

John Boyle, Greg Curnoe and Joyce Wieland: Erotic Art  
and English Canadian Nationalism

by

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation concerns the relation between eroticism and nationalism in the work of a set of English Canadian artists in the mid-1960s-70s, namely John Boyle, Greg Curnoe, and Joyce Wieland. It contends that within their bodies of work there are ways of imagining nationalism and eroticism that are often formally or conceptually interrelated, either by strategy or figuration, and at times indistinguishable. This was evident in the content of their work, in the models that they established for interpreting it and present in more and less overt forms in some of the ways of imagining an English Canadian nationalism that surrounded them.

The dissertation contextualizes the three artists in the terms of erotic art prevalent in the twentieth century and makes a case for them as part of a uniquely Canadian mode of decadence. Constructing my case largely from the published and unpublished writing of the three subjects and how these played against their reception, I have attempted to elaborate their artistic models and processes, as well as their understandings of eroticism and nationalism, situating them within the discourses on English Canadian nationalism and its potentially morbid prospects. Rather than treating this as a primarily cultural or socio-political issue, it is treated as both an epistemic and formal one.

The artistic material discussed consistently revels in irony, negativity, sarcasm and parody, treating abstraction, politics, and pornography on exchangeable footing and frequently mocks or derides the sociological value of art while simultaneously positing itself as a nationalist art. This, paradoxical or absurd though it may be, I think is important, because it demonstrates a need to shift from reducing nationalism in its artistic

expression to a mode of meaning production and community formation to recognizing that it can be, and was, something quite different.

For these three artists, nationalism was conceived not so much as the affirmation of a living community but of its deadness, noting its *irreality*, celebrating its destruction, or satirizing whatever values it could claim. Eroticism was consistently treated as a form of fragmentation or self-erasure and tied to deliberate abjection. In Curnoe, Boyle and some of the other Regionalists, art was a radical materiality that denied any privilege to meaning or experience, denigrated the value of the viewer, perverted a rational sense of representation, effectively treating the subject as another machine for processing matter and refusing it narrative substance. In Wieland something quite different occurred. She created a hyper-symbolic mode of imagining the world that derided the subject and their phenomenal life as little more than excrement and treated the symbol or stereotype as the vessel of a holy transcendent reality.

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## Introduction

This dissertation concerns the relation between eroticism and nationalism in the work of a set of English Canadian artists in the mid-1960s-70s, namely John Boyle, Greg Curnoe, and Joyce Wieland. It contends that within their bodies of work there are ways of imagining nationalism and eroticism that are often formally or conceptually interrelated, either by strategy or figuration, and at times indistinguishable. This was evident in the content of their work, in the models that they established for interpreting it and present in more and less overt forms in some of the ways of imagining an English Canadian nationalism that surrounded them.

To demonstrate this, I conduct a set of case studies of bodies of work by these artists. These are close readings informed by both public and private statements by the artists, as well as by their reception. I am not claiming that the artists provided completely coherent bodies of work or statements that are strictly reducible to the readings I provide of them. Each of these artists was contradictory and appeared to enjoy mocking the notion of consistency. Nonetheless, their bodies of work, and what claims they made to justify them, did contain an extraordinary consistency (more in the sense of its thickness than logic) which, if taken seriously, leads in some curious directions.

These were not obscure artists but several of the highest profile in the country at the time and, with the conspicuous exception of Boyle, have been some of the most written about in Canadian art history. They were also explicitly portrayed as nationalist artists, both by their own admission and as much in how they were represented by the press. Yet, a close examination of their art practices, aesthetic and theoretical claims may undermine much that is basic to claims about nationalist art and its alleged social function

or content, as well as substantially complicating much of the scholarship that has accrued on these artists over the past several decades. Part of the reason for this general misapprehension, *if* that is what it is, has been the ignoring or sidelining of the problems posed by the erotic which, when noted, is excised from the assumptions common to erotic art and within the artists' own thinking. There may be a straightforward reason for this, namely that the normative frameworks commonplace to art historical discourse are founded on taking as real what erotic thought suggests is specious. Reconsidering this would allow for a reconceptualization of artistic nationalism that is basically anti-political and nihilistic, and potentially undermines what Leo Bersani has characterized as *the culture of redemption* through its eroticism and its "*jouissance* of self-fragmentation."<sup>1</sup>

For Bersani, building on the work of Georges Bataille and others, his polemical claim is that redemptive concepts of art, present in psychoanalytic models (but also Marxism, although this can be extended to cultural studies in general), function as a form of 'humanistic criticism' that seeks to redeem 'damaged experience' or alienation.<sup>2</sup> Such approaches presume that art either creates 'knowledge' of some ostensible social world, whether by symptom or representation, or that it has a therapeutic function, repairing the wounds of life and elevating its perishable and ephemeral aspects, alleging both psychological subjects and social life. With the help of its analysts and the 'cures' they apply to it, art then serves as a tool for the 'correction' of humanity, relying on a series of presumed laws, derived from pseudo-sciences like psychoanalysis and sociology, that produce the 'heuristic lie' of interpretive authority. The redemptive view of art invents a 'true world' that it uses to attack appearance and negate art.<sup>3</sup> This is done through the construction of hermeneutic master codes to deal with manufactured symptoms. Far from

really analysing anything, such techniques are, at best, “symptomatic versions of the very processes they purport to explain.”<sup>4</sup> The fantasies of redeeming art basic to cultural studies, in other words, do not provide any plausible insight into art, but actually mystify it by striving to make it socio-politically or culturally meaningful and treating it as a source of useful ‘knowledge’ about the ‘world’ as imagined within socio-political hypostases.<sup>5</sup> Bersani’s work, both in *The Culture of Redemption* and more generally, tracks how, regardless of ostensible reparative intent, art or theory’s attempts to concoct knowledge or heal the split between the world and art, inevitably end up doing something very different, finally collapsing under the weight of their own accumulated ironies.<sup>6</sup>

One of the principle ironies of work done on these artists has been precisely that it has been predicated on reading them in the terms of a positivistic liberal humanism when almost everything about the logic of the works, and the cosmologies that they embraced, sits uncomfortably with this. Wieland, in particular, has suffered at the hands of those who have deployed various schools of feminist thought against her. For instance, in the essays dealing with Wieland’s work in *Woman as Goddess: Liberated Nudes by Robert Markle and Joyce Wieland* (2003), this is particularly true of Brenda Lafleur’s essay, which relies on Judith Butler, Jacques Lacan and Griselda Pollock to the point of effacing almost everything Wieland said or the formal implications of her work.<sup>7</sup> In practice, this recourse to theory has resulted in a consistent incapacity or unwillingness to think through the strangeness of Canadian eroticism. Yet, despite trappings that would invest art into a productive relationship with socio-political reality, the art at stake is oriented more to what John Boyle deemed ‘masochism’ and called a drive toward “making ourselves helpless, weak, shapeless, mindless, armless, legless, toothless, powerless,

thalidomide, protoplasmic blobs” than it is to constructing useful statements about the world.<sup>8</sup>

As well as being basic to the ideological conventions of cultural studies, the therapeutic or redemptive claim for art was one avowed by the Canadian Liberal regime. This is best exemplified by Francine Larivée’s *La Chambre nuptiale* (1974-1976) which, in addition to being a case of the new art advanced by the Liberal state, expressed its ideological premises in overtly sexualized terms.<sup>9</sup> A massive work in the mold of the multimedia environments of Expo 67, *Chambre* was also conceived in the context of the International Year of the Woman and finished for public display in 1976. It first appeared at the shopping centre and office building Complexe Desjardins before moving into the mall Carrefour Laval and then on to the pavilion for *Québec Art et société* at Terre des Hommes on the former Expo site.<sup>10</sup> The exhibition was compared to the ‘grands cirques d’antan’<sup>11</sup> or “des nombreux pavillons thématiques érigés à Terre des Hommes en 1967.”<sup>12</sup>

*Chambre* was designed for a blank white space. [Figs. 1-2] At its centre was a closed circular structure that was entered by a flap. The interior was composed of three rooms, like a three ring circus – a labyrinth (*Le Corridor des Angoisses*), the chapel-room (*Chapelle ardent*) and the projection room. After entering, the viewers (in groups of 30 or less) encountered fragmentary sculptured bodies and the birth of a child. They then filed along a corridor, its shape reminiscent of an umbilical cord, the walls made of life-sized polyurethane sculptures of people with latex faces, posed as male and female stereotypes. The palette was white and beige, and the soundtrack was amplified sighs and breathing. The second room, domed and golden, recalled baroque churches, and foregrounded the

work's attack on both the power of the Church and the institution of marriage.<sup>13</sup> It contained three altars – one for the Man, one the Woman, and one the Couple – replete with images referencing religious and pop culture (movie loves scenes with the lovers sporting halos). [Figs. 3-5] At the centre of the entire piece was a hybridized bed and burial vault; two automatons had sex in their wedding clothes above and the bride was laid out dead below. The journey completed, a film screen appeared to explain the themes of the show to the viewer. *Le Devoir* summarized: “Traité en bande dessinée, un court-métrage complète cet aperçu critique d’une situation sociale où régné trop souvent la disparition des valeurs nobles et essentielles au profit d’un mutisme oppressant et insidieux, d’une lente torture de l’esprit et du corps de la femme et de l’homme.”<sup>14</sup>

Liberated from this phantasmagoria of the past, the viewers went back into the shopping mall where they were met by interpreters and sociologists who offered information on mental and physical health and solicited commentary.<sup>15</sup> The work was calculated as an exercise in communication and pedagogy. Curiously, almost all the media coverage the work received consisted primarily of relaying Larivée's press communiqués with little to no criticism or reflection.<sup>16</sup> The artist stressed that, much like Expo, it was principally financed by every level of government as a kind of perfectly articulated model of federalism and its association with ‘projet spéciaux’ such as the International Year of the Woman.<sup>17</sup> Anithe de Carvalho has argued that the environment, both in terms of its aesthetics and aims, was remarkably in step with shifts in official cultural policy and the more sociological or anthropological idealization of art being proffered by the state's bureaucrats and their drive for “la démocratisation de la culture” designed to result in the expression of greater pluralism.<sup>18</sup>

For the three artists that concern us – Boyle, Curnoe and Wieland – these tendencies to historical phantasmagoria and even large scale public art will be used and perverted, exploiting the pluralization of meaning in order to negate communication, using common discourses appropriated from different models of Canadian nationalism and utilizing public art spaces as tools for exhibitionism that could be masturbatory (Boyle) or scatological (Wieland). In this, they were taking advantage of the expansion of the Liberal state and its increasing presence in the art world. But this perversion was also accompanied by a kind of divergence, or what Scott Symons would term the *disjunctive* aspect of English Canadian nationalism, its refusal to be synthesized into Hegelian liberal progressivism.<sup>19</sup> This extends the implications of their work far beyond the kind of Dada playfulness that they might be accused of.

As much or little as these artists may have had to do with New York's Neo-Dada, what they approximated far more closely was something more antiquated than that, Decadence. In his *Modernism and the Occult* (2015), John Bramble identifies an 'occult revival' of esotericism in Europe in the 1890s that was coincident with the expansion of its imperial horizons. The esoteric was exotic, wondrous and part of the strangeness of modernity and the search for transcendental co-ordinates once they had been lost.<sup>20</sup> The result of artistic innovation was often the creation of new myths (nomos) that would allow for the utopian overcoming of the limits of modernity. Orientalism, Decadence, Symbolism, Theosophy, Schopenhauer, Vitalism, etc. were all part of this attempt to negotiate the transcendental and the nihilistic in equal measure against the legalist-rationalism and the sociological imaginary of liberals and progressives.

Highlighting that ‘autism’ and automatism were essential to modernist communication and its models of consciousness, Bramble points to the spiritualist obsession with vibrations and metaphysical codes, obsessions with new forms, acoustic ideas and optics.<sup>21</sup> Modernism was about making the world ‘strange’ to escape from the ‘decay’ of European tradition. In the escape from morbidity, magic and mysticism would be embraced, expressed through a bricolage aesthetic of fused cosmologies, from Tantra to *Lebensphilosophie* and shamanism.<sup>22</sup> The resulting ‘Imperial Gothic’ balanced its cosmic utopianism with a heady sense of the horror of proliferating and cracked selves.

The crack in imagination that Bramble probes was a split between middle-class positivist knowledge and an aristocratic-vulgarian axis of imperialist-orientalist occult knowledge. This could be earnest, romantic, or crude but often fell somewhere amid these, fusing the plebeian and the elite. All of this was used to pursue a regenerative ‘progress-through-primitivism’ that would reawaken the folk-soul (myths and symbols). This ‘magic socialism’ or ‘rainbow fascism’ has fluidly shifted throughout the left and right, up to and including the Beats and the counterculture movements.<sup>23</sup> The results were highly individual. Lacking dogmas to restrain the kind of myths that would appear, the alien imagery artists employed was scarcely folkish and the fantasies created were less enlightened than “for the most part full of motives, unworthy or insane.”<sup>24</sup>

By the teens, Dada artist Hugo Ball was pointing out that everyone seemed to be becoming a medium, if not for the sake of ‘real’ spiritualism, at least for the amateur variety. Modern art gnostics were priests creating picture books of eclectic magics: Books of the Dead for the age of industrialization. Bramble adds, “Contrary to believers like Yeats and Jung, Ball, though himself a modernist, detected something illicit, the

occult as the pornography of genuine spiritual tradition maybe, in the motives and methods involved.”<sup>25</sup> The methods tended to be oriented toward capturing the ‘primary process’ as much as possible. What was common to such designs, and the experimental writing and ‘sonic occultism’ that was contemporary with them, was a sense of automatism, of the channeling of the otherworldly through a psycho-archaeology expressed in rudimentary symbolism thought to distill the unconscious.

While the three artists discussed herein appropriated many elements of this broad set of traditions, they fused it to local ones as well. If the original Decadence was a flight from a decaying tradition, the decadence engaged by our three artists is a flight into Decadence and a paradoxical attempt to maintain the decay. Arthur Rimbaud and the Group of Seven are of equal significance in this. And while Boyle, Curnoe and Wieland made work from their ‘lives’, what that consisted of almost strictly was the use of art and media-to-hand or taken from these Canadian or Decadent traditions. The appropriation and remediation of Canadian history, including its art history, was equally mixed with the use of pornography, both as model and material.

The decadence of Canadian art was registered in a pejorative Marxist sense by Barry Lord.<sup>26</sup> For Lord, an advocate for socially conscious or redemptive art, there were two counterrevolutionary enemies: Decadent art and conservative art. The former was a cultural nationalist art associated with McLuhanite formalism that drained it of political value, celebrated a depopulated landscape, transformed cultural signs into no more than ‘burlesque’ and, at “the most degrading point,” an eroticized perfume.<sup>27</sup> The latter relied on a ‘realism’ whose obsessive detail exceeded human perception and a ‘cardboard classicism’ that presented a permanently frozen world.<sup>28</sup> Ironically, the art which Lord

lauds as an antidote to the decadence that he explicitly associated with Wieland was that of Boyle, Curnoe and Claude Breeze, whose work was probably as decadent as hers.

David Weir has stressed that *decadence* is a term deployed with such inconsistency historically that it can mean a wide range of contradictory things. He suggests that this is potentially useful since what it ultimately seems to designate is *indefiniton*, although his own writing on it stresses it as an ambiguous set of positions existing between romanticism and modernism.<sup>29</sup> Other historians have been less shy about nailing it down. A.E. Carter for instance, identified the decadent as the ‘self-consciously perverse’, a long-standing reaction against both naturalism and the idea of progress; if the Decadent hated industrial technology and the liberal society it produced, it loved the artificiality that it allowed for.<sup>30</sup> The figures associated with this specifically French Decadence, such as Rimbaud (and the inheritors of their tradition, the Dadaists and Surrealists), will prove to be a kind of talisman for our artists. Rimbaud and the tradition of the *poète maudit* will appear in the imagination of Boyle and Curnoe as much or more than anything going on in international art at the time they were producing the work I discuss. Wieland’s work bears more than a passing resemblance to the artificial paradise constructed by Joris-Karl Huysman’s protagonist in *À Rebours* (1884), a world of perfumes where a kitschy restaurant populated by national stereotypes is esteemed superior to the thing it has been abstracted from. Besides this figurative and formal dimension, the decadent was explicitly bound to the issue of nihilism that will circulate around the problem posed by Canada and its liberalism in the work of George Grant.

