal text *Teachings from the Longhouse* by Chief Jake Thomas. Published to guide Six Nations Iroquois in dealing with the overwhelming changes of the nineteenth century, *Teachings from the Longhouse* outlined the Handsome Lake Code, a set of beliefs outlining how the Iroquois should conduct themselves in regard to family relations and spiritual guidance. During his life, Chief Thomas was at the forefront of efforts to preserve Six Nations (Haudenosaunee) language and culture.

With these objects, Niro subtly overturns what is, perhaps, the most deeply ingrained myth surrounding the Group of Seven's legacy. The Group's still landscapes, with their absence of human figures, purport to collectively deny the existence of First Nations. Their steadfast belief in the lack of a Canadian identity eradicated the presence of First Nations culture and tradition from a national and global consciousness. Niro's inclusion of these pieces reasserts the fact that First Nations were a presence in the land we now call Canada long before the existence of any of the members of the Group of Seven. Furthermore, these objects serve as a reminder of a time when humans on the North American continent were able to live in balance with the natural environment. Niro's work also posits that First Nations will also still be a presence in the future, contradicting the myth that they are a waning or dying culture.

The centerpiece of the work is the bag that contains all of the instruments of the runner. The main motif of the silver sack is a rendering of Harris' *Sand Lake Algoma*. The non-traditional beadwork that creates the piece reinscribes First Nations' ties to the landscape. It also serves as a *memento mori* of the fragility and finiteness of the natural world, an illumination of the beauty and vibrancy that once existed (and still does), but will no longer if, as a species, we do not alter

our ways of moving about the earth. Though Niro's tongue is firmly planted in her cheek, *Preparing a Runner for the 3rd Millennium* sounds a warning bell. ☘

Sally Frater is an artist, writer, and curator based in Southern Ontario. Her latest curatorial project, *the life and death of i.d.*, is being held at the McMaster Museum of Art.

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From the Story Circle to Cyberspace

How Technology Transforms the Stories We Tell and How Women Transform the Stories We Hear

Jennifer LaFontaine

A group of women sit on the floor on silk pillows amid colourful batiks. A woman in a sari lights a candle and says her name, her mother's name, and her maternal grandmother's name. She welcomes them into the circle, and then passes the candle to a woman beside her. The ritual repeats until every woman in the group, which reflects the cultural diversity of downtown east Toronto, has had a chance to include herself and her matrilineal relatives in the circle.

This is one version of the evolving story circle of Central Neighbourhood House's Story Project. The finished stories will end up online and each of the women will leave the program with a new set of media skills. But, for now, no computers are in sight. The energy in the room is charged with concentration, nods of recognition, tears, encouragement, laughter, and more tears. Each woman bravely tells her story of the women whose blood flows in her veins, women whose love, sacrifice, joy, and suffering has rarely been acknowledged.

Since 1998, I have created community-based photography and media programs for women at an organization in downtown east Toronto called Central Neighbourhood House (CNH). As an activist and a photographer, I was interested in the use of media — who controls it, who makes it, who consumes it. I wanted to use media to tell stories that were not heard in the mainstream, and that represented people and ideas that were reflective of my life. I started teaching black-and-white photography to a small group at CNH, and we created an exhibit about violence against women. Since then, I have continued to work with women, using media to explore social jus-



tice issues, to tell the stories of our communities, and as a tool for social change.

For the last four years, I have been collaborating with Camille Turner, a Toronto-based media/performance artist and cultural producer whose practice explores the social dimensions of technology. I met Turner through our work with social agencies and found that we shared a common vision of empowering communities to tell their stories through media-based arts. Camille recalls:

*This media world became my community, but I was very aware of how white and how male it was. I live in Toronto, the most multicultural city on the planet, according to the UN, yet I had never met another black new media artist until I went to MIT in Boston for a conference in 2001 called *Race in Digital Space*. It was the first time I was surrounded by people who looked like me who were at the forefront of digital technology. I went back to*

Toronto determined to create a point of entry so more diverse voices like mine can be represented.

Not long after, Turner and I started *The Story Project*, a series of media projects where women use black-and-white photography, digital storytelling, sound, digital photography, video, and web design to tell their stories. Our collaborative work builds on one another's strengths, as we straddle the different worlds — art, media, social justice — in which community-based media exists.

Each time a story circle takes place at CNH, women come together across boundaries of race, culture, age, sexuality, language, ability, and religion. However, the simple act of coming together can be understood as much more complex within a context of systemic inequalities. As Punam Khosla writes in her report, *If Low Income Women of Colour Counted in Toronto*, "There is mounting evidence that women, people of colour and immigrants

are the poorest Torontonians" (7). She goes on to explain:

Low-income women of colour and immigrant women are facing social isolation in near epidemic proportions. Women are keenly aware of their isolation and how it weakens their position. Opportunities to make connections outside their immediate family, culture, and religious networks are extremely limited... Women say they have nowhere to go to meet women from other communities (12).

The Story Project is part of an emerging field of socially engaged media that enables marginalized communities to tell their stories with new technologies and become active makers, rather than passive consumers, of technology. Its practitioners are activists and artists from various backgrounds who hack into the closed system technology operates within to empower communities who have been misrepresented or underrepresented by this media. Our priority is to support and encourage women from marginalized communities to access and engage with technology, and to use that technology to be leaders in their communities.

This approach is modeled after *Third World Majority*, a women's media organization. On their website, they explain:

Whether it is the internet or camera, computers and how we structure them, all of the technologies that we work with in *Third World Majority* have particular legacies of colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. We prioritize the leadership of young women of colour as our organizers, trainers, and technical support to rectify this legacy.

One way that *The Story Project* reflects this message is with the engagement of women as peer leaders. Although Turner and I are the artists guiding the process, we support a strong base of media leadership from within the communities that we work. As we have devel-

oped our methodology, we have focused on a team approach to learning. In our last peer leadership training, women represented East African, Latin American, Caribbean, South Asian, and Asian cultural groups, and ranged in age from their twenties to fifties.

When participants are mentored by a group of women representing a diversity of identities, it creates a point of connection where they see can see themselves reflected in the leadership.

In a recent peer leadership media training program, a group of eight women learned how to co-facilitate our Digital Storytelling program. Peer leaders first learned how to create their own three- to five-minute video, using images, video clips, music, and, most importantly, their own voice telling their own story. Then, they learned to teach one another, developing media leadership skills such as image manipulation, video editing, sound recording, story development, and group facilitation.

During the digital storytelling program, participants not only learned technological skills, but also created content that is relevant and meaningful to their communities. Through their own storytelling process, peer leaders have recognized the many challenges women have to overcome in sharing their stories. One day, we asked the women to reflect on a turning-point, a moment where they felt like something changed the direction of their lives. After telling her story, Salma let us in on a secret: "this is the first time that I told this story since it happened. No friends, no family, for over fifteen years. It feels so good to let it out." Salma's story explores her struggle with family and South Asian culture, connecting with the audience through her love story:

In my dream, I see a girl who wants to tell an untold story that she never told anybody. She was a fifteen-year-old teenage girl, filled up with dreams and wanting to enjoy her life every moment. But her life was going on under some rules. Her family, culture, and the environment did not give her much freedom. Maybe she wanted to follow all the

rules, but, you know, there are no rules allowed in your heart. Suddenly, she falls in love with a very handsome boy. She sees him every day in the neighbourhood. His eyes — there is something in his eyes. Their time was going on slowly and slowly. That was a very soft love, like lavender flowers. For the next five years, they wrote lots of letters. They dreamed about their future life. They thought that the earth is wonderful, that life was beautiful. They were so thankful to God. One day, the entire dream just broke. She felt the beautiful earth turn to hell. That moment came to her and life was so sad. The culture, the family, the rules didn't give her permission to live her life as she wanted. Every day, she destroyed one letter, one card, one gift, and threw them out the window. She was trying to forget her love. Sixteen years have gone. Awake from her dream, she would like to say to him, I hurt you. She would like to say to him, if possible, forgive me. It is still not so easy.

The participants' stories reflect their diverse life experiences. Another woman came to the group with a happy, fictitious story. But the group saw through it. "There is another real story you want to tell, that you won't let out," they challenged. The next week she came prepared, and told the story of when she finally said "enough is enough" to her abusive family. Although their stories are individual, they explore universal themes such as race, gender, abuse, immigration, religion, and family. They are a testament to the stories that are so often silenced.