In a widely debated essay, the problem of liberalism in Canada was reformulated by Ian McKay as the liberal order framework.<sup>31</sup> Eschewing teleological and essentialist

arguments, McKay argued that the existence of Canada was neither inevitable nor necessarily good.<sup>32</sup> His argument, heavily influenced by Gramscian Marxism, is both descriptive and programmatic:

the category 'Canada' should henceforth denote a historically specific project of rule, rather than either an essence we must defend or an empty homogeneous space we must possess. Canada-as-project can be analyzed through the study of the implantation and expansion over a heterogeneous terrain of a certain politico-economic logic, to wit, liberalism. A strategy of 'reconnaissance' will study those at the core of this project who articulated its values, and those 'insiders' or 'outsiders' who resisted and, to some extent at least, reshaped it.<sup>33</sup>

Arguing that the liberal order is a long process of revolutionary rule spanning from the 1840s until the 1940s,<sup>34</sup> he recommends various a-liberals as its outsiders.<sup>35</sup> The project of reconnaissance would then be one of defamiliarization, designed to destabilize liberal conceptions of the world and to highlight the ways in which Canada becomes what it is at any given time due to its heterogeneous circumstances.<sup>36</sup> McKay's model of liberal order concentrates primarily on individualism, property, and, though he downplays it, the notion of consent.<sup>37</sup> He stresses that liberalism is not identical to capitalism, or the nation state.<sup>38</sup> In fact, liberalism and the liberal order in Canada existed quite readily, and in some ways more easily, without nationalism.<sup>39</sup> Lacking either a 'people' or 'community' in any coherent way, rule has been effected through liberal hegemony, operating within the organization of consent by the shifting alliances that make up the ruling class and help to construct 'lived reality'.<sup>40</sup>

McKay and his commentators tend to avoid the counter-narrative to liberal hegemony that was part of Canadian nationalist discourse in the period I am discussing.<sup>41</sup> As Ruth Sandwell has pointed out, if slightly sheepishly, even the 'reds' McKay elects as

a-liberals were only a different variety of liberal than established bourgeois liberals, and most of the frameworks that he and others employ (sociology, state history, sexual history, class, gender, or postcolonial analysis, cultural history) still rest on undefended liberal assumptions and categories, or as Dennis Lee would put it, on liberal cosmology.<sup>42</sup> The metanarratives of such histories, however ostensibly ‘critical’, are fundamentally written in terms that have “naturalized [and] essentialized liberal ideologies” such as “freedom, equality, justice, property...”<sup>43</sup> Sandwell would claim that hegemonic as the liberal order has been, some populations have fallen outside of it, primarily the rural populations (both European settlers and First Nations) who urban liberals have spent more than a century reforming and erasing.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the kind of disjunctive figures and values that Sandwell highlights would be basic to much of the imagery of the artists who rejected the liberal vision of Canada. One can push her point considerably further. While the liberal cliché of the ‘individual’ has been de-naturalized as a matter of course in academic discourse, this has been coterminous with the even more dubious naturalization of a hypothetical ‘social’, itself largely invented by nineteenth-century liberals, both of left and right. Among others, John Milbank has offered a probing and incisive critique of the tenability of the sociological hypothesis and its fundamentally irrational and ahistorical nature.<sup>45</sup> I point this out not simply because it is a basic flaw in McKay’s approach, but because his superficial critique of liberalism<sup>46</sup> is common to most of the historians of sexuality and art and their reliance on axiomatic sociological models and categories.<sup>47</sup>

More recently, in addition to being used in a bid to fold Wieland’s work into a text of political activism<sup>48</sup>, McKay’s work inspired a collection of essays, *Negotiations in*

*a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada* (2014), questioning the value of a 'national/ist' art history during a period of capitalist globalization. In particular, the volume's editors were attracted to the liberal order's role in promoting the cult of artistic genius etc. and critical of its inclusionary models since they simply expand existing power structures.<sup>49</sup> The problem with the 'intervention' the volume claims to be making is that it has denaturalized clichés from liberalism's past rather than addressing the new liberal premises that code their argument.<sup>50</sup> Besides this, the primary point they hammer at is the nation-state,<sup>51</sup> which, while allowing that nation-building has an instrumental value for the liberal order, McKay was quite explicit about disentangling the liberal order from. The historical practice they advocate, and which has been institutionally deployed over the past several decades, remains an example of the "démocratisation de la culture" intrinsic to postwar liberal hegemony. Although the editors acknowledge that there were forms of nationalism that challenged liberal hegemony,<sup>52</sup> they do not examine what a-liberal nationalisms could imply for art history, either aesthetically or epistemologically. Neither do they entertain the prospect that nationalism can be treated as a form of art, and that rather than subjugating art to the reality principles of the social sciences, which have primarily been liberal ideologies and functional tools of liberal order, one could do the reverse.<sup>53</sup> Lastly, they ask of the discipline of national/ist art history: "Is 'Canada' (or, for that matter, any other nation) still relevant as a category of inquiry – as a site for knowledge production – now that we find ourselves in the midst of the neo-liberal economic logic of corporate globalization and what has been described as a 'post-national' landscape?"<sup>54</sup> To which I would reply, and which this dissertation to some degree examines, that they have not thought about the problem potentially posed by

Canadian nationalism and its peculiarities seriously enough. To assume that a nation is an exploitable resource for knowledge is both in conformity with basic ideological dogma of the postwar liberal order and to ignore the centrality of the erotic in Canadian nationalism, which was not a matter of knowledge, but of what Bataille would call *non-savoir*, the state of non-knowledge that was the paradoxical ‘knowing’ of ‘death’ in erotic excess.<sup>55</sup> And it was such a death, one that would not be socio-politically redeemed, that was figured in so much of the most avowedly nationalistic art in Canadian history and which has been mostly ignored. *If* one wants to see what an ‘a-liberal’ picture of Canada would be, it is more likely found here than in the perspectives that McKay and his colleagues have taken. In this respect it would not be a reconnaissance and redemption of history, which from the perspective of Nietzschean nihilism can only be the fantasies of *ressentimentalism*, but a way of unknowing.<sup>56</sup>

On one hand, there was what one might call the state conception of art exemplified by Larivée above, which was community-oriented and socially conscious, involved in the production of multiple meanings and concerned with the new technologies available to art, all of which could be used as pedagogical tools. Then there was the nationalist art which refused to be substantively meaningful, but would introduce its possibility to deride it and parodied the notion of society; or an art which might insist on giving to nationalism a meaning that was fundamentally irreconcilable to what a liberal understanding of the term could designate. Either of these could include open and highly artificial acts of contestation or take the form of radicalized passivity or irony. It was not about the embrace of nationalism in the more conventional sense but of embracing untenable nationalism. In a kind of parody of state logic, it can be argued that

the 'empty repetitiveness' of the pornography that inspired so much of Pop art's own empty repetitiveness was an expression of the "desire to democratize art."<sup>57</sup> In Canada, this emptying out was often part of the evacuating of rational significance, something that expanded from the appropriation of pornography to the treatment of historical and political content in the same manner, such as in the work of John Boyle and Claude Breeze. Pornographic 'democratization' needs to be read as impossible to liberal 'democratization'.<sup>58</sup> Ostensibly, nationalism was a way out of imperialism, utility and what was considered a morally or intellectually indefensible sympathy to liberalism. While a way out, it was also a way of going nowhere. It could be superficially anarchist, socialist or tory, but it did not matter since the point was primarily excommunication while perversely exploiting the context of communication. It was in this degradation of the 'social' that the eroticism of nationalism often existed and that it expressed its perversity.

In their perversity, these Canadian artists were doing something common to the avant-garde artists of the twentieth-century, but in a distinct way. The art historian Boris Groys has explained this quite succinctly: for the avant-garde the work of art becomes a strategy of judgement to be used against society. Rather than being the object of a culture or world, the artwork is an objection to the world, one which the 'viewer' may ally themselves to or against.<sup>59</sup> Such art promotes 'nonunderstanding' as it refuses to articulate existing differences or identities, but instead introduces 'nonexistent' differences sure to ruin any kind of social unity or utility. This, the radicality of art, is usually subordinated by criticism or art history, filtered and subjectified into an expression of an 'other' to be recognized (it becomes socio-political).<sup>60</sup> But to understand

in this way is to miss the point, since such art was created to excommunicate art from society, to create spaces, distances, and walls. This art never actually leaves society, instead it exiles itself by going nowhere, creating a perverse and more ‘artificial society’ by excommunicating itself.<sup>61</sup>

Nationalism in Canadian art was frequently such a form of internal exile, whether in the impersonality so genial to so much erotic art, to the notions of Regionalism practiced in London with its infusion of the *Tory surrealism* of the art historian and novelist Scott Symons and the philosopher George Grant<sup>62</sup> or the kind of extreme objectification (or dematerialization through the artifice of perfume) of Canada in Joyce Wieland’s erotic art. This is, as politicized art critics like Barry Lord will point out, a basically Decadent conception of both art and nationalism.

### **Chapter Outline**

Chapter One sets out to do three things. First, it establishes a basic delineation of the extremes within which eroticism fits in this dissertation. This is followed by a brief literature overview that both differentiates my project from existing scholarship and provides a general survey of the field of erotic art history writing to which this dissertation belongs. I am not providing a detailed examination of the substantial scholarship on Wieland and Curnoe here as I am not concerned with their bodies of work in general but in their specific conjunction of the erotic and the national. In the case of Curnoe, the erotic has scarcely registered in scholarship beyond the recognition that he committed some of his energy to images with nudity. In the work on Wieland it is more complicated and appropriately dealt with through a series of critiques of Wieland scholarship when it is most directly relevant within her chapters. I think this is both more

productive and less prone to redundancy than an isolated literature review. Apart from the discussion of Wieland's films, most of the works I address have not been discussed in depth, if at all, in the scholarship. As for Boyle, the only broaching of the erotic content in his work is a few pages by Barry Lord, which form a direct springboard for a discussion of it in Chapter Four.

With the sketch of erotic art history as a genre I have provided in mind, I turn to another brief survey, this time of the erotic art practice that was at play in English Canada, limited to its representative forms in Toronto. This discussion allows for a highlighting of some of the varied strands that evolved within the genre in the timeframe that concerns us. The artists discussed often appeared in exhibitions with the subjects of this dissertation and this picture of the trends in the genre provides a context that none of these artists have been adequately discussed in reference to. The chapter concludes with a brief historical note on the English Canadian nationalism in the period and situates art practice within it.

Chapter Two focusses on divergent ways of imagining English Canadian nationalism. This opens with an analysis of what I term Trudeau's *passionate functionalism*, which proved to be a foil for the various modes of negative nationalism that emerged. Trudeau's federalism figured nationalism as regressive and potentially socially destructive, advocating for formal counter-strategies to repress it. This is then set in contrast to an analysis of George Grant's pronouncement of the "death of Canadian nationalism," and his quasi-Nietzschean critique of Canadian nihilism and the New Left that emerged in the postwar era. As with the discussion of Trudeau, this is more about form and figuration than political science. I highlight the crucial, and largely ignored, role

of comedy and eroticism in Grant's thinking, both of which will be transformed in unique ways by the artists that concern us.

Grant's way of imagining and situating Canadian nationalism as an impossibility will serve as the fundamental source of inspiration for the artists discussed for the rest of the dissertation. Indeed, Boyle, Curnoe and Wieland are incomprehensible without this understanding of the conflict between Trudeauvian federalist nationalism and Grantian untenable nationalism and their sometimes-ambiguous appropriation of the territory between them. The Grantian imagination is then contrasted to the various strands of Canadian cultural and economic nationalism that developed in the 1960s from Northrop Frye to Margaret Atwood, the Canadianization movement or Gad Horowitz, and the various national art histories that appeared and which the artists figured in and commented on. In particular, it is the work that flows most directly from Grant – Dennis Lee's negative nationalism and the idea of heritage in Scott Symons – that cast a useful shadow on the discussions that follow. What they highlighted was less the political problem that Grant posed than the epistemological one.

The third chapter details nationalist themes and nihilism in the work of Greg Curnoe and John Boyle. Their brand of a negative, generally absurdist, nationalism is then contrasted with the formal arguments at stake in Regionalism. Theories of regional aesthetics in London were derived from Dada, Alain Robbe-Grillet, anarchism and other sources which stressed a largely meaningless, non-narrative and surface-oriented conceptualization of art and which consistently appropriated the 'political' or 'social' to undermine them, imagining a static, mechanical world in their place.

With these hermeneutic limitations established, the fourth chapter addresses Boyle and Curnoe's interests in a productive erotic relationship with technology, and a re-imagining of the nude in geographic terms that appropriate local materials. An even more dramatic display of these formal tendencies is displayed by Boyle's uniquely pornographic reinvention of the History genre. It concludes with a discussion of the symbolic importance of decadence and the figurative value of erotic adolescent boys in Boyle.

Finally, the last three chapters concentrate on Joyce Wieland. This is done primarily through close readings of her texts and interviews, where she offers a model of erotic nationalism<sup>63</sup> that fuses aspects of Camp, rococo and what she termed 'hick' art. The fifth chapter opens with a discussion of the *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* exhibition and will situate her work within the conflicting interpretations it was accorded by the critics, and the hostility it often received from the public. It also serves as a means to set up several of the formal considerations that will be crucial to understanding her art practice, namely her use of artifice, her closeness to Camp aesthetics, her appropriation of the rococo, and the importance of the tantric art tradition in the construction of her work.

Chapter Six turns to an examination of how the formal traits of her work operate in relation to the hermeneutics she establishes for understanding it. I will situate her work in a broader Canadian tradition of imagining the gendered relationship between nature, matter and art. This will be used both to examine how she constructs her own kind of erotic bodies and also how she appropriates bodies. To do the latter, I look at how she uses her own lips as a way of articulating a form of tantric nationalism and the very

different way that she uses the lips of Pierre Vallières to construct a romantic fantasy about nationalism.

Finally, Chapter Seven probes into the most thorough articulation of the intimacy of eroticism and nationalism in Wieland's work. This chapter examines how she tied together her environmental and erotic concerns to imagine a form of 'Arctic mysticism'. This was in turn part of her attempt to reinvigorate a Canadian tradition (that of the Group of Seven, the nationalist artists during the first sexual revolution). But this was balanced with her own explicit re-enactment of the death of Canada in her film *The Far Shore*, which was also implicitly a response to Québec's *films de cul*.

Through this set of case studies of English Canadian artists, I will suggest that within their bodies of work were ways of imagining nationalism and eroticism that were often formally or conceptually analogous, either by strategy or figuration, and at times indistinguishable.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 143. Bersani and Dutoit would speculate that, its attempts to do otherwise notwithstanding, "we can say that, far from promoting the pansexualism it was for a long time accused of, psychoanalysis proposes a definition of sexuality that has very little to do with what we think of as sex (which may be little more than a contingent manifestation of it)." Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?: And Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 160.

<sup>2</sup> Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>5</sup> For some discussion of the primary epistemological problems of the social scientific image of the world, see Gillian Rose's *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: Athlone, 1995), 1-47. Rose examined the problematic claims to 'science' in sociology's moralization of the hypostatic category of the social and its determination of categorical values. For a rather different critique of the limits and viability of the social sciences to plausibly render facts or describe history, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* [Third Edition] (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 1-121. That the sociological image of the world is the moral naturalization of the historically contingent claims of liberalism is a point that George Grant (among others) will make. That morality is one of the primary epistemes that structure the hypothesis that social facts are possible is one of Rose's concerns. Yet Rose largely avoids entertaining the entirely plausible suggestion that moral hypotheses, while no doubt useful, are nonetheless 'vacuous' and untenable, something that MacIntyre does acknowledge but attempts to remedy. For why his remedy is likely non-viable, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* [2nd edition] (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 327-381. And for why Milbank's solution likely is not viable either,

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see Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Joyce does not address the extent to which his work may radically undermine the claim that social facts can exist.

<sup>6</sup> For a good discussion of how this has developed in Bersani's work, see Mikko Tuhkanen, *The Essentialist Villain: On Leo Bersani* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 45-56. This is particularly relevant to use since Bersani's project, in explicit opposition to the treatment of sexuality by queer theory, shares the anti-Hegelianism that is also basic to the erotic nationalism discussed in this dissertation.

<sup>7</sup> For a demonstration of the untenability of Butler's work, see Geoff Boucher, *The Charmed Circle of Ideology: A Critique of Laclau & Mouffe, Butler & Žižek* (Melbourne: re.press, 2008), 127-162. Boucher convincingly stresses the extent to which Butler's inversion of Althusserian materialism results in a reversion to an idealist Hegelian existentialism, one which is epistemologically predicated on a highly functionalist sociology, a reliance on an incoherent model of transcendental intentionality and a profound insensitivity to empirical evidence. Within arguments on social relations that are so contradictory that any plausible theory of agency is lost, her arguments often amount to an image of "the Beautiful Soul, whose permanent stance of marginal subversion is in actuality a cover for a thoroughgoing complicity." *Ibid.*, 150. What is odder about the deployment of such models by historians is that the Canadian artists who most directly presaged the kinds of arguments Butler would make about the performative quality of gender, such as Dennis Burton and Don Bonham, have been either pathologized as misogynists or ignored by scholars. They understood it in very different terms from Butler of course, but they were still both substantially closer to her position than Wieland was. This has been in keeping with an earlier generation of scholars, discussed in the Wieland chapters, who filtered her work primarily through post-structuralist French feminism.

<sup>8</sup> John B. Boyle, "Address to the general assembly of the Nihilist Party of Canada," *20 Cents Magazine*, April 1969, np.

<sup>9</sup> Though Larivée is commonly accorded the role of author for the project, it was the work of the Group de recherche et d'action sociale par l'art et les médias de communication (GRASAM) that she found with Claude Gosselin and Jacqueline Rousseau.

<sup>10</sup> It was resurrected a few years later for Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (1982) during the *Art et féminisme* exhibition.

<sup>11</sup> Anon, "La chambre nuptiale, conçue pour agresser le visiteur," *La Presse*, July 7, 1976, E10.

<sup>12</sup> Angèle Dagenais, "La Chambre nuptiale hante le Complexe Desjardins..." *Le Devoir*, July 8, 1976, 13.