Reclaiming our voices through digital storytelling is not just about telling our stories, it is about reclaiming our dignity, our communities and our histories (*Third World Majority*).

However, in some cases, the emotional risk required to tell a story can be too great. Peer leaders help support women in deciding when to let stories out, and when to find a different story to tell. In one sto-

rytelling circle, a woman said, "I know the story I want to tell, but if I tell that story I will cry and cry for weeks. I cannot do that right now." Instead, the peer leaders continued to encourage her, and help her change her approach. In the story she did tell, she hinted at the old story by letting us know that she lost her family in the war in Somalia. She then told a story of trying to learn English when she arrived in Canada:

The capital city in Somalia is Mogadishu. It used to be an Italian colony. When I started school, we had to learn Italian. The teachers were Italian. The entire government was Italian. They told us that Christopher Columbus "discovered" Somalia. I ran away from my home in Mogadishu when my husband and son were killed in the war. When I came to Canada, I didn't speak English at all. When I went to the store, I couldn't buy anything. I took the subway and got lost, and went to school and when the teacher said something, I said, "Namakhan," which means, "I don't know what you are saying." She said, "Write your name." I said "Namakhan." I was frustrated because I could write and read in Somali, but not in English. One day, I was walking through the mall and looked in a bookstore. I saw a shelf with different dictionaries: Russian, Arabic, English. I bought an Italian-English dictionary for \$8. I went home with the dictionary and practised, practised, practised on my own. One day, at school, I put up my hand and said, "Excuse me, Teacher, can I ask you a question?" She said "Oh, my God! Is this Dahabo?!" "Yes, Teacher, I am Dahabo."

The peer leaders support other women by sharing their own experiences, and cultural and religious beliefs. They also translate stories from first languages such as Bengali, Spanish, and Tamil, where the

storytelling is less inhibited. Most of all, we let other women know that we each have many stories to tell, and our stories are worth telling.

However, *The Story Project* has the potential to not only support marginalized groups in telling their stories from within their communities, but in bringing them together to understand the similar human experiences they have through their stories. For example, the CNH peer leaders helped teach a digital storytelling program at the 519 Community Centre's program for seniors in the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered/Queer community. Participants expressed that they valued the immigrant women who came into a queer space for seniors with such openness, supported their learning of media, and were interested in more spaces that brought communities together.

As the process shifts from the story circle to the computers, a new set of barriers needs to be overcome. *The Story Project* creates access to technology for marginalized groups such as immigrant and refugee women, and helps to narrow the digital divide. According to the 1998 report, *Falling through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide*, "members of ethnic minority groups are less likely to be connected to the Net than are white people."

Unfortunately, community programs rarely have adequate technology to access: the computers we use break down, and are so archaic that we're constantly troubleshooting. It is challenging to make access to computers seem desirable when we are constantly battling computer problems, and our computers and digital technology are barely capable of accommodating the media programs we want to run. Computer literacy and English literacy levels also play a part, so peer leaders learn to assess the women's skills to find a place where they can work together to create the story. Peer leaders provide guidance for participants to feel a sense of ownership of their story, even if they have minimal computer skills. For example, a peer leader might type up the woman's story and teach her how to cut and paste it into the correct web locations herself. A Spanish peer leader encouraged women to publish their stories in Spanish, so that they

could freely share them with their community; however, this is more difficult for women whose written language is not in Roman script. Maintaining adequate and accessible technology is a constant struggle that reflects our critique of who owns the media, who has access to it, and whose voices are heard.

Storytelling through media has its own set of complexities. While we use technology as a tool to tell our stories, there is the risk of exposure that technology represents. Sharing stories online means that anyone can see them. Our stories lose anonymity, and are no longer safe in a small circle of women. In particular, stories of abuse create the risk that the women's ex-partners could find the stories, their community will judge them, and that their safety will be in jeopardy. Each woman finds a range of creative solutions. Some women used personal family images freely, while others used stock images to represent their story. Other women changed their name, but were fine with personal images. One peer leader shared that a Chinese woman in her group believed that putting family images on the internet would bring them harm, so she supported her in finding images that were symbolic of her story.

Through *The Story Project*, women find their own path to create content that is relevant and meaningful in their communities. The importance of creating meaningful content is explained:

A growing number of scholars are questioning popular assumptions about the digital divide in an attempt to reframe public discussions about race and technology, as well as about the social impacts of technology. Too often, these scholars say, discussions about the digital divide focus on installing computer hardware rather than on helping develop online content for underrepresented communities (Young, chronicle.com/free/v48/i11/11a05101.htm, August 2006).

In *The Story Project*, we see the suc-

cess of creating content in many ways. Women who may never have used computers before learn how to create their own stories online, and share those stories with friends and family. Many women spoke of sending their stories to family in their home countries — to Sri Lanka, Mexico, and China. A peer leader said that her eight-year-old child was shocked when he found out that she had made her own video. She said, “He just assumes I know nothing about computers.” She was happy to challenge his ideas and say, yes, she could do it herself. One woman talked about not wanting to seem self-absorbed for printing photographs of herself. This led to a discussion of how uncommon it actually is to see images of ourselves in the media, on television, in magazines, and in day-to-day life, and how important it is to make ourselves visible. These conversations and activities, where we give one another the right to take up space — both real and digital — challenge women’s ideas of what our rights are. They encourage women to demand more, to share more, and to expect more.

Our websites are found not only by friends and family, but by institutions, galleries, and festivals. *The Story Project* has found its way to a conference in Senegal, a university course in Texas, a UNESCO international event for adult learners, and the Canadian National Archives. A public gallery in Saskatchewan requested *The Story Project*, and it was shown as part of a group exhibit entitled, *Subverting Virtual Territories*. As Elwood Jimmy, curator of the exhibit at Godfrey Dean Gallery, explains:

Over the last twenty-five years, Canada has evolved into one of the most digitally connected countries in the world. However, in that time, government and corporations are increasingly moving toward an information and economic environment that is void of dissent and difference. As this colonization of the digital realm evolves, it is integral that a multiplicity of communities, voices, and creative acts are included in the further development of the internet and digital technologies.



Having a public gallery find *The Story Project* online also validates our work, as we so often hear critiques that community art is not valued.

By using the internet, our stories can be shared around the world. But if it is not also shared in our backyard, the technology is used just for the sake of technology. Over the years, Turner and I have grappled with how to make digital space living, to engage communities face to face with technology, and to break down the individualism that computers encourage.

In the first year of *The Story Project*, CNH worked in partnership with InterAccess, an electronic media arts centre in downtown Toronto where Turner was working a curatorial residency. At InterAccess, we were able to access equipment, studio space and technical assistance, and to end our project with an exhibition in the gallery. We supported the women in creating a space where they had the power to represent themselves in media that usually excludes them, and we all worked towards transforming the gallery into a vibrant community space.

During the exhibition of *The Story Project*, we offered mini-workshops to various groups in the community, such as anti-violence organizations, post-graduate university classes, and young women’s groups. We rented a bus to bring the entire Women’s Program from CNH over for a celebration and feast. While InterAccess was only a half-hour from CNH by transit, many women would not be able to make the trip across the city, and out of their own neighbourhood. When we screened a series of short video clips, the women clapped and cheered every time they saw a woman they knew on the big screen. One Somali

woman in the group said, “I feel like a star.” The space was alive with children, food, music, art, and community.

The feedback from the InterAccess staff and members who came to see the show was positive. They were able to see their gallery space being used in many non-traditional ways. Within the organization, however, there are mixed feelings about community collaborations. Some members do not see this work as “art,” while Turner and I feel that projects like these hack into a closed system, and open up what, we believe, can be represented by media. This process in itself is a vital and legitimate art form. The final result is a dynamic community collaboration in the context of media arts that challenges the audience to broaden their understanding of who is visible in the media, and who is making that media.

Equally important, though, is the sense of personal growth and community engagement that women feel when they become part of *The Story Project*. As one participant explained:

This is a unique program in the city, where you can go and meet women who are 19, 20 years old, who are 40, 50 years old, who are Anglo-Canadian, who are Somali, who are from Latin America. We would normally never experience that if we didn’t have this program. We’re meeting a lot of truly different people all in one place, doing something fun and creative.