As Gourlay explains, the work also bore a strong resemblance to earlier feminist and performance works, notably by the collective Mauve. See the footnote by Sheena Gourlay, "Feminist/art in Quebec, 1975-1992" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2002), 68.

<sup>13</sup> This would remain a theme in her work in the years to come. One of her more overtly Ti-Popish moments, was the film, *Le coeur du frère André*, described as "le flash du mort qui se regarde éventré, le coeur extirpé, mis dans un bocal de formol. Autour, des images pieuses, son selfportrait et quelques rêves érotiques éparpillés subtilement dans sa mémoire." Anon, "Du cinéma expérimental au Musée d'art contemporain," *Le Devoir*, October 25, 1977, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Anon, "Le pavillon du Québec à TdH présente 'La chambre nuptiale,'" *Le Devoir*, July 13, 1977, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Anon, "'La Chambre nuptiale' de Francine Larivée au Complexe Desjardins et dans les centres commerciaux," *La Revue de Terrebonne* (June 30, 1976), 21. Larivée notes that men generally reacted negatively and older people were shocked. Stéphane Moissan, "La 'Chambre Nuptiale,'" *La Presse*, August 30, 1977, D1.

<sup>16</sup> The complete lack of criticism and mechanical reiteration of Larivée's statements has also been noted by Sheena Gourlay, "Feminist/art in Quebec, 1975-1992" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2002), 78.

<sup>17</sup> Francine Larivée, "La Chambre Nuptiale 'sous silence,'" *Intervention*, no. 7 (1980), 39.

<sup>18</sup> Aníthe de Carvalho, "La chambre nuptiale de Francine Larivée : une œuvre issue du modèle de la démocratie culturelle ou quand l'art féministe néo-avant-gardiste s'intègre à l'establishment," *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art Canadien*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2013), 122-131. Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson discuss, if superficially, the awkwardness of this situation for many feminist artists at the time, though they notably ignore both the ambiguous nature of the response the exhibitions received from the broader public and the predominance of erotic content within them. See Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson, "A Past as Rich as Our Futures Allow: A Genealogy of Feminist Art in Canada" in *Desire Change: Contemporary Feminist Art in Canada*, ed. Heather Davis (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press and Mentoring Artist's for Women's Art, 2017), 25-41.

Huneault and Anderson also interpret this string of feminist art exhibitions this was part of as an instance of

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‘deterritorialization’ but do admit that it was at least in part an attempt by the state to funnel the ‘disaffected’ into the useful. The growth of feminist art involved the expansion of the state as patron and pedagogue and the exhibitions were intrinsically bound to the territorialization of the Liberal state apparatus, a process that could be described realistically less as liberatory than imperialistic.

<sup>19</sup> Instead of having an Identity, he claimed that he and George Grant lived in ‘disjunction’ from the ‘current world’; the disjunctive and non-synthesized life of a Tory. Scott Symons, *Dear Reader: Selected Scott Symons*, ed. Christopher Elson (Toronto: Gutter Press, 1998), 208.

<sup>20</sup> John Bramble, *Modernism and the Occult* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.

<sup>21</sup> For a more thorough account of these developments which highlights their erotic aspects, Christoph Asendorf, *Batteries of Life: On the History of Things and Their Perception in Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> John Bramble, *Modernism and the Occult* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 36.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. For examples of the blurring between fascism and student radicalism in Canada, see George Woodcock, “The 30s and the 60s,” *Saturday Night*, December 1969 and “Are the student rebels fascists of the Left?” *Saturday Night*, July 1969 as well as Charles Taylor’s critique of the Marcusean New Left, “Authoritarian Utopia,” *Canadian Dimension*, August-September 1970, 49-53.

<sup>24</sup> John Bramble, *Modernism and the Occult* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 43.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>26</sup> Barry Lord, *The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People’s Art* (Toronto: NC Press, 1974), 212-215.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>29</sup> For succinct discussions of decadence, see Michel Winock’s recent history of it in French (literary) art, *Décadence fin de siècle* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2017) and David Weir’s more expansive, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995). Weir’s first chapter, and in more complex ways his entire book, deals with the great ambiguity and contradictoriness of the term decadence and the various ways it has been, and continues to be used. This runs from optimistic notions of cultural collapse and renewal to pessimistic views of decline; from Dionysian multiplicity to Apollonian objectivity; and spanning from Sade through romanticism (positively and negatively) and into modernism (also positively and negatively) or beyond. Weir’s study makes a case for the presence of the decadent in the postmodern. This is appropriate since the most consistent criteria of decadence is precisely the decay of categories, the collapse of social meaning or even sociability, and a ‘dehumanization’ of art. *Ibid.* 1-21. All of this tends to be expressed in erotic terms. This fairly well-known form of erotic decadence can be contrasted to different models from the same period. Olga Matich’s *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia’s Fin de Siècle* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) outlines a form of decadence as a radical reaction against nature and death, not through the embrace of a morbid and often satanic artificial utopia as the French often did, but through attempting to immortalize the self or collective through resisting coitus and celebrating an androgynous form of ascetic celibacy, which likewise rejected the idea of progress in order to accelerate a kind of apocalypse.

<sup>30</sup> A.E. Carter, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1930-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 4-25.

<sup>31</sup> The editors of *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution* note that McKay’s work can be read as a way of turning Grant ‘on his head’, but this severely underestimates the radicality of Grant’s position namely that, unlike the Marxist approach of McKay, it breaks with the Hegelian tradition in a far more extreme way and that the epistemological position it suggests makes McKay’s untenable. If anything, the approaches of McKay and his associates amount to a reactionary humanism.

<sup>32</sup> Ian McKay, “Canada as a Long Liberal Revolution: On Writing the History of Actually Existing Canadian Liberalisms, 1840s-1940s” in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, eds. Jean-Francois Constant and Michel Ducharme (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 347-420.

<sup>33</sup> Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 81, 4 (December 2000), 621.

<sup>34</sup> Sometimes he says the 1950s but does not acknowledge this discrepancy or the deep ways that the Canadian state changed between the 1920s and 40s. Ian McKay, “Canada as a Long Liberal Revolution: On Writing the History of Actually Existing Canadian Liberalisms, 1840s-1940s” in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, eds. Jean-Francois Constant and Michel Ducharme

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(Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 350, 358. That he defines ‘Canada’ as this order leads one to wonder whether it makes sense for him to speak of Canada afterward.

<sup>35</sup> This is more heavily covered in *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005) which awkwardly resituates his initial arguments in an attempt to re-define leftist history in Canada and displays McKay at his least convincing, which is to say his most overtly utopian, which tends to undermine the more realistic and pragmatic history writing he often does.

<sup>36</sup> “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 81, 4 (December 2000), 643, Ian McKay, “Canada as a Long Liberal Revolution: On Writing the History of Actually Existing Canadian Liberalisms, 1840s-1940s” in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, eds. Jean-Francois Constant and Michel Ducharme (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 403-409.

<sup>37</sup> Consent is one of the primary normative claims of liberal rule, but unlike the other claims he highlights, McKay seems unwilling to de-naturalize and historicize it to the same degree.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 363-364, 395.

<sup>41</sup> The notable exception in certain respects in Jerry Bannister’s “Canada as Counter-Revolution: The Loyalist Order Framework in Canadian History, 1750-1840” in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, eds. Jean-Francois Constant and Michel Ducharme (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 98-146.

<sup>42</sup> R.W. Sandwell, “Missing Canadians: Reclaiming the A-Liberal Past” in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, eds. Jean-François Constant and Michel Ducharme (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 250-254. Most of the collected essays debating his hypothesis stress the questionable selectivity of his definition of liberalism. See Dennis Lee’s *The Savage Fields* (1977) for his Grant-inspired critique of liberal ontology’s function in the Canadian imagination. This is discussed briefly in a later chapter.

<sup>43</sup> R.W. Sandwell, “Missing Canadians: Reclaiming the A-Liberal Past” in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, eds. Jean-François Constant and Michel Ducharme (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 246.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 247-253. As Sandwell’s various histories have shown, the vast majority of the population was marginalized by liberal rule until the postwar era, after which it was largely and systematically eliminated or neutralized by urban progressivism. This has also been clearly displayed in various histories of the country’s peasantry, such as Allan Greer’s *The Patriots and the People: The Rebellion of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1993) and Michael Cross’ “The Dark Druidical Groves: The Lumber Community and the Commercial Frontier in British North America to 1854” (Ph.D. diss. University of Toronto, 1968).

<sup>45</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* [2nd edition] (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 49-256. One need not share Milbank’s religion, or even his radical relativism, to recognize the absurdity of claims for sociological reason and its descriptive or analytical value.

<sup>46</sup> In fact, another a-liberal option, beyond various religious ones, is precisely anti-humanism, whether Althusserian, Foucauldian, eliminative materialist etc., but McKay does not engage with the more radical possibilities of any of them, let alone the a-liberalisms that circulate among many of the thinkers in this dissertation.

<sup>47</sup> For a concise statement of the basic epistemic weaknesses of sociologically inflected history, see Paul Veyne; trans. Nina Moore-Rivoluceri, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 263-289. Veyne’s criticism, namely that the sociological has no actual object, is incapable of non-absurd explanation, is largely reducible to cliched descriptions reflecting little but the prejudices of their locale, and generally mistakes aesthetic effects for something else, applies even more forcefully to the application of such models to the study of works of art.

<sup>48</sup> See the introduction to Kristy Arlene Holmes, “Negotiating the Nation: The Work of Joyce Wieland 1968-1976” (PhD. diss., Queen’s University, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson, “Rethinking Relevance: Studying the Visual in Canada” in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada* (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), 5. In this, they are conflating two rather different historical forms of the liberal order.

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<sup>50</sup> There is a quite blatant moralism to their argument that is never justified but which fundamentally dictates the nature of their critique of liberal order, and it is a critique of a past liberal order not of liberalism that they offer. But as McKay makes clear (if inconsistently), the liberal order he outlines ended nearly a century ago while the sort of socio-political claims they stake inhere readily to the mythologies of the postwar liberal order.

<sup>51</sup> Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson, "Rethinking Relevance: Studying the Visual in Canada" in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada* (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 3. They far too easily conflate nationalism with nation-statism.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> If the liberal state insists on the anthropological attitude to art, evidenced by the model of Larivée, one can take a different route. One can after all, have an a-liberal conception of art such as that proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, who significantly recast the basic points of contention described by McKay and his interlocutors and would interpret the liberal order and nationalism as processes of artificial territorialization: "Can this becoming, this emergence, be called Art? That would make the territory a result of art. The artist: the first person to set out a boundary stone, or to make a mark. Property, collective or individual, is derived from that even when it is in the service of war and oppression. Property is fundamentally art because it is fundamentally poster, placard. As Lorenz says: coral fish are posters. The expressive is primary in relation to the possessive; expressive qualities or matters of expression, are necessarily appropriative and constitute a having more profound than being. Not in the sense that these qualities belong to a subject, but in the sense that they delineate a territory that will belong to the subject that carries and produces them. These qualities are signatures, but the signature, the proper name, is not the constituted mark of a subject, but the constituting mark of a domain, an abode. ... One puts one's signature on something just as one plants one's flag on a piece of land." Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari; trans. Brian Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 316. Not only that, but does the caricature of art history that Jessup, Morton and Robertson convey have much to do with art history beyond its practice in art appreciation classes, and does what they propose instead substantively differ from the anthropological/sociological model of art advocated for by the Canadian state? One could also, in a very different vein, treat material usually subsumed by traditional sociological fields as primarily material to be evaluated as artistic processes. For a good example of this, see Joel Black, *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991).

<sup>54</sup> Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson, "Rethinking Relevance: Studying the Visual in Canada" in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada* (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>55</sup> This would mean the dissolution of subjects into nihilism but also an access to noumena. It is implicitly a worry about the threats of nihilism that animates both their argument and McKay's original and their reduction of art to 'the visual' or a form of social practice. See Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson, "Rethinking Relevance: Studying the Visual in Canada" in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada* (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 12-14 and Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *The Canadian Historical Review* 81, 4 (December 2000), 618. In fact, one could argue that contemporary liberalism in Canada functions as the institutionalized 'chaos' of non-communicating positions that McKay outlines at the beginning of his essay. Also of relevance here, arguing against visual culture studies, Boris Groys explained "art consists not of images but of all possible objects, including utilitarian objects, texts, and so on. And there are no distinct 'artistic images'; rather, any image can be used in an artistic context. Turning art history into visual studies is thus not an extension of its field of study but a drastic reduction of it, since it restricts art to what can be considered an 'image' in the traditional sense." Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 95.

<sup>56</sup> Although he takes this in a rather different direction than I would, Michael Dorland has argued for the centrality of *ressentiment* and contempt in Canada, particularly within the nationalized culture industries. See his "A Thoroughly Hidden Country: Ressentiment, Canadian Nationalism, Canadian Culture," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue Canadienne de theorie politique et sociale*, vol. 12, nos. 1-2 (1988), 130-164.

<sup>57</sup> Pippa Hurd, *Icons of Erotic Art* (Munich; Berlin; London; New York: Prestel, 2004), 116-118.

<sup>58</sup> The term impossible, originating with Gottfried Leibniz, was re-popularized by Martin Heidegger and subsequently employed by Jean-François Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze. In Lyotard's *Économie Libidinale*

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(1974), the impossible has an essentially erotic significance, describing the incompatible groups of intensities or even modes of discourse that collide and implode around the erotic figure.

<sup>59</sup> Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 112.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 113. This is largely how both Thomas Waugh and Alyce Mahon for instance treat the erotic (discussed below).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>62</sup> The moniker *Tory surrealism* is adapted from an early article by Scott Symons in which he polemically attacked the ‘mythe libéral’ of Canada and insisted on a radical opposition between the liberal and tory understandings of humanity. For him, tories reflected life as it is while liberals attempted to reform it. The tories were the inheritors of the Classical tradition and the liberals its parasites. His contemporary tories, however, betrayed their own traditions, becoming liberal and helping to create a ‘Canada châtré’. Rather than being driven by the desire for control, the tory is ruled by the ambiguities of passion which can make them both dangerous and, he claimed, *surrealist*. Symons retained this understanding with remarkable consistency and his work is one of the most eccentric forms of surrealism in Canadian history. Scott Symons, “Je vois le parti Tory comme un acte de foi; le parti Libéral, comme un plainte,” *Le Devoir*, June 17, 1961, 9-10.

<sup>63</sup> My use of *erotic nationalism* is loosely inspired by Susan Crean’s concoction of it, although Crean’s use and development of the notion is only superficially relevant to mine. However, Crean rightly observes that “eros is a constant and ardent companion” to be encountered in Wieland’s work throughout her career and interprets it as ‘poetic and ribald’. See Susan Crean, “Forbidden Fruit: The Erotic Nationalism of Joyce Wieland,” *This Magazine*, August-September 1987, 13.

## **Chapter One: Eros and idiom**

This chapter does two things. First, it delineates (broadly) the basic framing commonly employed in the writing of erotic art history by examining some of the different approaches and attitudes on erotic art that have emerged over the past century. This concerns the metaphysical implications of the erotic and some of the formal controversies that have emerged within art historiography around it and stresses the issues that were current at the time in which the art that concerns us was being produced. This follows from a few brief remarks on the normative ways in which sexuality in the arts tends to be treated in Canadian cultural studies. The second section of this chapter surveys some of the trends of erotic art most apparent in Toronto at the time and will provide the baseline for the work of the three artists that concern us in this dissertation.

After the brief survey, the chapter offers a short general historical account of English Canadian nationalism in the period and situates the art practice of the three artists that concern us within it. These two general discussions will set the stage for a more concrete examination of the ways English Canadian nationalism was imagined in the chapter that follows it before proceeding to the detailed case studies of Boyle, Curnoe and Wieland that rely upon points that have been raised in these discussions.

### **1.1. Eros in Canada**

“As the meaning of the female orgasm became a hot topic of political discussion, button-wearing radicals popped up at the multiversity’s various colleges sporting a slogan that immediately generated a playful mass appeal: ‘Bring U of T to a Climax.’”<sup>1</sup>

“Pornography has become as much a middle-class liberal issue as racism and sexism. True, some critics have tried to duck the issue by claiming to prefer erotic art to pornography...”<sup>2</sup>

The National Gallery of Canada's Centennial exhibition *Three Hundred Years of Canadian Art* displayed 375 works, only one of which contained so much as a nude.<sup>3</sup> The majority of the 17 most erotic Canadian artworks listed in *The First Original Unexpurgated Canadian Book of Sex and Adventure* (1979) were in the private collections and notebooks of the artists themselves rather than in public collections or on display.<sup>4</sup> Although erotic art was shown in the period, and usually with some fanfare in the media, it has attracted little subsequent scholarly attention.<sup>5</sup> There is not much of a history of writing the history of erotic art in Canada. There are a number of histories of the nude.<sup>6</sup> Jacques de Roussan, the author of one, insisted that his work did not deal with the erotic, a claim that would be echoed by Jerrold Morris in his *The Nude in Canadian Painting*.<sup>7</sup> One exception was the one and half page exhibition essay by Linda Belshaw for *The Figure – A Sensual Response* (1975) at the Brant Gallery and featuring a number of the artists covered in this dissertation. The other, and more relevant one for this dissertation, was tory surrealist Scott Symons' *Heritage: A Romantic Look at Early Canadian Furniture* (1971), which offered what Wilhelm Worringer would call a *psychology of style* as it charted Canadian historical development through the erotic qualities of its furniture.