In *The Story Project*, women shared that telling their stories made them feel proud, happy, and connected. Being part of the group also supported women in their life challenges. As one woman explained, “I learned how to develop film and print photos. It helped me retrieve what I learned before my stroke and it helped me greatly.”

A peer leader shared changes she felt within herself: “In maintaining my sobriety, it changes the way I deal with people. I discovered I could do really different things.” With many immigrant women away from their families, they felt a sense

of kinship and community, which filled a gap in their lives and created a new support network.

One woman expressed her discovery that simple things can bring her joy: "Once I joined the photography group, it made me feel good about myself. This group allowed me to remember who I was, and I look forward to the future, and it also gave me hope." Although the medium changes from project to project, the concept of *The Story Project* remains the same: women are using media to tell their stories, and make their stories heard. ❧

Jennifer LaFontaine is a community-based artist who works with diverse groups to use photography as a tool to explore social issues,

to tell the stories of their communities and to work for social change.

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Creating Art and Social Change in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

Mary Pullen and Sheila Matthews

In the heart of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), a group of women are discovering how the creative process and act of art-making are powerful forces for social change. Through art and creative entrepreneurship, women in the community are working together to improve their individual and collective circumstances, and challenge the discrimination that has denied them rights and opportunities because of personal background, disability, or social status. Indeed, their art-making strives to create social change at every level of society, starting from the personal (self-affirmation and healing) and gradually moving to the more political (highlighting issues of women's economic insecurity).

Supported by Enterprising Women Making Art (EWMA), a harm reduction and social co-operative development initiative of Atira Women's Resource Society, women are creating visual art and handmade products such as candles, garden stepping-stones, jewelry and accessories, and Aboriginal crafts, and collectively selling them at local craft fairs and markets. More importantly, they are doing so



A few members of Creative Women Craftworks, an emerging artisans' co-operative for women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside community.

on their own terms, as members of a democratically controlled co-operative enterprise called Creative Women Craftworks (CWC). In contrast to the

oppressive social climate in which their lives and struggles for survival in the DTES are situated, the power and freedom of artistic and creative expression, of

democratic member control, and the opportunity to supplement their, or their family's, livelihoods through product sales, is extremely liberating and empowering. By embodying their desire to create and express themselves freely, their artistic expression, as well as their entrepreneurship, creates conditions for their independence and autonomy.

Enterprising Women Making Art

Faced with increasing social inequality and the oppression these inequities create, many women in the DTES struggle to survive. As in many distressed urban communities, they face multiple barriers to accessing training, employment programs, and other social resources. For example, a woman who has limited work experience, and is in poor health or has a disability, may have difficulty finding appropriate programs or forms of employment that offer her support and flexibility. In addition, she may also experience actual and perceived discrimination based on social identity or the stigma attached to being "from the DTES." Add other barriers, such as low literacy or English-language proficiency, lack of social networks, a criminal record, history of homelessness, and complicated social assistance policies, and women's vulnerability to economic insecurity and low self-worth increases. As a result, due to their marginalization, women in the DTES are often unable to secure mainstream employment.

Prompted by the lack of meaningful economic options for women in the community, Atria Women's Resource Society proposed the idea of developing an artisans' co-operative as a strategy to build women's economic and social engagement. Launched in 2003, Enterprising Women Making Art (EWMA) aims to improve women's personal and economic well-being, and support their full participation in the economy and community. Structured as a flexible training and co-op development program, EWMA provides hands-on workshops and entrepreneurial support to women interested in arts and crafts production. The program also manages the day-to-day operations of CWC and collaborates with co-op members on



A Creative Women Craftworks member at a local artisans' market.

the enterprise's governance. With the program's support, co-op members are increasingly building their leadership capacities and taking on more responsibility within the co-operative. For instance, members actively recruit women interested in joining CWC; members have developed their own membership process and orientations sessions.

To date, women's participation in the co-operative has increased their supplemental income anywhere from a few to several hundred dollars a month. In addition, EWMA and CWC have together increased individual and community capacity-building (skill development), expanded social and peer support networks, and, most notably, improved women's individual welfare and sense of self and belonging. For these reasons, we believe that, by fusing art and enterprise within the context of freedom, respect, and equity, we (including EWMA and members of CWC) are cultivating social justice and change in the DTES community.

Creating art as anti-oppressive

Exclusion from mainstream society and its advantages often involves a web of oppressions and oppressive relations that include (but are not limited to) social divisions such as gender, age, race, sexual ori-

entation, class, and disability. As a response, anti-oppressive approaches seek to create egalitarian relations that celebrate and accept difference, as well as challenge many of our society's deep-seated assumptions and socially constructed boundaries. We feel the act of art-making and asserting one's right to self-expression transgresses these boundaries and hierarchical divisions, many of which have acted as barriers to the improvement of women's lives in the DTES. This is certainly true for women whose experiences of poverty, addictions, trauma, and violence have resulted in shame, isolation, and exclusion. Art offers them a vehicle for self-exploration, connection, and sharing.

Creativity is accessible, and is intrinsic to and inclusive of all people, regardless of one's social identity (i.e., gender, culture, faith, citizenship, etc.). It is also not bound to any particular social position or perspective. In the case of EWMA, creativity is apparent in the co-op members' art-making processes, as well as in their solutions to addressing life's difficulties and improving their quality of life. For instance, more than 85 per cent of CWC members volunteer in the community as a way to give back, as well as to supplement their grocery budgets through the receipt of honoraria. Each woman develops a

unique expression or creative practice that reflects her experiences, her knowledge, and her values. Focusing on women's creativity as a means of developing economic opportunities means that these opportunities are accessible to all regardless of past employment experiences, level of education, and individual barriers to employment. Creativity is low-threshold in that it takes into account personal limitations and abilities, and produces equality whilst maintaining diversity. Moreover, EWMA emphasizes the creative process, in addition to the end product. Each woman's artwork or handmade craft, therefore, represents an opportunity to have a voice. Art provides a safe place in which women have the opportunity to contest the discrimination they have encountered, and communicate or engage with mainstream society. In this manner, we frame creating art as anti-oppressive.

Art and social co-operative development

Often, CWC members start to self-identify as artisans only after participating in the co-operative. The act of creating increases their self-esteem and empowers them through the realization that they can effect change in their own lives. This shift in consciousness is particularly significant in terms of women's self-confidence and autonomy. No longer restricted to finding identity in past experiences, women are seeing new possibilities. Their participation in CWC and the healing properties of creating art work together transform the individual. Evidence of such is indicated

in women's stated feelings of "being able to do something" and "being productive."

Being co-authors of a developing co-operative and having some ownership of the process of helping themselves can empower and validate a woman's dignity, and give her the feeling of being a valuable member of the community, and not just a client or service user, but an equal. In effect, the hierarchical structure of providing services is minimised when participants are challenged to think differently about themselves and their place in life. Nevertheless, it can be an uncomfortable position, producing anxiety and a lack of understanding of shifting roles. Hence, the co-operative development process has had many challenges.

For example, it is difficult at times for participants to conceptualise that they are member-owners of the emerging co-operative, since this is foreign to a more service-user mentality where ownership is identified as being that of an agency or care provider. In addition, coming from a social environment where services end when well-being and quality of life improve, women of CWC at times seem reluctant to take a more significant role or ownership of the co-operative. The most commonly cited reason is the women's fear that their increased responsibility and ownership of the co-op will negatively impact their disability or social assistance benefits. Nonetheless, we believe that it is important not to rush the process of co-operative development, as true empowerment requires the members' full participation; without this, it's not empowering.

Conclusion

Although we have tried to minimise the oppressions women experience, as participants of EWMA, it is still present in ways that we cannot directly control. While we consciously choose to empower women to follow through with their arts and crafts ideas, rather than making purely commercial decisions, there is still a conformity to making marketable products, which places constraints on women's individual expression. Further oppression exists in the regulations and limitations placed on individuals who are on social assistance or disability (i.e. the "clawing back" of earnings). And although we have been diligent in reducing oppression in the way we are providing services, this, too, is a process of awareness and continued learning of what this means in practice. In spite of these challenges, EWMA and the emerging co-operative, CWC, are providing hope and empowerment for some of the most disenfranchised individuals in our society. ✎

Mary Pullen is the project manager, and **Sheila Matthews** the case manager, of Enterprising Women Making Art, a project of Atira Women's Resource Society.

Further Reading:

Atira Women's Resource Society Web site: www.atira.bc.ca

Dominelli, L. **Anti-oppressive social work theory and practice**. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.



Rise to your Potential

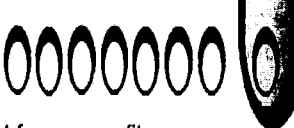
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Reweaving a Life

The Art of the Women Weavers of Palm and their Struggle with Water, Poverty and Pride

Susan Smith and Shelley Porteous

Daily, people interweave the strands of their lives. When people believe that a better life is possible, they are able to reweave the strands, altering colours, shapes, and textures to create a new reality, one richly woven with hope and purpose.

The “Reweaving a Life” Art Project portrays the daily reality of the Nahua women basket weavers of the mountainous village of Tlamacazapa, Mexico. They are caught in a complex web of social disintegration coupled with environmental toxicity and water shortage. With a population of 6200 people, Tlamacazapa, is the largest indigenous village in the state of Guerrero, and one of the largest in Mexico. The villagers say that Tlamacazapa, meaning “people who are fearful,” was founded over 400 years ago when three extended families fled the fertile land in the valley below to escape the Spanish *conquistadors*. Life revolves around the traditional art of basket-making, which comprises the basic economy of the village. Working steadily, a woman can weave a large basket in three to four days, which, outside the village, will sell for a few dollars.

Water culture shift: From essential resource to economic commodity

Caminamos Juntos para Salud y Desarrollo (Walking Together for Health and Development) is a non-profit, humanitarian organization working with the women of Tlamacazapa to improve an existence presently characterized by raw fatigue, illness, and tragedy. Operating in response to community needs and interests since 1997, *Caminamos Juntos* (CJ) programs focus on three integrated areas: health and healing; income generation;



SUSAN SMITH 2005

and water and sanitation. Local villagers work in and benefit from these programs, each based on development principles of participation and sustainability.

Inadequate water and sanitation are pressing issues that threaten the health of the entire community. The majority of people use open space as a toilet. Pigs and other animals add to a horrific cycle of disease as they roam freely in the streets.

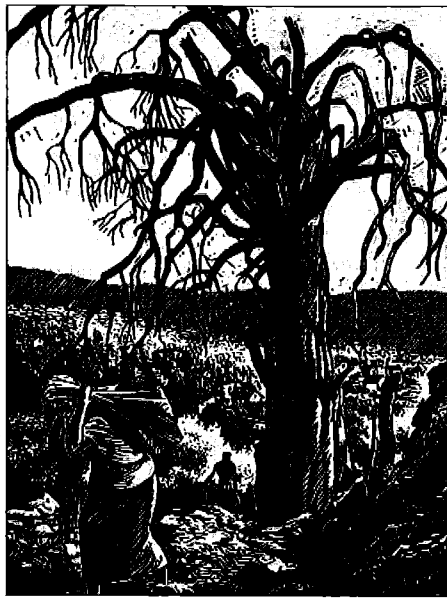
In the rainy season, the four main open wells — actually large cracks in the bedrock — fill with a parasite-ridden brew of excrement and garbage. Since 2001, a three-pump system operated by several local men regularly distributes additional water to the village from a valley five kilometres away. This water service is available for purchase if the family can afford to pay, signaling a critical shift in water

culture from a free, essential resource to an economic commodity controlled by a few. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends twenty litres of water per person per day in order to maintain a basic standard of health. Today, the people of Tlamacazapa get by on roughly five to 10 litres of water per person per day to fulfill all their daily needs.

To further complicate an already difficult situation, 2000 saw CJ detect the presence of lead and arsenic in all of Tlamacazapa's water sources. According to National Autonomous University of Mexico researchers currently collaborating on this investigation, this contamination is most likely natural, arising from the soil and rock. The WHO's norms for maximum concentration of lead and of arsenic in water is 0.01 milligrams per litre, respectively. The official Mexican norm is 0.010 milligrams per litre for lead, and 0.025 milligrams per litre for for arsenic. Since 2003, CJ has found, based on monthly water samples analyzed by the Massachusetts-based, EPA-certified laboratory Groundwater Analytical, lead levels as high as 0.150 milligrams per litre, and arsenic levels as high as 0.110 milligrams per litre, .

Toxic synergy: contamination and poverty

Long-term exposure to even low levels of multiple toxins is a crisis in the making for malnourished and dehydrated people. Harmful toxins and metals in their water, soil, glazed clay cooking pots, and palm dyes seriously affect their health — especially that of the malnourished young child and pregnant woman. Especially at risk are those who are exposed to multiple sources of toxins: an example would be the impoverished weaver who eats a basic diet of tortillas with little protein, vegetables, and fruit; uses chemical palm dyes; drinks and cooks with contaminated water; lives in a dirt-floor hut; and cooks in a low fire lead glazed clay pot. CJ compiles evidence of the environmental contamination that is affecting the health of the poor, while forming strategic alliances to support the obtainment of clean, sufficient water and the alleviation of poverty.



ETCHING BY ARTIST: ALEJANDRO GONZALEZ ARANDA

Art as Social Engagement

The "Reweaving a Life" Art Project creatively draws attention to this forgotten community, using art as a powerful means for public awareness and action. CJ and OPIRG McMaster invited Canadian artists Yar Taraky of Hamilton and Karen Kulyk of Halifax to join Mexican artists Alejandro Gonzalez Aranda and Maya Saenz Romero, both of Cuernavaca, to participate in the project. In November of 2004, and again in 2005, the artists visited Tlamacazapa, where they met with nine women weavers, aged 17 to 46. These women now work with CJ as health promoters or midwives, and participated in the "Reweaving a Life" Art Project, a remarkable testimony to their ever-growing trust in the members of CJ. A heartfelt exchange emerged between the visiting artists and the village women. The process of interacting with CJ and the artists, reflecting on their lives and their hopes, constitutes a unique journey for the women, one that is enabling them to place increased value on their work, on themselves as individuals, and on their community. One midwife, an emerging leader amongst them, summarized their thinking: "When the paintings are exhibited, people will know the name 'Tlamacazapa.' The paintings will depict our poverty. People will know how we as women live... the work we do, our many responsibilities, how little authority we

possess. We will sell more baskets."

The artists visited all the women's homes, painting and sketching, observing and engaging in extended discussions. Watching the women weave rapidly while carrying on full conversations, the visiting artists awkwardly tried to weave small baskets, highlighting the expertise needed to produce "art in palm."

Breaking silence

Prior to the arrival of the artists, the women used disposable cameras to photograph their children, their homes, baptisms and other celebrations, people weaving and working. The photos helped the women talk about their daily lives; some did so tearfully, pain in their voices when breaking silence about personal experiences with violence and harsh machismo. One single mother, abandoned when pregnant with her second daughter, said, "The women here tolerate and do not speak. I think the answer is to speak. We need to speak in order to solve our problems... I want to be courageous. If I remain fearful, I will never get ahead. To speak is better."

In this disorganized and violent setting, at different times and at their own rhythm, the participants accept that the real work lies in transforming this silence, this silence that permits the continuation of physical and spiritual toxicity, into an accurate naming of their environmental dynamics and, subsequently, into a slowly-building yet compelling call to action.

The paint and ink of artists

Left sadly reminiscent by memories of his birthplace of Afghanistan, Yar drew from his own experience of the violence of poverty to interpret the realities of this



NIGEL HAYDU 2006

Their goal — “clean water for all” — reflects their belief that access to sufficient pure water and a harmonious environment are basic human rights and a collective responsibility.

village. Recognizing art as a powerful vehicle for social change, he believes that the “Reweaving a Life” Art Project will stimulate debate about human rights, including the right to access enough clean water and the universal need for peace. Karen’s colourful depictions of the community focus on the glimmer of hope symbolized by the planting of flowers in old pots and oil cans — an attempt at beauty in a despairing world, and a symbol of the renewal achieved by the work of women. Maya’s paintings capture the constant interweaving of women’s many responsibilities with the undercurrents of tension and the bleakness of life and death. Through his etchings, Aranda provides a glimpse of the women’s souls, portraying their small silhouettes walking in cheap plastic sandals as well as their strong spirits shouldering long days of mandatory work.