Symons' work, however, has not had any sequels. Instead, the erotic has been displaced by the sexual or by gender.<sup>8</sup> A textbook that expresses the most generic tendencies in the direction of sociology's colonization of art is *Sexing the Maple: A Canadian Sourcebook* (2006), an interdisciplinary compendium edited by Peter Dickinson<sup>9</sup> and Richard Cavell. They stress that "disciplinary categories such as 'literature' and 'sociology' are becoming increasingly blurred."<sup>10</sup> The editors claim that

while there was a ‘domestic’ image of sexuality that occurred in “normative and thus ‘natural’” settings, the nineteenth-century demonstrated that sexuality also took place “in history, that it was constructed according to certain social and political needs and constraints.”<sup>11</sup> As with most of the sexual history writing in Canada, they concentrate a great deal on it as a question of regulation and liberal subjectivity. They stress that sexual identity is a ‘process’ sometimes parallel to “the national process of becoming.”<sup>12</sup> Relevant to this, they contrast queer nations and “the heteronormative ones of reproduction and assimilation” as two nationalisms that aim at forms of ‘sexual citizenship’ that would allow for subjective belonging.<sup>13</sup> Their selection of texts and the introduction’s concentration on notions of ‘sexual discursivity’ found in Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault<sup>14</sup> that allows for the “depsycholog[izing] of the unconscious” and its emplacement in language which “provides the assumption for making the connection between sexuality, literature, and nationhood.”<sup>15</sup>

However, in Foucault’s language, much of the writing of the history of sexuality in Canada is still the history of ‘mentalités’ and the reconnaissance of the ‘mirage’ of subjects.<sup>16</sup> This could, for example, be applied to one of the few extended investigations of sexuality in Canadian cinema, Thomas Waugh’s *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (2006).<sup>17</sup> Waugh’s work draws from Dickinson’s<sup>18</sup> and claims to cultivate a counter-normative idea of sexuality.<sup>19</sup> Waugh stresses the elasticity of his queering of the canon, defining *queer* as a universalizing concept which treats the world as a network of transient identities in ‘active construction’,<sup>20</sup> uncritically insisting on the autobiographical nature of the works he selects, and expressing a conscious bias in favour of Trudeau-era liberatory polemics.<sup>21</sup>

The most remarkable lacunae in *Sexing the Maple* is that despite performatively declaring the degree to which the collection is inevitably the product of a set of historically contingent norms, they do not substantially defend or historicize their central claims (the conflations of history/literature/sociology). As a result, like Waugh, their method and models are, by their own logic, reducible to the normalization of liberal cosmology. Like Waugh's work, and most of the history of sexuality genre, the authors reduce sex primarily to an issue of liberal subjectivity and socio-political relations between persons. 'Sexuality' then operates as a device for interpolating liberal subjects into an imaginary social world. Such, as this dissertation will show, was not the case with many of the ways of imagining sexuality in the period I am examining. This is evident when contrasted to what *Maple's* editors claim as its closest precedent, *The First Original Unexpurgated Canadian Book of Sex and Adventure* (1979).

Edited by Christopher Ondaatje and Jeremy Brown, *The First* consisted almost entirely of lists, primarily derived from newspaper and magazine articles rather than academic work (which is given the same weight as gossip columns). *The First*, as unscholarly as it is, dramatically historicizes sexuality as "IT or 'sex' as we say now," claiming that previous to the 1960s, this was scarcely part of language and its point of description exceedingly vague.<sup>22</sup> The text embodies this in its list format offering quotations, real and imaginary book titles, statistics and photos involving literature, art, sports, advertisements, politics, divorce, therapies, foods, places, pick-up lines, provincial premiers, hang-ups, sex tips, bank presidents etc. Parodic down to its absurd title, arbitrary, irrational and often random, it offered a far more radical vision of sexuality in Canada than *Sexing* does. This was also in keeping with the common frames of erotic

discourse: the de-centring catalogue of proliferating types and deliberately artificial anti-identities, of fetishes for recognizable objects but not discernable meaning, of the perversion and demeaning of the political image of the world.<sup>23</sup> A contrast with *Sexing* also reveals that while the eroticism of *The First* produces something closer to, although still distant from, what Bataille would term *non-knowledge*, the sexuality of *Sexing* seeks to striate, filter and frame, obsessing over a kind of Foucauldian knowledge/power in line with the logic of the Liberal state.<sup>24</sup>

To the extent that erotic visual art in English Canada has been academically covered, it has primarily been in the form of biographies of individual artists or their retrospective catalogues. Andy Wainwright's biography of Robert Markle,<sup>25</sup> for instance, gives a good picture of the artist's milieu. Joyce Wieland has been written about a great deal biographically,<sup>26</sup> or in terms of gender issues,<sup>27</sup> while Greg Curnoe and his work have also been largely treated in biographical terms.<sup>28</sup> There has been writing on Harold Town and Painters 11 in a similar light,<sup>29</sup> but Graham Coughtry, Dennis Burton, John Boyle, Claude Breeze and the majority of other artists concerned with the erotic have been largely ignored by academic writing. Barrie Hale's *Out of the Park: Modernist Painting in Toronto, 1950-1980* (1985) deals with the Toronto scene broadly and scarcely touches erotic terms while Denise Leclerc's art history of *The 60s in Canada* (2005) casts the decade as one of 'collective awakening' and adaptation to new modes of being, contextualizing the art that appeared in an almost entirely international (primarily American) way.<sup>30</sup> While the presence of eroticism in art is *very briefly* addressed, particularly with people like Burton and Wieland, it is done so under the vague avatar of

the sexual revolution.<sup>31</sup> Erotic film, although primarily concentrated in Québec, has fared considerably better.<sup>32</sup>

In the period I am discussing, notions of the erotic and the sexual that circulated in Canadian art worlds tended to hover between two poles: a Georges Bataille-inspired notion of *érotisme* as the destruction of identity into impersonal communion with matter and the Marshall McLuhan model of impersonal sexual machinery and environments. In the latter, the destruction of personhood is paradoxically accelerated and compensated for by a reactive turn to cultivating identities, either personal or collective.<sup>33</sup> By coincidence, it has been between Bataille and McLuhan that much of the discourse on the history of erotic art in the twentieth-century has likewise been pitched. I am not suggesting that any of the artists I discuss clung dogmatically, coherently or even necessarily consciously, to these basic arguments, but that they formed some of the grounding and a plausible set of heuristics to approximate what was at stake in the erotic and how it was formally constituted in the works I analyse.

In Bataille's scheme, eroticism is fundamentally paradoxical: "De l'érotisme, il est possible de dire qu'il est l'approbation de la vie jusque dans la mort."<sup>34</sup> It is part of sexual reproduction but not identical to it. Reproduction implies what he terms 'êtres discontinus', the discontinuity between all people.<sup>35</sup> What fills the 'abime' is the vertigo of death and the *jouissance* of érotisme. To fall into this vertigo is to enter continuity, to shift from one state of being and be dissolved in the violence of this transformation. The erotic is this 'domain' of 'violation', one which is often figuratively associated with the sexually passive, usually 'feminine' role.<sup>36</sup> But the erotic can also be, according to Bataille, deeply tied to nostalgia since this violation is part of the *yearning* for continuity

that he sees as the base of religious experience.<sup>37</sup> The religiosity of the erotic appears to the rational (self-possessed) as a form of obscenity since its push for dissolution and fusion destroys the self-contained or normal world.<sup>38</sup>

The ‘dépossession’ of the self, the unmooring of ecstasy from the confines of personhood, is what Bataille identifies as religious eroticism.<sup>39</sup> Citing Rimbaud, he portrays eroticism as this fusion that eliminates all objects in eternity.<sup>40</sup> That said, in its cultural practice, érotisme is unique for persons as opposed to animals, since its appearance is reliant on tools and taboos, the two utilitarian means for the maintenance of life.<sup>41</sup> The utilitarian model of life rests on relegating the reality of continuity to the space of the taboo (menstrual blood, corpses, feces, the horror of violence), or what he glosses as the ‘rien’ or that which is “moins que *rien*, pire que *rien*.”<sup>42</sup> These taboos, necessary for the preservation of the world of discontinuity are, ironically, irrational, relying on the failure to recognize that, “La vie est toujours un produit de la décomposition de la vie.”<sup>43</sup> This axiom is paradoxically rationalized through the irrational spectre of cultural organization where “[l]a transgression organisée forme avec l’interdit un ensemble qui définit la vie sociale.”<sup>44</sup>

Bataille’s notions of the erotic also strongly approximate that of one of the other prevalent models in the period that was embraced by artists – the Tantric.<sup>45</sup> In one of the popular texts of the period dealing with this religious-erotic art, Philip Rawson explains that, “Without the drastic experience of disintegration, no search for integration means anything.”<sup>46</sup> In addition to its mixture of abstract, rhythmic and sexually graphic imagery, one of the common iconographic traits in tantric art is the graveyard. Since meditation – either through sexual excess or privative withdrawal – is only part of the way toward the

elimination of the self that is necessary for enlightenment, the embrace of decomposition drives excess to its logical end. From the rejection of conventional morality flows the rejection of social bonds. The tantric initiate “must confront and assimilate, in its most concrete form, the meaning of death together with the absolute social defilement that it entails.”<sup>47</sup> This entails not only making the graveyard a home but commonly using images of corpses and horrible scenes before engaging in sexual activity as part of the sex act itself. Images of cannibalism and sex among corpses are also common signs and suggested actions for erasing the self.<sup>48</sup> Less crudely, in the artistic realm, the consistent presentation of Canada as a junkyard of clichés, of its history as a meaningless joke, the use of garbage in artworks, the contextualization of art scenes in terms of urban decay and graveyards in the press, the treatment of the political imaginary as trashy kitsch, the presentation of Canadians as psychically vacant automatons, and apocalyptic hyperbole about national death are all in line with this eroticism.

A generalized eroticism leading to self-erasure was also one of the primary traits that Marshall McLuhan saw emerge after the Second World War with the creation of a ‘cannibalistic’ culture that in practice made the codings of the erotic absurd as the resulting space had no “privacy and no private parts. In a world in which we are all ingesting and digesting one another there can be no obscenity or pornography or decency.”<sup>49</sup> In *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968), McLuhan examined the disintegration of the categories that made up life in the pre-electronic era and the reactive attempt to create identities as forms of psychic protection. His famous insistence on the neo-primitive aspect of this new environment is not only aesthetic, but also basically political and social. The global village is a parody of the Hobbesian state of nature, that

is, of perpetual war. McLuhan stresses that war is not primarily about defense, but about social organization and technological innovation. The innovation and knowledge produced by the sciences for war are the same things that erase the 'identity image' that peace is thought to protect or recover.<sup>50</sup> Conventional nationalism and the various sociological identity formations central to the sexual revolution are reactionary symptoms resulting from this process.

Warfare is the battle for territory.<sup>51</sup> This can mean geographic territory or psychic territory; the organization of bodies in space and of space on bodies. Fashion and the settlement of land both play the same roles as disciplinary mechanisms to corral matter and stabilize the economy of images.<sup>52</sup> Since *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), McLuhan had staked his argument for the history of technology and culture as the various deployments and sublimations of the body. What resulted was a continual erasure of any difference between organic and inorganic realms. Such a model is best summarized by the insight that "man appears as the reproductive organ of the technological world, a fact that Samuel Butler bizarrely announced" in *Erewhon* (1872).<sup>53</sup> McLuhan offers a fuller gloss of what is at stake: "Man becomes, as it were, the sex organs of the machine world, as the bee of the plant world, enabling it to fecundate and to evolve ever new forms. The machine world reciprocates man's love by expediting his wishes and desires, namely, in providing him with wealth. One of the merits of motivation research has been the revelation of man's sex relation to the motorcar."<sup>54</sup>

McLuhan takes William S. Burroughs' novels (*Naked Lunch* [1959], *Nova Express* [1964]) as the perfect exemplars of this process. Such artistic experiments are the 'engineer's report' on the new corporate world of electro-biology producing a "series of

social orgasms brought about by the evolutionary mutations of man and society. The logic, physical and emotional, of a world in which we have made our environment out of our own nervous systems, Burroughs follows everywhere to the peripheral orgasm of the cosmos.”<sup>55</sup> Additionally, Burroughs’ methodology – a mixture of drug influenced stream of consciousness writing, collage and the cut-up method – provided some of the basic formal tools and qualities to the aesthetics of erotic art in the period.<sup>56</sup>

It is within these two extremes – that of organic ecstasy and inorganic machinic delirium – that the history of modern erotic art tends to be written.<sup>57</sup> Historians of modern erotic art have noted the prevalent breakdown of the organic and inorganic in both its imagery and use of industrial materials. Gilles Néret also points to the prevalence of mechanical motifs in modern erotic art, particularly in the twentieth-century.<sup>58</sup> He detects this in everything from Surrealism to Pop, likely best exemplified in a concern for mechanized dolls, often unsubtly imbued with pederastic desire and bestiality fantasies, both of which are present in the Canadian art under discussion.<sup>59</sup> Pierre Cabanne also argued that if pre-modern erotica was often allegorical, then the modern was largely defined by its mechanical qualities which the sexual revolution made concrete in the new forms of media saturation that technology rendered possible. This was the reality of modern eroticism, a reality he identifies with capitalism.<sup>60</sup> Cabanne makes the useful distinction that while the erotic is rooted in the language and acts of sexuality, it is not reducible to them but rather functions as a questioning of being, life and, through its phantasms, reality.<sup>61</sup> The distinctly machinic quality of modern eroticism is at one with the surrealist drive toward automatism, but also in the evolution of the suburbs and a service-based economy.<sup>62</sup>

Erotic art is a small subgenre of art history writing with its own norms and recurrent debates. Histories of erotic literature, and eroticism more broadly (including the nude) predate erotic art history as a genre, which had something of a renaissance in the 1960s.<sup>63</sup> This dissertation is part of this subgenre. Historians of erotic art are sometimes, though not always, self-conscious about insisting that it is not pornography, claiming that it is a form of sacred art, whether religious or political.<sup>64</sup> In a broad and popular history of the erotic arts by Peter Webb, he promised to deal with eroticism in sociological terms, stressing that such a history is ‘essentially about attitudes’ to sexual imagery.<sup>65</sup> He framed his discussion with comments on the growing commercialization of sexuality and superficial references to Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse, their ideas about repression and the promises of libidinal revolution.<sup>66</sup> He contrasted his definition of eroticism (loving, emotional, relational) with pornography (obscenity, action, anti-social), suggesting that when liberation takes shape, erotic art will finally be a “true celebration of love.”<sup>67</sup>

One of the better recent examples of this stream of historicization is Alyce Mahon’s *Eroticism & Art* (2007). Mahon argues that “eroticism has not been marginal but central to the history of art as a whole.”<sup>68</sup> Like Webb, she identifies the erotic with the thought of Bataille and as a “mirror of the times,”<sup>69</sup> claiming that the terror of the erotic is basic in human beings. She defines erotic art in terms of *jouissance* and the power of transgression, the flight from the social world into one of excess and dangerous openness.<sup>70</sup> Reading the history of erotic art through the prism of contemporary concerns, Mahon argues for the erotic as a strategy of subversion in the service of “progressive and oppositional politics” that seek to free the repressed.<sup>71</sup> Starting in the nineteenth-century

with the Decadents, Mahon notes that artists increasingly began to exploit the erotic as a tool to subvert social values.<sup>72</sup> She insists on a difference of intent between pornography and eroticism that allows the latter to be art.<sup>73</sup> According to her, pornography is related to power and dehumanizing objectification rather than love. Erotic art relies on ‘consent’ and this provides for ‘diversity’ and makes ethical demands for equality.<sup>74</sup> This distinction, however, is predicated on a dogmatic liberal morality she never justifies, one contradicted by the theoretic work she derives her concept of the erotic from, and which, like Webb’s, seems compromised by an intense instrumentalization of sexuality, as well as an elitist, utilitarian concept of art.<sup>75</sup> Theoretical problems aside, there is also a historical problem with such arguments.

Mahon must be aware of the longer history of pornography and its role in political practice since the seventeenth-century. This has been most clearly delineated in the work of Lynn Hunt and her associates and has mapped out the depth with which radical materialist philosophy was expressed through the creation of pornography.<sup>76</sup> Pornography played a significant role in the French Revolution and the subsequent creation of the avant-garde. This continued into the twentieth-century,<sup>77</sup> heavily influencing the Decadents<sup>78</sup>, Surrealism<sup>79</sup> and the Foucauldian model of sexuality,<sup>80</sup> as well as registering its polemical value during the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>81</sup>

The selective moralistic narrowing of the erotic is not unique to Mahon and Webb, but it also is not common to the historians of erotic art. For instance, Alessandro Bertolotti’s *Curiosa: La bibliothèque érotique* (2012), which offers an equally liberal but far less restrictive judgement regarding eroticism than those authors, makes no such distinction and includes a wealth of underground comics, pornographic illustrations and

postcards alongside paintings and photography and does not shy away from pederasty, bestiality, and apolitical sado-masochism the way that Mahon does.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, the many histories of erotic art written by Hans-Jürgen Döpp make no separation between pornography and erotic art, or for that matter the lives and practices of prostitutes.<sup>83</sup> Histories such as his are also attentive to the highly regionalized varieties of erotic art and their imbrication in a specific milieu.