Tangible hopefulness: women, weaving and water

In 2005, the women walked the physically challenging and spiritually rewarding pilgrimage along an ancient Nahua route from Amatlan to Mexico City. The Exhibition signals a second pilgrimage, one that leads to an intimate public view-

ing of their lives, their struggles, and their advancing work. Their stories, told with the artists’ tools of paint and ink, are rich in movement from oppression to the freeing of spirit, and merit close attention.

The “Reweaving a Life” Exhibition opened on September 21 and runs until November 5 at the prestigious National Museum of Popular Culture in Mexico City, a museum dedicated to indigenous culture and cosmology. After traveling to further locations in Mexico, the project will tour in central and western Canada. The Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario, has invited the women weavers to Canada for the Planet IndigenUS Festival in August 2007, a festival that employs traditional artists to celebrate the indigenous spirit and will to survive. The Tlmacazapa women weavers will be highlighted as indigenous artists, demonstrating an ancient art form that has been preserved over centuries.

These courageous village women collaborate with CJ to investigate, document, and act on the contamination of their environment in order to support the betterment of life for their people. Their goal — “clean water for all” — reflects their belief that access to sufficient pure water and a harmonious environment are basic



ETCHING BY ARTIST: ALEJANDRO GONZALEZ ARANDA

human rights and a collective responsibility. Through their work, they are growing stronger, and gaining new perspectives and confidence. It is an empowering moment—a time when people realize that they can reweave their lives. They can create a new reality, one richly woven with hopeful purpose, pride, and peace. ❧

Susan Smith, PhD, is Director and Founder of Caminamos Juntos para Salud y Desarrollo, A.C., working since 1997 in Tlmacazapa. www.caminamosjuntos.org Email: susan@caminaamosjuntos.org

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The “Reweaving a Life” Art Exhibition is co-sponsored by **Caminamos Juntos para Salud y Desarrollo, A. C.** (Walking Together for Health and Development, Cuernavaca, Mexico) (www.caminamosjuntos.org) and the **Ontario Public Interest Research Group** (McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario) with financial support of the Canadian Auto Workers Social Justice Fund; the United Food and Commercial Workers Canada Humanitarian Fund; and the Belleville Tlmacazapa Clean Water Corp.



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Rivers of Change

Monumental Cultural Expressions

Judy McNaughton

Creative cultural expression is among society's most powerful forces, inviting many attempts to control it—particularly in the realm of public spaces and community memorials. The degree of the threat can be measured in monolithic monuments, erected to create the illusion that culture and history can be safely memorialized in concrete, denying a community's multiple perspectives and identities. How could the perspectives and histories of a community be honoured in a way that involves the creative expression of present realities and multiple perspectives? And what form would truly populist public art take?

As the resident artist in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, I was invited by local agencies and residents to help search out answers to such questions. I came to Prince Albert five years ago as resident artist with the community-based arts organization Common Weal Community Arts, whose mandate is to link artists and communities for social change.

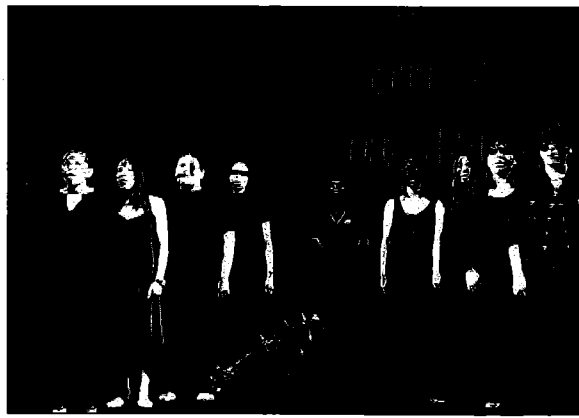
Common Weal creates partnerships with communities to develop and present collaborative artist and community arts projects. These projects encourage the development of cultural identity and creative expression. Common Weal facilitates access to the arts for communities with geographic, cultural, economic, or social barriers. Professional artists and communities are brought together in a mutually transformative, collaborative process.

Prince Albert has been called the "gateway to the North," as it services the needs of many smaller northern communities. Being a small city with seven correctional facilities and a penitentiary creates a population that is split between the transitory families of the incarcerated and those with positions that serve this community. Within the region are many cultural groups that

have long, difficult, and complex histories of interaction — and isolation. In most of the province, the history of colonization, rebellion, and suppression is understood through history texts; in this region, it is played out in the daily interaction of its distinct groups: the old English families, the First Nations groups, the Metis, and the French, to name a few.

May 2003 marked the opening of an upscale performing arts center in Prince Albert. There had been a fear that this impressive new structure, built near the riverbank and economically and culturally inaccessible to many, would serve as one more monument to the conquering fathers. In response to this fear, some schools and agencies wished to create an event that would make this structure theirs in some way by introducing their constituency to the building and vice versa. Five Saskatchewan artists were invited into 11 community schools to do workshops with students and develop a performance that was to take place in the new performing arts centre. The performance also involved the historically loaded location of the riverbank, the first point of European contact in the region.

The five artists — singer and storyteller Joseph Naytowhow, ritual-based collaborative performance artist Reona Brass, performer Michelle Sereda, sculptor Mike Jozsa, and actor and musician Erroll Kinistino — worked with students over a two-week period, developing elements of collaborative performances. They worked intensely with the students, each other, and myself to envision a coherent, evocative work that would include the community members, the school students, and the physical and cultural landscape of the city.



Artist Reona Brass with students singing the "Strong Woman Song."

On the day of the performance, students, families, and local residents met at the new performing arts centre, where students were part of productions developed within the schools and with the artists. The mood was celebratory, with local families filling the building to capacity, and then some.

As the performances drew to a close, a teenage girl dressed in black with black face paint executed a slow, reverent break-dance to a traditional First Nations drum song under a spotlight. When the lights came up on the stage, Brass and several teenage girls in black dresses and facepaint stood in solemn formation around a red willow canoe. Behind them was the projection of a video with images of the river and the girls talking and goofing around on the riverbank. As the girls on the stage began to sing the haunting "Strong Woman Song," several youth carrying tall willow poles wrapped in coloured cloth made their way silently out of the audience to the stage. When the song ended, the red willow canoe was passed off the stage and carried out of the building to the riverbank. The attending families followed, holding votive candles cradled in bowls made of leaves, to the riverbank where a number of canoes glowing red with votive candles moved down the river. Offerings of tobacco pouches were thrown into the river as the canoes moved down the river and out of sight.

This event incorporated historic and traditional references blended with elements of contemporary realities to emphasize the continuum of history in which present conditions are not isolated, but inextricably connected with the past. The event also reclaims



The canoe made by students with artist Mike Josza.

the site of the riverbank, creating an alternative form of monument — not the mortuary monuments to conquest, but a living, performative monument that acknowledges the complexity and difficulty of the present situ-

ation in this historically loaded place.

In addition to the performance event, the Prince Albert residency initiated a series of ceramic murals designed with the help of local elders and artists that were

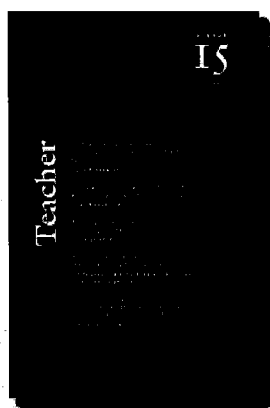
placed in public places. Residents and students decorated hundreds of tiles, personalizing them with their names, notes to loved ones, and images. The two murals have elements in the design referencing important First Nations imagery. The majority of students in these schools are of First Nations ancestry, and, though the imagery is specific to certain local groups, they are images that are widely recognized and respected throughout the community.