Mahon notes that postwar Europeans and Americans tended to depict the nude in grotesque terms, treating the body as a metaphor for the human suffering of the war.<sup>84</sup> This was displayed in a return to more expressionist and abstract art and in the lingering presence of surrealist tendencies. “Post-war angst gave way to kitsch, absurdity and counterculturalism in the 1960s,” she argues, although, as her own history makes clear, this had to an enormous extent been underway since the nineteenth-century.<sup>85</sup> Understandings of the world were changing significantly, however, and she cites McLuhan’s work as one of the principle iterations of a new worldview for art, politics and sexuality. The most substantial change she cites is that erotic art became increasingly ironic, collapsing dichotomies of popular culture and high art and incorporating the sexual imagery of advertisements and softcore pornography into artworks.<sup>86</sup> With this, there was also “a new non-conformist sexualization (and often masculinization) in Pop art in the first half of the decade [that] gave way to countercultural radicalism in the latter half.”<sup>87</sup> She also acknowledges, however, that by the 1970s, sexually explicit material was rarely shocking to anyone, either in Europe or North America, and was readily commodified; besides that, non-objective or abstract painting had managed to be significantly more socially troubling than open depictions of genitalia.<sup>88</sup> To a striking

degree, one might add, the sexually representational and the abstract were directly superimposed in Canada, perhaps to a greater degree than elsewhere, and often in keeping with aspects of the tantric tradition cited above.

The topic of erotic art's relationship with (or indistinction from) pornography was a presence in intellectual circles in the United States in the period that concerns us, particularly in the wake of highly publicized obscenity trials such as those around James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Terry Southern and Mason Hoffenberg's *Candy*, William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* and D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which showcased arguments about the relationship between art and pornography.<sup>89</sup> Although arguments were usually pitched in terms of rights to expression, claims that were far more rarely staked in Canada, the aesthetic dimension of this expression was usually used to moralize the obscene. At the outset, Susan Sontag separated the object of her 1967 essay (which focused on Bataille and, unlike much of American discourse on pornography at the time, was more formalist than psychoanalytical<sup>90</sup>) on pornography from its role as a psychological phenomenon or an item in social history. The exile of the pornographic from art has not been strictly moral, writes Sontag, but also formal. The pornographic as a form tends to disfigure or destroy traditional modes of narrative development, eliminating the supposed complexities of empathy to replace it with primitive sexual fixation; it degrades language, treating it as a tool for an image dominated world, while the whole notion of psychology, social relations and motives are effaced for the "tireless transactions of depersonalized organs."<sup>91</sup> She rescues it from aesthetic nihilism by comparing it to the more radical experiments of literary modernism and by insisting on its value in dealing with anomalous and intensified psychological states.<sup>92</sup> Sontag relates this

to the experiments in extreme forms of consciousness of the Surrealists. In this way, one can see the shade of what would prove to be one of the other dominant tendencies is discussions of the erotic – *sophistication*, a notion that would be central from *Playboy* to feminist art and describe particularly urbane models for erotic relations.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps the most influential academic tackling of pornographic aesthetics published in the period was Steven Marcus' *The Other Victorians* (1966), which suggested that what was at the heart of pornography or erotic art, at least in the nineteenth-century, was the presentation of the world as a 'nowhere' which had neither beginning nor end, neither gratification nor cessation, only an idea of perpetual pleasure.<sup>94</sup> But the world that pornography imagines is even more radical than this plotless and ecstatic one because it uses language in a completely anomalous way, de-meaning it until it functions on an unconscious level that creates a 'total, simultaneous present' which has no durational subject.<sup>95</sup> This is what Marcus terms *pornotopia*, which eliminates the psychological model of persons and the sociological notion of subjects, as well as the idea of nature, for a system of totalizing artifice that is allergic to the meaning given to sexuality by the social scientific image of humanity.<sup>96</sup> This alien world is one, Marcus suggests, that might be "written by a computer."<sup>97</sup> And it is such a model that will often dominate much of the erotic art in Canada in the period that concerns us. While Marcus tended to pathologize the pornographic imagination as a kind of perpetual childhood, other critics, such as Peter Michelsen, would recognize it as being at one with the Decadent movement and with the radical avant-garde, stressing, as Sontag did, an almost formalist credo that, "No artistic dimension of complex pornography is obliged to anything other than its art."<sup>98</sup>

One of the few essays published in Canada at the time on pornography-as-art, and reacting in part to Marcus, was by Montréaler John Glassco.<sup>99</sup> Writing in *Edge*, Glassco argued that pornography “is not, then, the ribald or bawdy, whose aim is to evoke laughter; nor the erotic, whose tone is mainly sentimental or lyrical; nor the obscene, with its appeal to impulses of brutality, desecration and revolt.”<sup>100</sup> Pornography may stray into these things, but if any of them, particularly the political or moral, become focal, it ceases to be pornography or art. Though he defines the pornographic by its aphrodisiac value, he also compares it to satire, since they both appeal to the same “intensity of feeling, the same truth and clarity of observation.”<sup>101</sup> He stressed the formal quality of pornography as a mode of collage and superimposition with Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* as the exemplar of modern pornography with its “stripped, functional style... with its flatness of statement, its record of acts uncluttered by sentiment or background.”<sup>102</sup>

Sexuality, like politics, in the period was often figured in mechanical terms with a surprisingly antiquarian kind of ‘Fordist’ imagery that would have been more common in the era of silent film comedies and which often seems to parody the functionalism of Liberal technocracy. This was true both for establishment political jargon and those who protested it, such as imagery created by feminist activists, particularly around abortion. [Figs. 6-7] Taking a dominant role in McLuhan’s probes into libidinal culture, the technophilic or erotic-mechanical may be polemical or satirical.

The erotic, at least as importantly, is about waste, whether in sterile (or reproductive) sex acts, the hybridization of garbage in works of art, or deliberate pointlessness. This is part of why there is a striking prevalence of scatology which, in addition to performing its more traditional satirical role, is also mixed into the erotic

literature and imagery of the period.<sup>103</sup> By coincidence, one of Wieland's celebrations of perversity was a man picking his nose and eating his snot, *Larry's Recent Behaviour* (1963). Such a scatological desire is usually a complement to the more prevalent mechanical body that dominates most of the work in the period and unites the sexual themes of the time with the equally looming tensions around technology that suffused so much of the nationalist imagination.

Finally, the other most prevalent erotic figure was that of the young boy or adolescent. Usually naked, often with an erection, this figure would appear in the imagery of male and female artists, in the work of gay liberation polemics and at the heart of nationalist polemics about a utopian post-liberal Canada.<sup>104</sup> Gilles Néret has claimed that, "In the brave world of erotic art, the male plays a small supporting role."<sup>105</sup> While this may have been true in Europe and the United States, it is not nearly as applicable in Canada where the male body, machines, abstract painting and animals featured as significantly as the bodies of women.<sup>106</sup> Eroticism does not pertain to figurative images alone but also to the non-figurative and the constructed environment, whether that of the Happenings popular in the period, or the new architectural spaces of the cities.

As we have seen so far in this section, erotic art history has generally involved understanding the erotic dwelling between two poles: a pole of impersonal communion with matter that revealed the absurdity of social relations and a pole of impersonal sexual machinery and environments for which sociological or political 'reality' was a delirious reactionary fantasy. Attempts by some historians (Webb and Mahon) to distance erotic art from its asociability and make it politically redeemable are theoretically and historically dubious. What erotic art, including pornography, tends to suggest about the

world is a pure impersonal presence, a nowhere or *Erewhon* – the kind of space that we saw filled Ian McKay and his associates with horror – that reveals the sociological to be an absurd delusion populated by no more than parodies. As the artist’s case studies will point out, this is also to a significant degree how Canada is imagined. What follows is a general account of the conditions of English Canadian nationalism in the period that will serve as a backdrop for the analysis of its divergent interpretations in Chapter Two.

### **1.2. Pornographic ‘politics’ in the hothouse of erotic art**

“In Toronto, the centre of erotic art, or at least art-with-erotic-references...”<sup>107</sup>

The First International Exhibition of Erotic Art was held in public museums in Lund, Sweden, and Aarhus, Denmark in 1968. The works were taken from international museums and the private collection of psychologists and curators Phyllis and Eberhard Kronhausen.<sup>108</sup> This was one of the peaks of a broader trend, usually confined to smaller galleries, of showcasing erotic art. This was not limited to Europe and the United States, but also appeared, with controversy on some occasions, in Canada. The notoriety of erotic art in the country registered its first strength in 1965 when the *Eros* ‘65 exhibition at Toronto’s Dorothy Cameron Gallery was shut down, initiating the first in a string of highly publicized obscenity trials. But such melodramatic events only hinted at the broader existence of erotic art and industry in the country during a period that has been generically termed *the sexual revolution*.<sup>109</sup> This section of the chapter offers a very brief survey of some of the different forms that erotic art took within the Toronto art scene. The artists discussed knew and exhibited with the subjects of this dissertation and shared quite direct formal concerns.

Erotic art made significant waves in the art scene of New York around the same time. By 1966 *New York Times* critic Hilton Kramer would complain that the city was ‘deluge[d]’ by erotic art, a development he regarded as largely a matter of commercial exploitation.<sup>110</sup> Other critics were also hostile, particularly around the Sidney Janis Gallery’s *Erotic Art ‘66* and the New York City Arts Theatre Association’s *Hetero Is*.<sup>111</sup> The works in such shows marked a break from reigning modernist conceptions of art, bringing the figure back into painting, breaking with the specificity of media, and using imagery from advertising and pornography. None of this was particularly new, but it was treated as novelty by critics. Rachel Middleman has noted that this situation allowed for new conceptualizations of art to occur, particularly for women artists.<sup>112</sup> While both American Pop and feminist art were adopted in numerous ways by Canadian artists, the national translation often significantly altered both their formal sensibility and symbolic value. This was true of erotic art more broadly as it evolved in Canada and took on characteristics unique to its national context.

Barrie Hale notes that by 1965 Toronto had moved from a city largely indifferent to art, to one that thought of itself as a “Paris of the North” complete with the “storybook romance of the young painter struggling in his atelier, thinking, thinking, working, working, the enormous pressures of his exquisite sensibilities exploding in mad bohemian parties...”<sup>113</sup> In his estimation, Toronto had graduated from the ‘provincial’ to the ‘international’ as a cult of (local) celebrity increasingly dominated an art world whose inhabitants were still heavily reliant on Canada Council grants, illustration work for the CBC and teaching jobs.

What happened in Toronto from 1960-1976 developed from a model that had been set in the previous decade with the loose association of artists who became known as Painters Eleven (P11).<sup>114</sup> With their public personas and abstract paintings, they provided the city with a highly performative kind of modishness that served as overture and accompaniment to the architectural renovations of downtown and the creation of an equally modish and populuxe variant of suburbia.<sup>115</sup> From the outset, P11 fused mod art to urban design and the desire for a more sophisticated and hedonistic lifestyle. Such was the case in their roles as public performers and party hosts and in their formal endeavors.<sup>116</sup>

Tensions around the issue of provincialism often drove young artists from the ‘hothouse’ of Toronto to New York (Michael Snow, Joyce Wieland, William Ronald) or Spain (Graham Coughtry) even if they continued to show their work primarily in the Canadian city.<sup>117</sup> In spite of New York influences, Hale would claim artists remained markedly local and the Toronto art scene was ultimately a deeply regional one inflected with individuated tendencies toward a generalized lyricism.<sup>118</sup> This often went through the figure, at least in part because there was still such a dominant concentration on painting from the figure in the local art schools.<sup>119</sup> An interview with art collector Sydney J. Fagan, a lawyer who had been collecting Abstract Expressionist paintings since the 50s, complained that Canadian art tended to reduce itself to regionalism. According to Fagan, local artists ‘lack creative abilities’ and “their style is dead.”<sup>120</sup> The spectre of obsolescence was noted by critic Robert Fulford, who suggested that artworks were considered pieces of tradeable obsolescence; the failure to accumulate the obsolescing would be regarded as a sign of becoming personally obsolescent.<sup>121</sup> The collecting of

obsolescence then served as a way of buying a place in history, since the work of art was not valued for itself, but as an artefact of a historical moment.<sup>122</sup>

Toronto's rebranding, whether as a Northern Paris or as "middle class capital of the world" was not without its snags.<sup>123</sup> British newspaper *The Spectator* labelled Toronto "the pornography centre of North America."<sup>124</sup> This charge was repeated in the provincial legislature by MPP, art collector and coroner, Morton Schulman, raising the ire of publisher Jack McClellan, who pointed out that very little porn was actually published in the city and insisted, quite accurately, that it was remarkably softcore.<sup>125</sup> However inaccurate this unwanted reputation might have been, it would certainly be an image that was exploited by some in the art world. As Dennis Burton's painting *Bay-Yonge-Bloor* (1963) [Fig. 8] suggested, there was a fusion of the painterly tendencies and the content of the city's sex scene. Overlapping the same part of the downtown grid, burlesque houses, strip clubs and porn shops would progressively share the same space as artists, their studios, the latest galleries and art shows.

Burton and his colleagues were part of the general visual ecosystem of Toronto's sex scene, and they were often actively responding to its environment, most explicitly in Robert Markle's imagery derived from the clubs.<sup>126</sup> In addition to how these artists situated themselves in this world, conveyed as often in their writings as in their visual materials, they were cast by the local press as desirable and exotic character types. Being mod was about being hip to jazz and pop, being open to New Age spirituality, and binding these things together was the assumed sexiness of the artist. All of this was in keeping with the city's rebranding as a space of liberal sophistication. The image of the artist drew from antiquated Beat clichés<sup>127</sup> and fashionable performative machismo<sup>128</sup>,

presented through a highly domesticated form of lifestyle branding that fetishized them as sex objects. Helping to solidify all of this was the increasing openness with which sexual content was displayed. P11's Tom Hodgson would slip from abstraction to abstract backgrounds that foregrounded glamorous depictions of women<sup>129</sup> and pornographic imagery would be linked in the artistic imaginary with the sophistication of abstraction associated with New York City.<sup>130</sup>

The fusion of sex scene to art scenes came to a head on May 20, 1965, when The Dorothy Cameron Gallery held the *Eros '65* exhibition. Featuring the works of 22 artists, the opening had between 200 and 300 attendees. The gallery was filled with pink light, pink champagne and heart-shaped cookies frosted in red. Popular historian and television personality Pierre Berton gave a speech celebrating how such an event would have been unimaginable even three years previous. The artworks in *Eros* were “touchingly romantic, innocent, or effectively mysterious in their treatment of these matters.”<sup>131</sup> Cameron was inspired to put the show together by Dennis Burton's recent, infamous show, *Garterbeltmania*.<sup>132</sup> The next day, the gallery was visited by the morality squad. The seven pictures removed, including some of Markle's work inspired by burlesque dancers, were eventually deemed obscene, and Cameron was guilty of exhibiting them. She was fined \$50 on each count or five days imprisonment on each count to run consecutively.<sup>133</sup> Artists were appalled and condemned this as an act of provincialism.<sup>134</sup>

Well over a decade after the height of Painters Eleven, Markle and his colleagues were taking at least one aspect of their legacy to its logical end – the erotic dimension of modishness. Contextualized in the shadow of the Dorothy Cameron case and the general apathy of the public to art, in “The Group of Sex,” [Fig. 9] Barrie Hale cited Markle,

Graham Coughtry, Michael Snow, Harold Town and Burton as the centre of an “art community that seems very much concerned with erotica these days.”<sup>135</sup>

Like the male artists, Wieland was aligned with the erotic. A 1963 profile in *The Telegram* proclaims ‘Decadent’ above an image of her lounging in the Issacs Gallery, her legs kicked over a mod plastic chair as she smiles at the camera, her discarded shoes sitting beneath her.<sup>136</sup> The profile stressed her interest in the erotic and the capacity to shock. “I love those things, I have a deep interest in the subject matter. But they’re more than that... they’re paintings. If all I wanted to do was shock, I’d just go down the street and expose myself,” she explained.<sup>137</sup> According to the *Globe*’s Robin Green, and thinking of the many penises that populated her imagery, Wieland’s “work is always a shock: There are parts of the body that one simply doesn’t expect to see singled out and painted in such aroused form all over the canvas.”<sup>138</sup>

*Balling* (1961) [Fig. 10] can be singled out for its playful erotic character. It followed several years of more collage-oriented paintings which contained similar allusions to sexual fluids as well as warfare. The landing strip, series of arrows and collages of bric-a-brac that make up *Laura Secord Saves Upper Canada* (1961) [Fig. 11] seems to almost be a sequel to *Balling*, with what could be read as the curling runway to the heart of Canada rendered as a distinctly vaginal space. The oil on canvas features smears and drips of pink fluid around a loosely hewn circle at the centre. The centre is filled with green, which congeals in different densities and is spattered over the canvas or wiped down the centre. To the side is a pink circle with a red outline and an arrow pointing to it.<sup>139</sup> Stained as much as painted, and overtly crude in both the sexual connotations of its title and content, it also seems to mock sexual instructiveness.