Through this process, individuals and groups were provided a forum to explore their aesthetics and identities. These unique expressions of social values were communicated to the broader public, creating a forum for dialogue and, hopefully, understanding. Community projects, including hip-hop dance and songwriting, aerosol art murals, and visual arts and writing projects with incarcerated women, have continued in the city of Prince Albert and the surrounding area. ❧

Judy McNaughton is an artist and cultural worker living in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

Feminist Teacher

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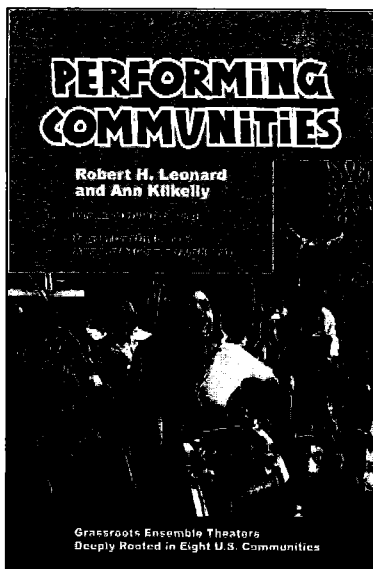
In Print

All books reviewed below are available or can be ordered at the Toronto Women's Bookstore, advertised in this issue.

PERFORMING COMMUNITIES: GRASSROOTS ENSEMBLE THEATERS DEEPLY ROOTED IN EIGHT U.S. COMMUNITIES

Robert H. Leonard and Ann Kilkelly
New Village Press, 2005
\$19.95 US

Review by Heather McLean



Performance is intrinsically a highly political act. By putting images of human behaviour onstage for an audience to recognize and analyze, performance creates dialogue, culture, community and identity. These politics are explored in **Performing Communities**, an anthology edited by Robert Leonard and Ann Kilkelly, that illustrates the myriad ways the concept of community is fostered by American

theatre ensemble groups who work collaboratively in the places where they live. The groups are diverse, ranging from inner city Los Angeles and small town northern California, to low income central Appalachia and the South Bronx, revealing how theatre and performance provide tools for encouraging civic dialogue on various social issues, and give residents creative opportunities to shape local politics.

In contrast to mainstream theatre that often reproduces a hierarchy of producers, actors, and playwrights, while placing the audience in a passive role, these performance examples disrupt the traditional relationships and strive for a more egalitarian ideal. Committed to interaction with the residents of the various communities in which

these theatre groups work, the actors, playwrights, and community development animators discussed in this book utilize a range of techniques to incorporate community members in developing narratives.

By working with residents, an intimacy of place, culture, identification, and struggle against the homogenized world of mainstream popular culture is revealed in these plays. These performances also provide creative opportunities to engage residents in discussions about local environmental issues. For example, Robert Leonard and Ann Kilkelly's chapter entitled, "Findings: Knowing the Secrets Behind the Laughter," illustrates how music, storytelling, and theatre provide opportunities for residents, educators, and community workers to develop stories about environmental politics in a small Californian resource-dependent community with a history of struggles between loggers and environmentalists. The Dell'Arte artists work with residents to reveal the contested terrain of local politics, assisting residents in exposing the many layers of conflict that shape their community. Joan Schirle of Dell'Arte explains their role has "not been to side with one or the other, but to reveal the kind of complex human web that underlies that. Fear."

Humor is a tool used to disrupt entrenched opinions, and to illustrate the humanity of the residents involved in these conflicts. In one play, for example, prominent activists on opposite sides of a conflict between forestry workers and environmentalists sang the duet "Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better," with lyrics rewritten for the political topics.

Art provides opportunities to help complex stories become visible through living, moving bodies, song, and storytelling. The plays of Carpetbag Theatre, for example, portray the entanglements of race, class, and gender, and the experiences of young African-American parents in poetry, storytelling, and theatre. Their performances provide rich dialogue and a unique alternative to academia, journalism, or policy-writing, as they get to work with young people and various community-based grassroots groups.

In an environment of diminishing funding for the arts, the contributors to **Performing Communities** leave the reader wondering how the arts organizations discussed manage to develop such creative performance pieces while scrambling to stay economically afloat? Also related to the funding question is how do these ensemble theatres work in communities with limited public spaces in which to perform? While **Performing Communities** is limited to American theatre groups central to the Community Arts Network, there are equally lively networks in Canada and throughout the world connecting performance and politics. **Performing Communities** provides rich insights for anyone interested in engaging with communities through performance, and fostering com-

plex, creative dialogue.

Heather McLean worked in community development and urban planning for five years and is now in the second year of her PhD in Environmental Studies at York. Her areas of interest include the politics of public space, gentrification, and performance studies.

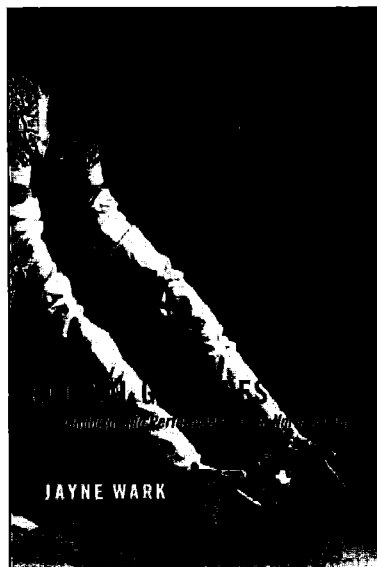
RADICAL GESTURES: FEMINISM AND PERFORMANCE ART IN NORTH AMERICA

Jayne Wark

McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006

\$32.95 CDN (paperback) \$80.00 CDN (cloth cover)

Review by Briony Smith



Jayne Wark's text **Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America** has brief flashes of colourful anecdotes and language that provide a respite from the dense theory that pads out the majority of the text, but it can't transcend its academic thrust to appeal to any but the most thesis-minded.

Its chock-a-block theory makes **Radical Gestures** decidedly not

for the faint of heart. The book assumes knowledge of several major art movements, including conceptualism,

modernism, and minimalism, and tosses about complex feminist terms and references without explanation. Sentences, such as the ponderous "He added further that the neo-avant-garde addressed the relationship between art and the praxis of life not by collapsing the two but rather by testing the conventions of each with reference to the conventions of the other — that is, by testing the limits of art in relation to commodity and industrial forms of bourgeois capitalism within the specific context of the postwar period," often require decoding, whether of the unfamiliar terms rolled out within them, or, if you're jargon-savvy, of the multiple clauses jammed together. Even though it is undeniable that a record of the rich variety of feminist performance art is a must, it is ironic that the book gets so mired down in the high-falutin' academic language and theory that is accessible to so very few, at the same time tamping down considerably the joy, vibrancy, wit, and zest present in these artworks.

Documentation of the actual art is, in fact, the saving grace of the book. It covers a wide range of North American performance artists and, while the emphasis is on American artists, some Canadian artists get their due, too. There is a good variety of different types of performance described here — from the creation of different personae to unsettling video confessions to shocking live street performances — and the different sections of the book make it a little easier to see what each artist was tackling.

The matter-of-a-fact tone, reams of theory, and tons of quotations from other theorists make this a very thorough, useful resource for women's studies or art history students putting together their dissertations. It's a pity, however, that the book didn't take a more artistic form, in line with its content, by dramatizing the stories, a la creative non-fiction, and thus bringing these women's achievements to life once again through narrative storytelling, which would showcase the artist's background, for example, or the aftermath of each piece. This, (with, perhaps, only the most essential theory, explained in

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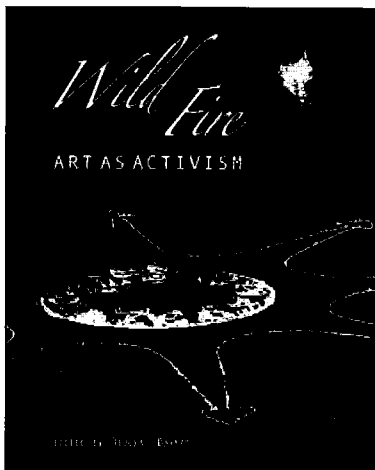
simple terms, to keep the book on the academic side of things) would illuminate, rather than simply enumerate, their import in the history of art and feminism. The theory is important, I suppose, but not as important as the women's art—and it should speak for itself.

Briony Smith is a born-again feminist, editor, and writer living in Toronto. Born and bred in British Columbia, her interests include gender issues, sex-worker and gay rights, and sex-positiveness advocacy.