Fellow Torontonians John Leonard relied even more on the staining technique, but rather than presenting something verging on an *art informel* reimagining of Canadian history, he exploited the techniques of abstract and non-representational painting in, at least apparent, pictorial realism. Leonard's paintings were large, photo realistic representations of images appropriated from softcore pornography. He presented his women full frontal and confrontational, challenging the viewer. [Fig. 12] Sheryl Taylor has stressed the iconic quality of his imagery, claiming a Leonard figure "is the Venus of the 70's, born not from a shell, but out of the city. ... possessing a cool sensuality which suggests more than it reveals, she confronts the viewer with a stance as aggressive as Yonge Street on a Saturday night."<sup>140</sup> The mixture of content and deadpan affectivity, with its disavowal of any particular significance, then invited projection from the audience.

Leonard's *The Great Canadian Nude* (1974) series [Fig. 13], offered clear parody in its appropriation of Tom Wesselmann's *Great American Nude series* (1961-1973) as a model. But there is more to it than a bland joke, though the blandness of the joke seems to be part of its humour. Leonard makes a show of not doing what Wesselmann did with the nude, namely making it a catalogue of disparate painting techniques that displayed great diversification. Instead, Leonard strips things down so that it is an already existing image that is claimed and altered from within the *givenness* of its composition. Rather than retaining the intimate and mobile quality of a magazine image, as a painting it takes an aggressively static position. Across the *Nude* series, he invests most of his painterly attention into the textures and folds of clothing, fur, jewelry and other artifacts. The faces retain a slightly over-modelled quality that makes them seem alien. *Canada* is figured in

the work not simply as a pornographic female, but as an impersonation of the American. This impersonality is what is layered into the images to provide them with their sophistication, as well as their 'Canadian' content, to cool them down and let them be ironic.

Having at least a punning relationship with Leonard's work, Badanna Zack's *A Flock of Great Canadian Geese* (1975-76) would reimagine the nation as a flock of 45 erect and winged phalli suspended in space in a V formation. [Fig. 14] After years spent doing more abstract work, Zack turned to organic forms and used materials like aluminum, styrofoam, wood, rusty nails, hair and especially bones. Spanning from approximately 1972-1975, the phallic pieces she earned renown for started out as a joke. [Figs. 15-16] She worked on them while she was making sculptures from bones and of bones, noting that "there is the colloquillism[sic] for the phallus being bone too."<sup>141</sup> Such humour is also on display in pieces like *Hedge Hog Nail Fetish* (1976), which featured a phallus as the 'head' for a hedgehog like creature made of rusty nails. Her genitally themed works were part of a "vendetta against society. I resented the hypocrisy surrounding sexuality in our culture and these works were a way of fighting back."<sup>142</sup> It was not strictly polemical. As she explained in an interview: "It was simply homage to the male form... Men have been painting women for centuries without anyone thinking it was perverse. I don't know why they made such a fuss about my capturing the essential beauty of men."<sup>143</sup> This essential beauty was rendered in clean, simplified forms that were often highly decorative or, in the case of *Tumescence Detumescence* (1973) [Fig. 17], loosely narrative. In this work, which is thematically reminiscent of some of Wieland's cartoonish paintings of inflating and deflating erections (discussed later), she

casts the penis in polished aluminum, giving it a refined and industrial sense, much like mass produced plumbing equipment. A review of some of her early work by Kay Kritzweiser stresses that the phallic symbol is “subservient to her materials,” humorous (“in a sad little way”), abstract and lacks profundity.<sup>144</sup>

If Zack’s work was deeply indebted to surrealist humour, Graham Coughtry’s took the surrealist influence in a rather different direction.<sup>145</sup> Early on, he professed a dislike for abstraction and wished to make ‘Social Message pictures’ but this choice was soon jettisoned.<sup>146</sup> Although Coughtry’s work would be figurative, it would verge on complete disfiguration. With his work sometimes categorized as ‘morbid’<sup>147</sup>, Robert Fulford observed that “Coughtry inherits or borrows the language of action painting, but his current work is action painting’s opposite. It freezes rather than liberates the image.”<sup>148</sup> The painter’s frozen figures were usually paired, the two figures becoming merged in the sexual ‘confrontation’ (the term Coughtry preferred). The union takes place not only for the figure; the elements of painting on the canvas becomes increasingly fused. [Fig. 18] The painter claimed that the *Two Figures Series I* was “an attempt to transform sexual imagery into a way of painting.”<sup>149</sup> Mixing his oils with Lucite allowed him to paint with greater speed and fluidity as the different aspects of the image become blurred into one another “which is probably why they’re not pornographic, even though an awful lot of sexual energy went into them.”<sup>150</sup> The sexual confrontation at the centre of his work and the ‘union’ of erotic experience suggests “a rape in a countryside, very pantheistic” and even more explicitly in the vein of Bataille “it could be an orgasm or it could be a slaughter, but then you know as well as I do that sometimes that is the same kind of thing.”<sup>151</sup>

Coughtry imagined the erotic in terms of the violent congealing of bodies into a fusion of matter, differentiated primarily by the play of acidic colours. This was in stark contrast both to Leonard and to Dennis Burton. It was Burton who would construct the most complex and convoluted forms of erotic art in Toronto in the period. Something all three artists shared, critically or not, was a stake in the claim that eroticism was a privileged means of access to truth. Burton regarded himself as a philosopher as much as an artist and his work as a way of investigating truths about the nature of the universe.<sup>152</sup>

Burton's erotic art can only be properly understood in relation to his epistemological and cosmological claims which, perhaps surprisingly were articulated largely through his depictions of lingerie. Lingerie, and underclothes in general, do not simply cover parts of the body but reveal the extent to which it can be sculpted, reshaped and figuratively transformed. Burton spoke directly to this in a statement from 1968: "I don't quarrel with this contemporary use of woman as the most deliciously containerized commodity available. But I do quarrel with the resulting loss of her humanity. In my work, I express my love for the container and especially for its contents."<sup>153</sup> This was thematized in his controversial *Garterbeltmania* (1965-68) [Fig. 19] images, which offered a formalization of eroticism through abstractions based on undergarments that he mapped onto disparate historical, biological and artistic claims.

But more than their sociological component, which he downplayed in private<sup>154</sup>, it was the fusing, collaging and charting of the evolutionary potential of forms that was significant to Burton's work. For years he painted lingerie as a way of breaking away from the European and North American painting traditions of the nude.<sup>155</sup> In his notebooks, Burton wrote that the garterbelt images were primarily concerned with the

evolution of humans from insects and crustaceans, the excretory organs eventually being displaced to the face.<sup>156</sup> But after finding a book on tantric art in December of 1966, he decided to concentrate on paintings of genitalia as images of cosmic origin.<sup>157</sup>

What Burton sought to do, was create 'RELIGIOUS-SEXUAL PICTURES' that would undo the negative circumlocutions that had dominated Western depictions of women from high art to slang.<sup>158</sup> It was such symbols that Burton used in framing his propositions, which according to him, were basically theological.<sup>159</sup> *The Niagara Rainbow Honeymoon* series (1967-68) foregrounds the tensions between the holy and profane depiction of erotic life and the same division between its various 'shrines'.<sup>160</sup> [Figs. 20-22] Narrative, and designed around archetypes (including a vaginal maple leaf) that wed a diagram-like structure to highly symbolic geometrized abstractions, use of colour and their fusion to images from kitsch erotica, these paintings were some of the most propositional art that he would create.

The challenge of a multi-tiered or polyvalent erotic art was also taken up by painter Claude Breeze whose politically polemical imagery investigated the plasticity of the erotic body. [Figs. 23-24] This body could involve anything from atrocity victims to scenes of rape and would appropriate its content from news imagery, obscure porn magazines and the art press. His concern was both with the affective qualities of media reproduction and the sensual suggestiveness that the mechanics of media created as they distorted the human figure, a quality particularly apparent in his appropriation of TV imagery. [Figs. 25-26] These aspects of his work tended to receive secondary recognition in their reception by journalists, who would acknowledge that he had created some of the

“most erotic pictures ever painted by a Canadian” without analysing what this implied about their political statements.<sup>161</sup>

Breeze’s work shared something with John Boyle and Dennis Burton’s comparable senses of making the construction of the image naked, of rubbing different painterly styles against one another, and creating images that are obvious and ambiguous in equal measure.<sup>162</sup> Breeze would insist on the social role of his art but recognized, and made formally explicit, that this was comprised of more than moral concern. Breeze considered the atrocity-filled *Lovers in a Landscape* paintings (1964-65) ‘funny as hell’ in their obviousness which “the more you talk about it the cornier it sounds.”<sup>163</sup> By this, he implied that they became melodramas thanks to their presentation of extreme actions and over-emotionalism.<sup>164</sup>

A profile of Breeze in the *Toronto Star* portrayed his work as social reportage and the artist as an eccentric diagnostician. “It’s all part of the sickness I try to report on in my paintings,” Breeze was reported as saying.<sup>165</sup> Breeze’s concern for a heightened affective quality, and its possible defects, runs through this period and is best explained in his own remarks about pornography. For Breeze, using the popular clichés of the time, ‘involvement’ was a way of being ‘turned on’ and porn provided both the positive and negative model for this. This is illustrated by his own attempts to translate images from pornography. Breeze worked from *Twilight* [Figs. 27-28], an obscure contemporary skin magazine that he claimed looked several decades old and featured a “strange titillation which really isn’t... it’s just gross. [...] I’m all for good pornography... but this stuff is crap... porcelain, corn-ball stuff.”<sup>166</sup> He would explain that the drawings he made from the magazine “represent the desexing and dehumanization of the female form. The

figures are a plastic, porcelain type and reflect the sexless society we will have if people continue to get turned on by false images. It is becoming increasingly difficult to get turned on. By what will society be turned on?"<sup>167</sup> So, for Breeze, there is a dual capacity for pornography – it can desexualize (become corny and false, a turn off) or it can hypersexualize and be a turn on, a way of investing in the world. What he seemed to regard as a failure in his work was that the more socially meaningful he tried to make it, the cornier the work became. Nonetheless, one of the lengthier interpretations of the works in this period, by Gail Dexter, uncritically read them as images that ‘emphasize the horror’ of carnage and protest this state of affairs with ‘unheeded anger’.<sup>168</sup>

The more famous instance of Breeze’s use of media imagery as a form of political pornography was his appropriation of a lynching photograph for *Sunday Afternoon: From an Old American Photograph* (1965). [Figs. 29-30] This painting was printed in *artscanada* as a ‘Playboy-type foldout,’ eliciting outrage within the House of Commons, and was purchased by the Canada Council.<sup>169</sup> Such embrace of the image as a centerfold for progressive ideology finds itself exaggerated in a catalogue essay that cast its symbolic value in religious terms: “And one stands before his ‘Sunday Morning’ as one ought to stand before a crucifix.”<sup>170</sup>

Judging from his statements about the hilarity of charged imagery above, the irony that Breeze’s work presents is that once you get ‘turned on’, the fantasy of social significance, which is itself revealed to be a sexual fantasy, is also shown to be a melodramatic joke. This seems to be why Breeze largely abandoned figurative art, turning back to landscape, in a move that Lord would castigate him for.<sup>171</sup> But Breeze

was not turning against the erotic, he was looking for it in space, things and texture rather than the figure.

Meanwhile, Harold Town was adamant about the moral content of his work, though the critics seemed unwilling to recognize it.<sup>172</sup> Town began his *Enigma* series in January 1964 and continued them for eight years. According to him, “The Enigmas are fuelled by much more of our national idiocy than I can adumbrate here. They are concerned also with specific private loathings...”<sup>173</sup> Reviewing their publication as a finely produced art book, David Silcox summarizes them as “vicious parables about modern Canadian society” peopled “with sadistic, domineering women... while the men are sissified boys.”<sup>174</sup> [Figs. 31-34] By contrast, at a showing of some of the *Enigmas* at Jerrold Morris, Pearl McCarthy found the show ‘cheerful’ and ‘aristocratic’.<sup>175</sup> And Elizabeth Kilbourn would interpret them as “allegories on the great twentieth century revolution, the disequilibrium of the sexes.”<sup>176</sup>

A concern with the extremes of physical forms dominate his *Enigmas*. Town almost always presents a nearly bare theatrical set, marked only with the occasional, recognizable prop or two, upon which predominately male, half-nude or nude, usually fat and tiny genitaled men are tortured and humiliated by muscular or fat women. Characters are caked in make-up and attire from the renaissance to the present, engaged in duels, murders, torture, rape, suicide, begging, parading with pigs, hobbling on crutches or performing carnival routines. Three deathly figures in black hats preside over some of the events, closing out the book version of the series as they tower over a heap of naked bodies.

This brief survey has provided a very general sense of what erotic art tended to involve when appearing in galleries in English Canada at the time. Coming to the fore during a more global trend toward acceptable erotic imagery, it was branded as sophisticated, flirted with political satire and cosmology, and usually married clichés of news imagery with a motley of appropriated styles. It tended to be as much concerned with the blurry ground between abstraction and representation as it was about overt sexual content. Although it tended to editorialize its ostensible meaning, it managed to do this in ways so cartoonish that they were self-subverting. Canada could often be explicitly presented in gendered terms. As a female it could be the iconic impersonality of American capitalist forms that included everything from pornography to abstraction or it could be the obese matriarchs that tortured a population of sissified men. It could be fetishized phalli accorded mock transcendence, or a series of potentially holy sites embodied in erotic kitsch. If socio-political content primarily existed in their work as pornographic material, it is worth noting that nearly all these artists abandoned the figurative aspect of erotic art in the years that followed. These figurative tendencies will be present in the work of the artists that are our focus. But before we turn to them, we must make a few notes about approximately what the Canada that concerned English Canadian nationalists consisted of.

### **1.3. The nation that dared not speak its name**

“By 1966 they had discovered the nationalist George Grant and had had a ‘passion for the nation’ awakened...”<sup>177</sup>

“This is all you need to know about my bias. It is not so much pro- as anti-; in that I am a typical Canadian.”<sup>178</sup>

The following section will give a very general account of English Canadian nationalism in the period and then situate the emergence of nationalist art within it. This will also provide a necessary ground to contrast the practical political-economic nationalism outlined here from the quite different aesthetic-philosophical nationalism that is central to this dissertation. There is overlap, but the differences are still substantive.

In some important respects, nationalism as it existed in Canadian art in the period was the inverse or nihilistic parody of how it is commonly understood. Anthony D. Smith's historical sociology of nationalism generally insists on relativizing a political, state-based understanding of nationalism with a cultural one. The modern nation demarcates a kind of civic ideology with common sentiments, shared memories, a mass public culture and common forms of socialization. In the West, in particular, this is combined with legal norms and historic territory, whereas non-Western models of the nation tend to stress ethnicity to a greater extent.<sup>179</sup> Nationalism can mutate in a 'chameleon' fashion and become compatible with many divergent political ideologies.<sup>180</sup> It is not, in itself, to be confused with the state and, in fact, from a wider historical vantage, 'nation-states' are quite rare and unnecessary for nationalism.<sup>181</sup> National identities usually have had, Smith stresses, an ethnic basis, albeit one that tends to be heavily mythologized, a feat encouraged and solidified by its frequent pairing with a religious tradition.<sup>182</sup> But these identity formations transform whatever they take as their base, so "at the broadest level nationalism must be seen as a form of historicist culture and civic education..."<sup>183</sup> For Smith, this is part of why the arts are so essential to nationalism, although he consistently stresses that artifice is not enough to explain nationalism.<sup>184</sup>

The status of the nation, its often-ambiguous or hostile relationship to the state, and the problem of identity (conceived positively or negatively) played a role in the often-acrimonious arguments about what constituted Canada in the 1960s and 70s. In his *The Strange Demise of British Canada* (2010), C.P. Champion argued that “the country that emerged from the crisis of Britishness at the end of the 1960s as an officially bilingual, increasingly multicultural liberal state, was the natural hybrid successor to a multiracial Empire, a fulfillment, and not a rejection, of British Imperialism.”<sup>185</sup> Champion deals with what he regards as the systematic ‘othering’ of Britishness by the Canadian state in the period, particularly by the minority Pearson Liberal government, as the attempted erasure of the country’s unique and complex hybrid Britishness and its displacement by an ostensibly more ‘internationalist’ state, which was, ironically, only a renewed imperialism.<sup>186</sup> Although his account consists primarily of examining the educational background and working machinations of the civil service and leading Liberals, he does this to highlight the importance of looking at the ‘losers’ often erased from history, namely the more traditionalist side of the Tories.<sup>187</sup> It was the ‘Tories of decay’ as they have been derisively termed, exemplified by Scott Symons and George Grant, who served as one of the primary symbols for opposition to the Liberal Party’s reformation of the country.<sup>188</sup> And it was such losers who tended to be the heroes of many of the artists in this dissertation.