WILD FIRE: ART AS ACTIVISM

Edited by Deborah Barndt
Sumach Press, 2006
\$26.95 CDN

Review by Dallas Curow



Inspired by the success of several projects within York University's Masters in Environmental Studies program, **Wild Fire: Art as Activism** was born in the flames of activism past and present. While many of the contributors are students, they are also activists, and were not content to let their stories sit on the library

shelves. Instead, the individual projects were brought together into a collective statement about how art can be activism.

As editor Deborah Barndt explains in her introduction, the essays in *Wild Fire* challenge conventional understandings of art, activism, and academia. By exploring the many ways in which academically-informed art can create activism, and how intellectual activists create art, the essays highlight the overlaps between these disciplines. The text seeks to prove how definitions of what constitutes art should be reconsidered. The authors argue against the commodification of art, and question "the elitism and individualism of conventional art practices, and the internalized oppression that most of us suffer from when we say 'I can't draw.'" By showing a range of ways in which ordinary people produce art in a variety of ways, *Wild Fire* seeks to show the accessibility of art.

The book is divided into four sections. The first, "Art

in Social Movements," covers a variety of topics, ranging from the creation of community mural projects with urban youth to Canadians' experiences in community-based publication projects in Nicaragua's Sardinista revolution to collective vocalizing and the role of the voice in social movements.

The second section, "Art as Activism," features chapters on street performance as a tool of protestation and demonstration, discussing Muslim women creating a book of self-representation as a way of challenging their frequent misrepresentation in Western media, and East Asian women "jamming" with words and images to explore issues of women's rights.

"Eco Art," the third section, focuses on a shared lamentation of the disappearance of green space in cities, and artistic/activist efforts to reclaim urban landscape by bringing nature to the city in the form of balcony gardens, tree planting, and nature-themed art installations.

The final section, "Art Heals," features essays on different ways of using art as a healing tool to activate health. One author discusses the technique of phototherapy, the practice of healing through re-telling of personal stories and visual imagery. Another unveils the world of immigrant women detainees and their children, and the art and activity within the holding facilities.

The diverse assortment of subject matter throughout the text leads the reader in many directions: topically, mentally and emotionally. The approachable narrative created by Barndt, however, weaves the chapters together, as does the authors' energy and idealism.

It is not the final products of the authors' efforts that are investigated in this text, but the processes of and reflections on each project that is of interest. Many of the essays begin with questions that are never wholly answered. While this might generally invite criticism, in the case of a text about processes, unanswered questions are thought-provoking, and encourage readers to search for the answers themselves. Barndt puts out a call to arms, saying, "We challenge you, the reader, to reconsider how art, activism, and academics are framed and practiced. We also ask you to rethink their interrelationship."

Wild Fire illustrates that people in academia can lend their strengths to artistic and activist pursuits successfully, but it also encourages academics to consider using artistic and activist philosophies to fire up their own work.

Dallas Curow has a BA in Media Information Technoculture from the University of Western Ontario. She is currently completing a Master's degree in Media Studies at Concordia University. In her free time, she is a freelance writer and musician.

Updates

On Your Mark, Get Set: Is the Government of Canada Ready to Take Action on CEDAW?

Sandra Kerr

On May 17, 2006, during an event at Parliament Hill entitled, "25 Years: Ready Or Not?", the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) called for action on the issue of women's rights. The event was part of FAFIA's ongoing 25th anniversary campaign to raise awareness of the UN Convention to Eliminate All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In 1981, Canada was among the first countries to sign CEDAW, the most comprehensive treaty on women's human rights. Over the past 25 years, the UN's CEDAW committee has let Canada know that its performance lags far behind. The anniversary event served as a reminder of the current government's ability to take the lead on a positive and progressive approach towards fulfillment of CEDAW obligations.

Speakers from among the 45 MP's and four political parties represented at the event included: Irene Mathyssen, Critic, Status of Women, New Democratic Party (NDP); Maria Minna, Critic, Status of Women, Liberal Party; Maria Mourani,, Critic, Status of Women, Bloc Quebecois; and Joy Smith, Conservative. Jack Layton, leader of the New Democratic Party, was also present at the event. In addition, representatives brought greetings from the National Association of Women and the Law, and the Standing Committee on Human Rights. Each speaker restated their interest in protecting the rights of women, their dedication to definitive government action based on CEDAW, and reminded all in the room of the importance of increasing efforts towards women's equality. As MP Mourani stated, "The fight of women is the fight for humanity."

The many FAFIA members in attendance also had the opportunity to discuss with parliamentarians issues of accountability for and commitment to the human rights of women.

Due to FAFIA's challenge campaign, and the campaign pledge, the four party leaders and nearly fifty MP's have pledged to "support concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure governments fully uphold their equality commitments to women in Canada." FAFIA continues to raise awareness among MP's, senators, and party leaders through its initiatives.

Canada, and the women's community, have come a long way in a quarter-century. Yet the issues of Canadian women's human rights need urgent attention. Women and men must approach their elected representative now to encourage Canada to fulfill its obligations to CEDAW. With the full support of the government, Canada

has the ability to ensure that CEDAW's 25th anniversary year is remembered as a year of quantifiable progress for Canadian women's human rights.

For more information on FAFIA, an extensive alliance of more than 50 Canadian women's and human rights organizations, visit www.fafia.com.

For the text of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), visit www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/e1cedaw.htm.

Sandra Kerr is a 2007 Master of Environmental Studies (Urban Planning) candidate at York University. She is also a member of Toronto Women's Call to Action.

Announcements

Transnationalism, Activism, Art Conference March 8 - 11, 2007

University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada
For details contact, Aine McGlynn and Kit Dobson
Department of English, 7 King's College Circle, Toronto,
Ontario, Canada M5S 3K1
TransnationalismActivismArt@gmail.com

What are the practical applications for a transnational ethic, ie one that allows for fluid concepts of national identity while also acknowledging the vexed relationship between cultural products and transnational capital? This conference is interested not just in theorizing the genealogies of the transnational, but also in demonstrating the ways in which transnationalism is being articulated and applied in theory, art, politics, education, urban planning, travel, public policy, design, etc. Speakers include Robert JC Young, Gayatri Gopinath, Timothy Brennan, Henry Giroux, Lee Maracle and Declan Kiberd.

This conference is run with the support of the Department for English, the Centre for Diaspora Studies, Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, First Nations House, Graduate Collaborative Program in Women's Studies, Department of Equity Studies, and Sociology and Equity Studies in Education (OISE/UT).

Eva Quintas' Portraits of Resistance

An Overview

Ann Danilevich

The arresting series of portraits by artist Eva Quintas, collectively titled "Portraits of Resistance," was initiated during her residency in Mexico in 2004, which was supported by the Quebec Art Council. While walking a busy Mexican street, Quintas encountered a group of Aztec warrior dancers. A medley of contemporary signs, advertisements, and storefronts, surrounded the traditionally dressed dancers. Their dress and dance made a unique element of their heritage visible to a public all too quick to assimilate them. They were engaged in a form of resistance.

In the months that followed, Quintas met with the group weekly, and began to photograph them, carefully constructing their portraits to incorporate references that were understood, accepted, and sometimes, specifically asked for by each dancer. Each image shows a perspective and experience unique to the portrayed individual, as the final product is always negotiated.

In *The Lovers of Tlateloloco*, Quintas juxtaposes the portraits of two dancers with images of partly-buried human bones. Quintas states that "the 'constructed' portraits combine symbolic and mythological elements from traditional culture with references to the conflicts which cross Mexico today: violence of a kind of clandestine migration, repression of social movements. Here, the 'warriors' rehabilitate and renew memory and tradition by projecting them in the contemporary and plural city." It is the cultural contradictions of modernity, tradition and conflict that Quintas highlights in her work.

The work *Guerrera Mexhika* portrays a warrior dancer with a spectacular yellow and blue feathered headdress, set against an assortment of overlapping street signs. The bright colours of the signs engulf the warrior, making her seem almost indistinguishable from the background. She is part of the modern world, not separate from it. Alternatively, *Guadalupe* features a warrior dancer

(like the warriors in her photos). There are simultaneous varied resistances going on in Mexico — resistances to tradition, to modernization, to assimilation and to appropriation. The plethora of these individual and group resistances is what Quintas conveys in her work, each photo being its own platform.

Resistance can be found across cultures and countries. After her residency, Quintas continued similar work in Montreal, Quebec, where she photographed Quebec Aborigines who were also often dancers, as in the image *Wendake*. Furthermore, she extended her work to include non-native members of the Montreal arts community, engaged in their own forms of cultural, political, and artistic resistance. The photographs *Untitled* and *Amazon* are part of that body of work.

Prior to her residency in Mexico, Quintas produced constructed portraits in Japan. In the Japan series, she contrasted traditional elements of Japanese culture and myth with contemporary features of Japanese society. This series sought to depict the "made-up aspects of our cultural perceptions": the image *Celle qui proufend l'erreur* is a good example.

Quintas' photographs featured in this issue of WEI are highlights of a much larger body of work. At present, Quintas continues to photograph portraits of resistance. Her work evolves with each subject, as each individual shares their own set of ideas, beliefs, and resistances. ❧

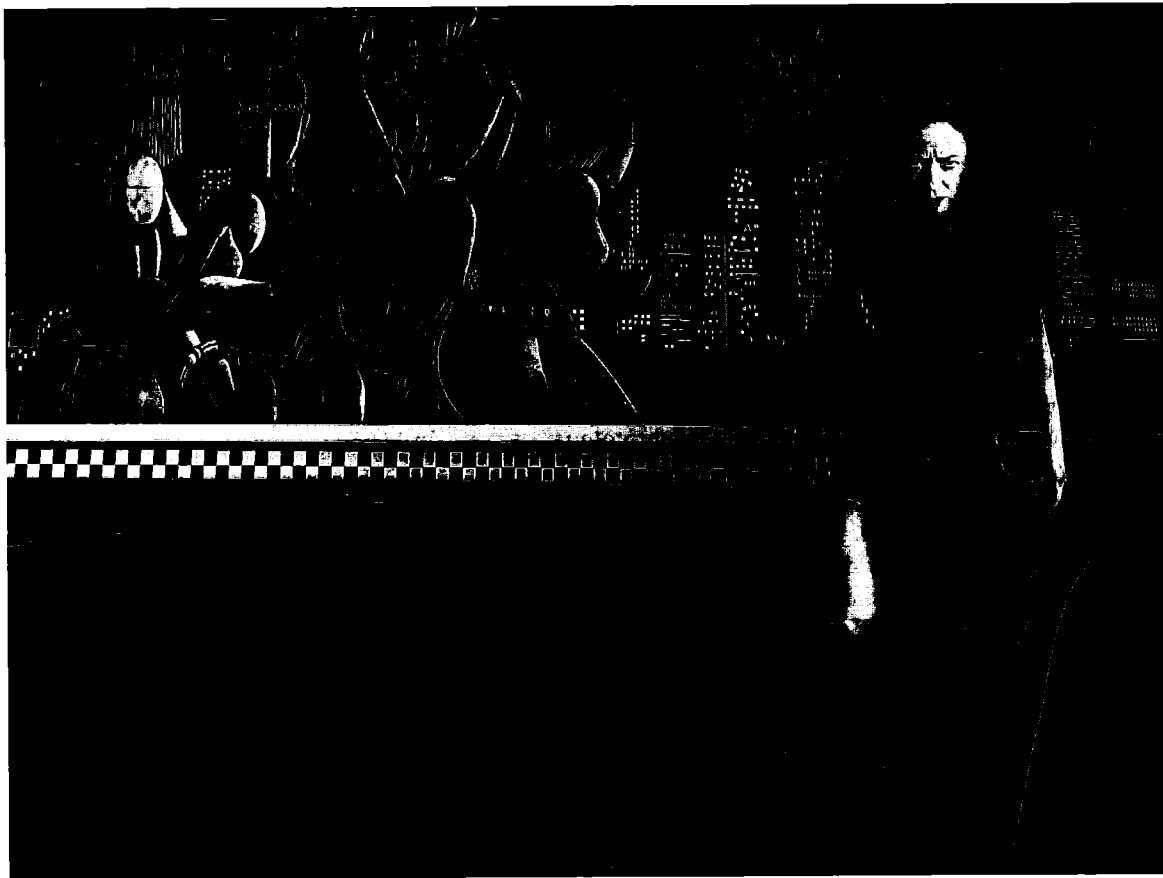
Ann Danilevich is an MA candidate in Media Studies at Concordia University. She is also an independent writer, whose work focuses on contemporary art and culture.



Celle qui proufend l'erreur

worshiping a traditional Aztec deity and the Christian Madonna. Over generations some Mexicans of Aztec descent integrated Christianity into older religious belief systems, thereby not keeping to the traditions of a single religion exclusively.

In present-day Mexico, as Quintas describes, there is a movement to rejuvenate traditional culture. The Mexican streets are filled with various performance groups dancing the traditional "war dance"



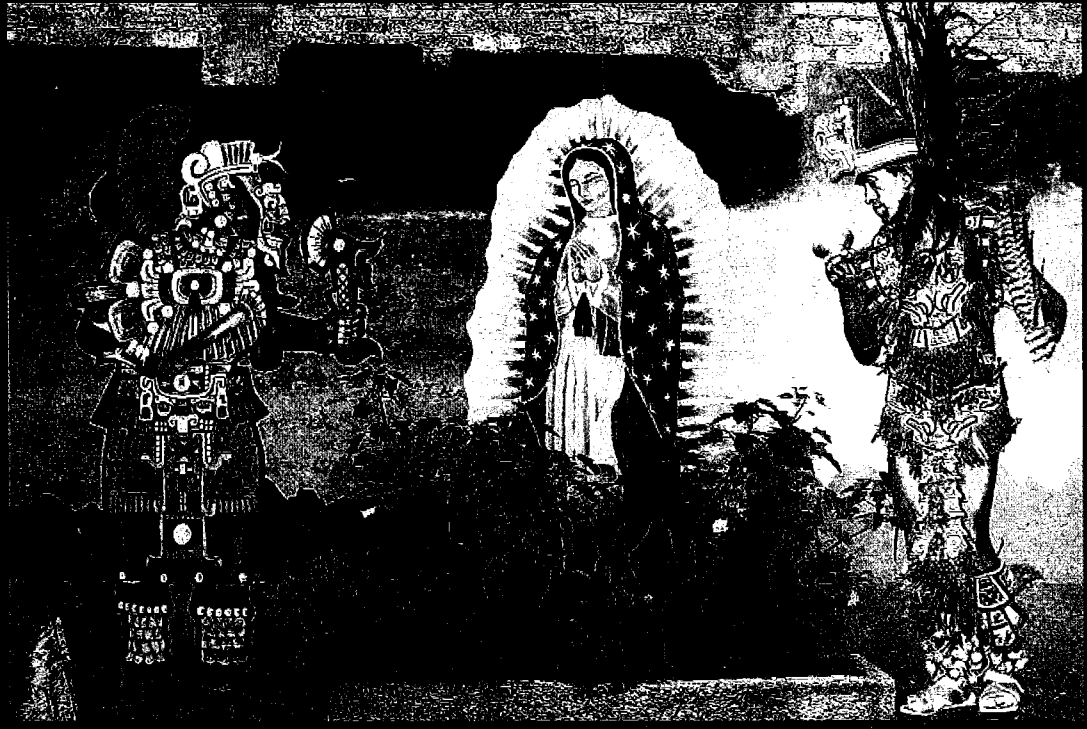
Amazone



The Lovers of
Talelaloco



LEFT: Guerrera Mexhika
BELOW: Guadalupe



Eva Quintas has exhibited as a photographer since 1990, both in Quebec and abroad. In 1997, she began working with multimedia creation, producing various web-based projects, video installations, and a fiction on CD-ROM. Her practice relies on the digital process of the image and collaborative work with other artists. Her work, rooted in the ritual of portraiture, questions cultural identities and mythologies. She is active in the Montreal cultural milieu and is the founder/chair and artistic director of Agence TOPO (www.AgenceTOPO.qc.ca), an artist-run center dedicated to the convergence of photography, literature, and new media. Quintas will be having a solo show at Galerie Luz, in Montreal, May 2 - May 26, 2007.

RIGHT: Untitled
BELOW: Wendake



ARTIST PROFILE