Champion’s book provides a contrast to Jose E. Igarua’s *The Other Quiet Revolution* (2006), which likewise claims to chart the ‘de-ethnicization’ of English Canada as it sidelined British ethnicity for the sake of a civic nationhood that could appeal to universal values. He even suggests that Britishness operated symbolically in

English Canada, much as Catholicism had in Québec.<sup>189</sup> Shedding the past and advocating for abstract universals such as ‘equality’ served as a tool for the federal government to use against the Québec government’s demands for more power.<sup>190</sup> In the process, the ethnicity of English Canada became, in Philip Resnick’s phrase, “the nation that dare[d] not speak its name.”<sup>191</sup>

Surveying the history writing leading up to the period we are dealing with, Ramsay Cook detected both among the French and the English, and across the political spectrum, a pronounced obsession with *la survivance* and survival.<sup>192</sup> This obsession saturated narratives of colonialism and the passage from colony to nation as well as the claim that the nation was threatened by expansive American power. Among French traditionalists Cook saw the scars of *la conquête* and the notion of the messianic role of Québec. Among the English he saw conflicts between liberal continental nationalists and ostensibly Burkean conservative nationalists. But most agreed, though not always for the same reasons, with Harold Innis’ contention that Canada was likely to disappear, whether for good or ill. While the spectre of survival would cast its shadow over Canadian cultural discourse in the period, what this might mean, and what divergent uses the cliché could be appropriated for, varied significantly.

1967 was the year of Expo, the Centennial year, and also the year the first McDonald’s opened in Canada.<sup>193</sup> According to *A Conspectus of Canada*, commissioned by the Royal Bank, “We can see more light than darkness in Canada’s future,” but the past needs to be forgotten, the ‘old planks’ replaced to “build a good present and prepare for a better future.”<sup>194</sup> The ‘future’ was powered by the significant surge of economic development and state expansion that followed the Second World War. This included a

‘radically’ new culture of ‘throwaway’ or ‘discretionary’ incomes that helped to fuel consumerism before ‘stagflation’ slowly and steadily eroded the country’s economic growth and exacerbated wealth disparities.<sup>195</sup> The birth rates briefly soared, and immigration levels increased as did urban and suburban development. With these came the reformation of space with the development of highways and the growth of the welfare state.<sup>196</sup>

The 1960s made Canada a ‘social service state’.<sup>197</sup> The economic model of an expanding welfarism was readily exploitable, both in terms of patronage and public concern, and coincided with a renewal of the rhetoric of ‘inequality’ by politicians and activists.<sup>198</sup> These tendencies were particularly buttressed by the expanding educational and media industries which remade the political and intellectual landscape of the country. While the 1946 Citizenship Act distinguished Canadian from British subjects, an identity which was increasingly bound to social programs and other entitlements,<sup>199</sup> the sense of national identity was precarious. This was accentuated as growth “strained the fabric of Confederation” and the 1960s served as a period of uncomfortable readjustment.<sup>200</sup> Even if the period can be identified with a more consolidated sense of nationalism, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson’s insistence on internationalism was reminiscent of “the turn-of-the-century imperialists, [as] Pearson looked beyond Canada because he did not like the limits he saw within.”<sup>201</sup> This internationalism was primarily urban or cosmopolitan, largely uninterested in collective identity and wishing to break from the past as Canada became part of the ‘American team’.<sup>202</sup> The tension between this, which many critics would deign to be the *liberal* vision of Canada, and its rivals would be central to debates

about the future of the country, debates that to some degree followed generational splits as much as a political one.

The postwar enjoyment of relative peace and prosperity thanks to continental economic fortunes gradually eroded so that “by 1965, many Canadians were beginning to believe that the United States was no longer the chief proponent of world peace and freedom.”<sup>203</sup> Pearson’s famously mild suggestion that the Americans reconsider the strategy of their bombing in Vietnam met with an equally famous rebuke from LBJ.<sup>204</sup> The sense of insult or threat was not limited strictly to high politics. At the time, 70,000 Americans immigrated to Canada, primarily to Toronto. According to one poll, at least 60% of Canadians ‘resented’ this incursion and this, perhaps, helped to spur on the drive for a renewed sense of national identity which took on an “ironic sense of urgency” as young Canadians were being ‘Americanized’ in an accelerated fashion.<sup>205</sup> There was also an encroaching sense of ‘silent surrender’ to what some saw as the American colonization through the educational, cultural and other industries.<sup>206</sup>

One of the earliest, and in some respects the best, narratives of English Canadian nationalism in the period was written by then Marxist Philip Resnick. *Land of Cain: Class and Nationalism in English Canada, 1945-1975* (1977) chronicles the emergence of nationalism in the country after it became formally independent from Britain in 1945. According to Resnick, the ruling class rejected the notion of political and economic independence as obsolete as “politicians and businessmen, intellectuals and workers were following the dominant liberal thinking of the time.”<sup>207</sup> Class relations were determined by the new economy of capitalist internationalism and continentalism. From 1955-1965, nationalism and the resistance to American economic domination were vehemently

opposed by the Liberal Party, the business class, civil servants, academics and the media.<sup>208</sup> It was not a significant positive concern of any social class in the period.<sup>209</sup> But there were instances of moderate bourgeois nationalism in the form of the Massey Commission and its recommendations on culture and the Gordon Commission's warnings about foreign ownership. The result of these gestures was 'essential vacuousness'.<sup>210</sup> This slowly changed in the early sixties. The *Financial Post* evinced "the *schizophrenic* quality of whatever bourgeois nationalism did in fact exist" as it oscillated between calls for increased autonomy and for the irrelevance of national sovereignty.<sup>211</sup> The spectre of Québec's growing nationalism also helped to spur some initial reaction.

The nationalism that emerged in English Canada from 1965 to 1975 was economic, political and cultural, seeking to escape the domination of the country by the United States and, perhaps, renegotiate confederation with Québec.<sup>212</sup> This occurred when the American economy was entering a significant downturn, facing substantial currency decline, and losing control in Indo-China while China rose in power. Polls suggested that while in 1967 a majority, especially in Ontario, supported massive U.S. investment and domination, within seven years and amid economic downturn this had reversed.<sup>213</sup> Additionally, there was an energy crisis and substantial charges on imports to the point that, in 1972, President Nixon explicitly insisted that Canada and the United States were separated by significant differences that had to be recognized and the old 'sentimental rhetoric' of continentalism was to be abandoned.<sup>214</sup> This change was also reflected in the Trudeau government's more moderate attitude the nationalization of some industry.

English nationalism was marginal and largely self-serving. It appealed both to the rural (small farming) class, who were most likely to oppose annexation,<sup>215</sup> and to the culture class who pragmatically realized that their financial survival was reliant on economic protections and state patronage.<sup>216</sup> According to Resnick, taking Québec's Quiet Revolution as an example, the petty bourgeois English nationalists – made up of what a Marxist would call the sterile or 'immaterial' class of 'parasites' consisting of doctors, lawyers, priests, soldiers and artists<sup>217</sup> – invested in nationalism just as the dominant bourgeoisie accelerated their hatred of it.<sup>218</sup> There was a small elite of urban intellectuals who formed political groups that were at least symbolically significant: The Waffle (1969)<sup>219</sup> and the Committee for an Independent Canada (1970).<sup>220</sup> Although these strands emerged with the development of a specific set of the petty bourgeoisie and reflected their self-interests,<sup>221</sup> they were also so basically 'undifferentiated' in their notions of Canada that they could not make much headway.<sup>222</sup> The majority position of the ruling class, however, remained anti-nationalist, advocating for the "multinational corporation as the harbinger of 'a more humane, equitable and non-discriminatory civilization.' Salvation lay in a world run by Exxon."<sup>223</sup>

Among Canadianists, the spectre of 'cultural genocide' and 'cultural suicide' were keenly felt.<sup>224</sup> The English Canadian drive to cultivate nationalism was largely understood as complementary to what was becoming increasingly vocal in Québec. Sharing a similar anti-imperialist rhetoric, it also contained a significant streak of self-interest. There was, as Jeffrey Cormier has demonstrated, particularly among academics (and more particularly those in the social sciences), a pronounced entrepreneurship in the cultivation of Canadianization.<sup>225</sup> This occurred both in the development of professional

networks, particularly among sociologists and anthropologists, but also among artists, publishers etc. Academics in particular benefitted from a substantial public backlash against Canadian nationalism in the media. The mainstream vilification of the movement seemed to make it more attractive to students.<sup>226</sup> Nonetheless, the ‘movement’ was brief in lifespan before “falling out of fashion.”<sup>227</sup> Initially reaching out through teach-ins, often featuring widely attended lectures by George Grant and Robin Mathews, the movement became more professionalized by the early 1970s and concentrated primarily in the social sciences where the ‘moral commitments’ some scholars claimed to possess prompted them to formulate a national identity which would be a ‘tool’ in the ‘insurgency’ against American imperialism.<sup>228</sup>

It was within the situation outlined that Canadian nationalist art was either promoted or derided. In “Art on the edge of empire,” Robert Fulford, echoing the claims of Joyce Wieland, argued that Canadian artists “played the role of shaman” to their society on three occasions – the Group of Seven, the Automatistes and Painters 11.<sup>229</sup> Artists were central ‘dots’ who gave their societies focus, direction or décor. But in the late 1960s, and in spite of the art being better and galleries proliferating, to most, “Canadian art is dead” and whatever social significance it once may have possessed had left the visual arts for literature.<sup>230</sup> He blames this largely on journalists of the period, who barely engaged with, and often ignored, Canadian visual art, and on collectors largely turning away from it, to be replaced by the state as patron. At the same time, art had ceased to have a “real sense of metropolitanism” as cities became both less important to the work (if not sales) and the country splintered more into regions.<sup>231</sup> Even cities themselves were best understood as regions, rather than as particularly cosmopolitan

centres. He stressed that a Canadian artist lived “in at least three imaginative geographies”: their own region with its own politics, English or French Canada, and North America, where the United States seemed to provide “the very air we breathe.”<sup>232</sup> This left Canadian artists in a ‘one-way internationalism’ where they imagine to be part of a world that would never recognize their existence. They were simply on the receiving end of an imperialist culture. While leading Canadian artists in the 1950s rejected provincialism and dreamed of an internationalist art world, by the 70s, they embraced localism and rejected the international as a colonial dream.<sup>233</sup> Although some gallerists were avowedly tied to an established set of American market norms (David Mirvish), others were more adventurous, such as Carmen Lamanna, who helped to encourage many of the artists taken on by the National Gallery. As art became larger in scale, it also became more reliant on state patronage through grants and purchases from the Gallery and the Art Bank. The result was “a peculiar way of producing state art. That is the most crucial economic and political fact of Canadian art in the 1970s.”<sup>234</sup>

Fulford leaves there, but this state-art nexus would result in, to put it somewhat crudely, two contrary tendencies for two different nationalist arts: an art against the state, usually for the sake of a region or subculture; and an art under the banner of the state against what was perceived as established culture or society. In the work of the three artists that this dissertation concerns, we will see a frequently perverse shift between these tendencies as they each establish forms of nationalist art that are not entirely reconcilable to either a social or statist conceptualization of art. The erotic aspect of their work will be essential to understanding this. As this chapter has suggested, erotic art was part of a long tradition that stressed an effectively formalist understanding of content.

What the erotic art discussed subsequently suggests is that the world is an impersonal presence and the sociological a delusion populated by parodies. This will be to a significant degree how Canada is imagined. This chapter concluded with a general account of the conditions of English Canadian nationalism in the period that will serve as a backdrop for the analysis of its divergent interpretations in the following chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan D. Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 284.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Goddard, "Can skin really be sin when it's only a picture?" *Toronto Star*, June 5, 1976, H1.

<sup>3</sup> Jerrold A. Morris, *The Nude in Canadian Painting* (Toronto: New Press, 1972), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Brown and Christopher Ondaatje, *The First Original Unexpurgated Canadian Book of Sex and Adventure* (Toronto: Pagurian Press, 1979), 100-101.

<sup>5</sup> And when it has, as in Andrew Horrall's "'Adult Viewing Only' Dorothy Cameron's 1965 Trial for Exhibiting Obscene Pictures," *Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* vol. 34, no. 1 (2013), it has avoided the matter of eroticism to concentrate on gender issues. Even Andy Wainwright's biography of Robert Markle avoids substantial discussion of the artist's erotic theories but deals extensively with gender.

<sup>6</sup> Michèle Grandbois, Anna Hudson and Esther Trépanier, *The Nude in Modern Canadian Art, 1920-1950* (Paris: Somogy; Québec: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2009) and Devon Smither, "Identity crisis: the nude in 1930s modern Canadian art" (MA thesis., University of British Columbia, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Jacques de Roussan, *Le nu dans l'art au Québec* (LaPrairie: Editions M. Broquet, 1982), 7; Jerrold A. Morris, *The Nude in Canadian Painting* (Toronto: New Press, 1972), 3. Both insist on separating the nude from the erotic on the grounds of etiquette, but are otherwise vague in defining the distinction.

<sup>8</sup> Of the 1765 works listed in the index of Diane E. Peters' *Canadian Art and Architecture: An Annotated Bibliography of Theses and Dissertations* (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2003), covering 1929-1999, there were 137 listings for women's art and artists, 60 listings for feminist art and theory, 1 listing for sexual intimacy, 2 listings for sexual abuse, 47 listings for sexual identity, 11 listings for sex roles, and 47 listings for nationalism (broadly, not strictly Canadian). There were no listings that directly dealt with eroticism, certainly not in the sense used here, or with its relationship to nationalism. In the period since 2000, there has continued to be extensive writing on gender and a great deal more on sexual identity or queer issues, but still very little on the erotic.

<sup>9</sup> It is worth pointing out that starting with his dissertation, Dickinson's work was rooted in a critique of Symons. See Peter Ernest Dickinson, "Here is Queer: Nationalisms and Sexualities in Contemporary Canadian literatures" (Ph.D. diss., The University of British Columbia, 1997), 130-162, though the it almost uncritically parrots Robert K. Martin's, "Cheap Tricks in Montreal: Scott Symons's Place d'Armes," *Essays on Canadian Writing* issue 54 (Winter 1994), 198-211. Both authors do not so much read the texts but grate decontextualized segments of them through a web of partially assimilated arguments from other writers. For a considerably more nuanced analysis that critically assimilates their arguments, see Terry Goldie, *Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003), 114-132. Ian McKay has pointed out that while such arguments are no doubt emotionally rewarding, their capacity for plausible or insightful historical explanation is minimal. See Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 137-138.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Dickinson and Richard Cavell, *Sexing the Maple: A Canadian Sourcebook* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006), xix. This claim is somewhat disingenuous given the explicitly pedagogical nature of the text which clearly treats 'literature' as material to be harvested for sociological speculation and to be judged against its normative claims of representation. Conversely, one could note that the history of sexuality genre has often demonstrated a significant *literary* rather than convincingly sociological bent. Some of the earlier works of Karen Dubinsky and Mariana Valverde, for example, are far more convincing as peculiar forms of softcore pornography than they are as history writing, or even exercises in

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metahistorical fiction. Valverde's *The Age of Light, Soap & Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* [2<sup>nd</sup> edition] (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), like Dubinsky's on rape (*Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929* [1993]), falls in line with what Foucault detected in the clichés of medical discourse and its establishment of "une polissonnerie du morbide, caractéristique du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle finissant." Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1976), 72. Dickinson and Cavell do not seem to take seriously what treating sexuality studies in Canada as pornography, a necessary logical implication of their basic epistemic claims, might actually suggest.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Dickinson and Richard Cavell, *Sexing the Maple: A Canadian Sourcebook* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006), xviii. Dickinson and Cavell's understanding of the twining of these two themes is derived largely from George L. Mosse's *Nationalism and Sexuality*. The spare evidence they provide does not make it convincing. Mosse's work deals almost exclusively with modern Germany and discusses how "concepts of sexuality haunted bourgeois society and nationalism, to be acknowledged yet curbed, deflected from the physical onto an ideal stereotype of male and female beauty." George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 2. These stereotypes then served to buttress the respectability preached by puritans and the rising class and served to regulate sexual behaviour in ways that he maps onto the emergence of fascism. But, leaving aside the clearly hyperbolic and emotionally manipulative quality of Dickinson and Cavell's gesture in appropriating this model, Mosse's study, whatever its merits, can not be arbitrarily superimposed onto Canada as they do, particularly the Canada of the second half of the twentieth-century, which had a fundamentally different ethnic, religious, economic and political history.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Dickinson and Richard Cavell, *Sexing the Maple: A Canadian Sourcebook* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006), xxxi. Such a model parallels the model of identity propounded by the Trudeau regime discussed later.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxi. The model of nationalism that they utilize for these generalizations is not derived from the empirical history of Canada and it ignores the fundamental way that anti-nationalism, multiculturalism, and the liberalization of sexuality were linked in Liberal discourse to 'normalization', *ratrapage* and against the 'sterility' of nationalism. What Cavell and Dickinson accidentally illustrate (along with Waugh) is precisely how uncritically normative, ahistorical and in keeping with the generic structures of post-nineteenth-century bourgeois nationalism their own arguments for queer nationalism are with their reifications of the clichés of liberal ideology.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvi. And yet, Foucault claimed that his task was to return the discourses on sexuality to the 'économie générale' of discourse. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1976), 19. This clearly Bataille-inspired gesture deprives Marxist, Freudian and Hegelian, as well as sociological claims, for to return to general economy is to deny any of these models a special relationship to reality and to undermine the kind of structural claims they are making. Besides this, their appropriation of Foucault rests on a basic misunderstanding of what discourse constitutes in his thinking.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxi. For a brief argument for the untenability of such a linguistically-derived approach, see Perry Anderson's *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983),

42-52, though I think he under-complicates Foucault's claims. Besides this, Dickinson and Cavell's insistence on framing the collected texts in this way is particularly odd given that so few of the authors in the collection follow a comparable or compatible methodology. Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) hardly backs up a sociologically-derived understanding of the world and McLuhan's article clearly satirizes it. What is even odder is that 'sexual discursivity' does not by any logical necessity imply the plausibility of the sociological model of sexuality that they assume and, as Anderson might have argued, may radically undermine it.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1976), 200-207.

<sup>17</sup> Waugh does not discuss the pornography of my period, which is somewhat surprising given his generally thoughtful and sympathetic writing on porn, such as *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), which coincidentally ignores Canada.

<sup>18</sup> Waugh is drawing from Peter Dickinson's *Here is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). See comments above on the dissertation it was

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drafted from. Dickinson's general framework in this text is almost identical to the one he adopted in the volume he edited with Cavell. It is notable that unlike Waugh, Dickinson tends to reduce the sexual to the issue of identity, love and community rather than allowing a little room for the erotic or rival conceptions of sexuality.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Waugh, *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. The irony of this construction, even more so than with Cavell and Dickinson, is that *queering* effectively designates the absolute and dogmatic *normalization* of the contingencies of neo-liberal ideology at a metaphysical level and projects it as universal history.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. To their credit, Waugh and Garrison's book on *Montreal Main* takes an often contrarian attitude to queer theory although the authors do not engage with, or unaware of, the substantially more varied and complex discourses on sexuality, as well as the erotic imagery present in Canada at the same moment, notably in the work of Paul Chamberland and that discussed in chapter four, part three of this dissertation.

<sup>22</sup> Jeremy Brown and Christopher Ondaatje, *The First Original Unexpurgated Canadian Book of Sex and Adventure* (Toronto: Pagurian Press, 1979), 7-8.

<sup>23</sup> As Susan Stewart would put it, "litotes and hyperbole in juxtaposition, serialism, parallelism, arrangement and display of detail, irony, parody, rhetorical climax and resolution—that is, all the traditional rhetorical devices of pornographic discourse." Susan Stewart, "The Marquis de Meese," *Critical Inquiry* vol. 15, no. 1 (Autumn, 1988), 185.

<sup>24</sup> The sociologization of the imaginary through language that they perform is a good example of what Lyotard had critiqued in *Discours, figure* (1971), namely the attempt to reduce the plasticity of erotic desire, which is fundamentally visual (even when written), into systems of knowledge made of signifiers of a dialecticized 'real'. Jean-François Lyotard; trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon, *Discourse, Figure* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2011), 3-19.

<sup>25</sup> Andy Wainwright, *Blazing Figures: A Life of Robert Markle* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Iris Nowell, *Joyce Wieland: A Life in Art* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2001) and Jane Lind, *Joyce Wieland: Artist on Fire* (2001).

<sup>27</sup> This received its most sustained examination in various essays by Lauren Rabinovitz (discussed later) but the collection *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999) illustrates the shift to this trend. The essays in *Woman as Goddess: Liberated Nudes by Robert Markle and Joyce Wieland* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2003) and Kristy Holmes' "Negotiating the Nation: The Work of Joyce Wieland 1968-1976" (PhD. diss., Queens University, 2008) follow suit with some notable changes in nuance.

<sup>28</sup> Lynda Curnoe, *My Brother Greg: A Memoir* (London: Ergo Productions, 2001); George Bowering, *The Mustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1993); James King, *The Way It Is: The Life of Greg Curnoe* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2017); Sarah Milroy and Judith Rodger, *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff* (Toronto; Art Gallery of Ontario; Vancouver; Toronto; Douglas & McIntyre, 2001). Pierre Thériège's catalogue essay for Curnoe's retrospective and Barbara Stevenson's MA thesis (both discussed in the relevant chapter) are the only extended studies that break from this in a substantial way.

<sup>29</sup> Such as Iris Nowell's *Harold Town* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing Inc., 2014), *P11: Painters Eleven; The Wild Ones of Canadian Art* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010) and David Burnett, *Town* (Toronto: McClelland Stewart/Art Gallery of Ontario, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> Denise Leclerc and Pierre Dessureault, *The 60s in Canada* (Ottawa: Publications Division, National Gallery of Canada, 2005), 13.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-43. This provides a remarkable contrast to the more context-specific discussion of overlapping works in *Les arts visuels au Québec dans les années soixante: L'éclatement du modernisme*, ed. Francine Couture (Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> For a few examples, see Yves Lever's *Le cinéma de la révolution tranquille de Panoramique à Valérie* (Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 1991); Julie Beaulieu, "Le plaisir visuel de Valérie" in *Nouvelles vues: revue sur les pratiques et les théories du cinéma au Québec*, 15 (hiver 2013-2014), 159-176; Ginette Belzile, "Valérie: du contexte au paratexte: étude de la réception critique" (MA thesis Université de Montréal, 1997); Alan Jones, "'Notre Valérie Nationale': The films de fesses as a catalyst of socio-cultural transformation during Quebec's Quiet Revolution and beyond" (MA Thesis Concordia University, 2017); Sacha Lebel, "Vulgaire! Pervers! Dégradant!: le film d'exploitation et le cinéma québécois" (MA thesis

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Université de Montréal, 2010); as well as Thomas Waugh and Jason Garrison's *Montreal Main* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010); and more general treatments of sexuality, rather than eroticism per se, in Canadian film such as Katherine Monk, *Weird Sex & Snowshoes: and Other Canadian Film Phenomena* (Vancouver : Raincoast Books, 2001) and Waugh's *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, although Freud, Marcuse and Reich are occasionally name-dropped, psychoanalysis, even in its then popular neo-Marxist reformulation, is rarely mentioned by visual artists and, unlike in Québec, the appeals to classic Surrealism are fairly rare beyond Coughtry and Town, while the appeals to erotic mysticism quite prevalent. This is not to imply that ideas from these traditions were not in the air. See Bruce Elder, *Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997) for discussion of Reich in Canadian literary art.

<sup>34</sup> Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes, X* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1987), 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. Bataille stresses the ambiguity, if not outright falseness, of maintaining an active/passive dichotomy as more than a trope. The tension in this is given a more psychoanalytic cast in Julia Kristeva's adoption of his notion of the abject which she expands to a discussion of the work of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, who would prove to be of crucial aesthetic importance to George Grant (discussed later). See Julia Kristeva; trans. Leon S. Roudiez, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>37</sup> Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes, X* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1987), 21. He stresses that to rational thought (the discontinuous world of objects and subjects) the erotic appears as a monstrosity. *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 58. Bataille's formulation echoes that of Darwinism: *Life is only life insofar as it is the destruction of life*. This is paradoxical of course; one can as readily, and in material terms quite realistically, understand sexuality less as the affirmation or reproduction of life than the mass production of death and waste. From this perspective, identity, selfhood, pleasure etc. are quite incidental (and, at best, instrumental) to this process. For a good Darwinian discussion of the destructive function of sexual reproduction and the pivotal role this plays in the establishment of cultural forms, see A. Samuel Kimball, *The Infanticidal Logic of Evolution and Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes, X* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1987), 68.

<sup>45</sup> One major distinction between them however is that the tantric redeems the erotic with enlightenment and Bataille's eroticism achieves an irredeemable non-knowledge. For a discussion of the latter, see Christopher M. Gemerchak, *The Sunday of the Negative: Reading Bataille Reading Hegel* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 169-196.

<sup>46</sup> Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra* [Rev. ed.] (London: Thames, 1978), 134.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 129, and the entirety of chapter 8, 112-137. While these tendencies are crudely at play in the work of Mark Prent, a more complex formal variant of it can be seen in the work of artists as different as Ivan Eyre and Michael Bidner with their combinations of pornography and garbage.

<sup>49</sup> Marshall McLuhan, "Notes on Burroughs" in *Media Research: Technology, Art and Communication*, ed. Michel A. Moos (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 1997), 89.

<sup>50</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 97. This is the general theme of the book, particularly insofar as the educational system, the same one that manufactured the historiography we will subsequently examine, lives off this in the form of indoctrination and culture war. See also Marshall McLuhan with Wilfred Watson, *From Cliché to Archetype* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 112-115.

<sup>51</sup> McLuhan's understanding of territory was largely influenced by the behavioral sciences writer Robert Ardrey and his ideas concerning 'open programs of instinct'. These stressed the function of education in addition to inherited desires to maintain and defend acquired property. See his *The Territorial Imperative* (1966). The stress that artistic form is territorial, spatially localized and an expression of biological asubjective processes is also at one with the citation from Deleuze and Guattari below.

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- <sup>52</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 156-173.
- <sup>53</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 1994), 116.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 46. For an example how such claims filtered into the broader public, see Daniel Cappon, “It’s all throb and sex,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 21, 1969, A21.
- <sup>55</sup> Marshall McLuhan, “Notes on Burroughs” in *Media Research: Technology, Art and Communication*, ed. Michel A. Moos (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 1997), 86.
- <sup>56</sup> While the other two techniques were well established since Surrealism, the cut-up method was introduced by British-Canadian Bryon Gysin. This kind of aesthetic programme would be most evident in the re-working of the History genre by John Boyle. See also John Glassco’s comments below.
- <sup>57</sup> Ancient erotic art history also has a substantial, but quite different literature, one which provided some inspiration for a few of the artists I discuss, particularly through the work of Philip Rawson.
- <sup>58</sup> Some of the more obvious examples would be Francis Picabia *Love Parade* (1917) and Tomi Ungerer’s *The Fornicon* (1969).
- <sup>59</sup> Gilles Néret, *Twentieth-Century Erotic Art* (Cologne: Taschen, 1998), 128, 145-163.
- <sup>60</sup> Pierre Cabanne, *Psychologie de l’art érotique* (Paris: Éditions Aimery Somogy S.A., 1971), 9, 195. More accurately, one could argue that this began less with capitalism per se, than with the emergence of mechanical and materialist philosophical models of the world and this is readily apparent in eighteenth-century pornography. But certainly, in the twentieth-century, mechanical aesthetics and consumer capitalism (and potentially socialism) are symbolically allied.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.
- <sup>62</sup> This is made particularly obvious in Québec’s *films de cul*, particularly *Deux femmes en or* (Claude Fournier, 1970) and *Fleur bleue* (Larry Kent, 1971).
- <sup>63</sup> There were earlier books on eroticism in art, such as Cary von Karwath *Die Erotik in der Kunst* (1907), appearing in the wake of the development of disciplines like sexology.
- <sup>64</sup> Claire Maingon, *Scandales érotiques de l’art* (Paris: Beaux-arts éditions, 2016), 9.
- <sup>65</sup> Peter Webb, *The Erotic Arts* [New Edition] (London: Secker and Warbrug, 1983), xxi.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvii, 230.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, xxviii – 2.
- <sup>68</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism & Art* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37.
- <sup>69</sup> In Webb, this is most explicitly the case in the polemical use of erotic content by George Grosz and Max Beckman. Peter Webb, *The Erotic Arts* [New Edition] (London: Secker and Warbrug, 1983), 224.
- <sup>70</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism & Art* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13. That the anti-sociality of such an eroticism conflicts quite directly with the socially redemptive use of sexuality as a category of identity that she subsequently highlights is not a contradiction she acknowledges.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. However, such a claim conflicts quite directly with the majority of erotic art history globally, whether in Moghul art, tantric art, Chinese erotic art genres etc., of which such claims would be dubious in the extreme.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. This modernist interpretation of the erotic is roughly shared by most historians of erotic art.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. Middleman also notes the frequency with which American critics in the 1960s stressed an opposition between erotic art in pornography. Rachel Middleman, *Radical Eroticism: Women, Art, and Sex in the 1960s* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 10-11.
- <sup>74</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism & Art* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 14-15. This argument normalizes an explicitly liberal conceptualization of relationality. There is a further tension in her claim that erotica appropriates porn to defy ‘bourgeois’ norms of taste and launch social criticism, but this is a ‘criticism’ that relies on exploiting the ‘exploited’ for the sake of an elite audience. *Ibid.*, 15. Besides this, her adoption of Bataille ignores his central point, namely that the erotic is precisely the socially and politically irredeemable but that these structures hypocritically rely upon it to manufacture the illusion of the social as true or real. For a more complex argument loosely in line with Mahon’s general position, see Julie Lavigne, *La traversée de la pornographie: Politique et érotisme dans l’art féministe* (Montréal: Les éditions du remue-ménage, 2014). The distinction between porn and eroticism claimed by Mahon is almost identical to the one offered in the Royal Commission examining pornography and prostitution, wherein Canadian state discourse actively pivoted toward a moderate feminist conceptualization of eroticism, pornography and their social function in order to safeguard ‘human dignity’ and the development of a more egalitarian society. The House of Commons. Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution and

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Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *On Pornography and Prostitution: Brief Presented to the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution* (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1984), 15-26, 57-58.

<sup>75</sup> One of the most consistent criticisms of pornography is precisely its sterile and anti-social character, one which is tied to its assumed use in masturbation. As Thomas Laqueur has noted, the Kantian horror at the depoliticized realm of the auto-erotic and its potential escape from the confines of the socialized self is echoed in many of the discourses around erotic art. The auto-erotic was seen to abandon both reason and the social. Laqueur stresses that modern masturbation is profane (though not really secular): “It is that part of human sexual life when potentially unlimited pleasure meets social restraint; where habit and the promise of just-one-more-time struggle with the dictates of conscience and good sense; where fantasy silences, if only for a moment, the reality principle; and where the autonomous self escapes from the erotically barren here and now into a luxuriant world of its own creation.” Thomas W. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 13. Kant’s horror at masturbation stemmed from the transgression of his moralizing anthropology and something similar is at stake in the writing of the history of sexuality discussed below. *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>76</sup> See Hunt’s *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) and the Hunt-edited volumes *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800* (New York: Zone Books, 1993), and *Eroticism and the Body Politic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). While Hunt’s work is important, it suffers (particularly in its earlier instances) from being mediated through an orthodox Freudian lens rather than in rigorously treating the pornographic on its own aesthetic and epistemic terms.

<sup>77</sup> For a good account of the some of the problems posed by pornography in France, see Carolyn J. Dean, *The Frail Social Body: Pornography, Homosexuality, and Other Fantasies in Interwar France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>78</sup> See A.E. Carter, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1930-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958) and Mario Praz; trans. Angus Davidson, *The Romantic Agony* [2nd edition] (London: New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>79</sup> See Jennifer Mundy, Vincent Gille, and Dawn Ades, eds. *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>80</sup> Aside from Bataille, one of Foucault’s most consistent points of reference is the Marquis de Sade, who he identifies with modern sexuality and promotes above Freud and Marx as a materialist thinker. See “A Preface to Transgression” in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984: Vol. 2. Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1988), 69–88 and the two relevant essays on Sade in *Language, Madness, and Desire: On Literature*, eds. Judith Revel, Mathieu Potte-Bonneville, Jean-François Bert, and Philippe Artières (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015) for the most obvious examples, but Sade pops up as a central character in much of Foucault’s history writing.

<sup>81</sup> Paul W. Goldschmidt, *Pornography and Democratization: Legislating Obscenity in Post-Communist Russia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999). Eroticism also played a notable role in the political rhetoric of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Eduard Limonov during the early post-Soviet period. See also Levitt, M. and A Toporkov, eds. *Eros and Pornography in Russian Culture* (Moscow: Lodomir, 1999).

<sup>82</sup> Webb shies away from these things less but has a difficult time reconciling them with his liberatory polemics. Bertolotti does not stake any of the claims of his narrative on explicit theoretical assumptions which, while making his delineation of claims less evident, also makes them less contradictory.

<sup>83</sup> Döpp’s histories, oriented toward a popular market, tend to be constructed around the idea of particular cities as erotic centres or on eroticism dedicated to specific acts or body parts. For examples, see *Paris Éros: le musée imaginaire de l’érotisme* (New York: Parkstone Press, 2004), *Le Musée érotique de Berlin* (New York: Parkstone, 2000), *L’éloge de la fesse* (New York: Parkstone Press International, 2010). The conflation of prostitution as an artform and erotic art is also present in Ferdinand M. Bertholet’s *Concubines and Courtesans: Women in Chinese Erotic Art: Ferry M. Bertholet Collection* (Munich: Prestel, 2011). Mel Gordon’s *Voluptuous Panic: The Erotic World of Weimar Berlin* [Expanded Edition] (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2006) arguably provides an interesting blurring of art history and sexual practice. The blurring of bodily practice and representational material is also a major feature of anti-pornography feminist thought, such as Andrea Dworkin’s *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: Plume Books, 1989). This line of reasoning was explicitly institutionalized by the Canadian state.

<sup>84</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism & Art* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 164-167.

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- <sup>85</sup> Ibid., 177. Arguably, it also finds its precedent in what Kenneth Clark called ‘the alternative tradition’ in *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1956), 400-446.
- <sup>86</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism & Art* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 177.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., 177. Néret’s book, to a far greater degree, concentrates on the masculinization that he detects in the erotic art of the first half of the century.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid., 202. In spite of this, and without addressing the contradiction, Mahon argues for the radicality of the sexual art of ‘resistance’ in the decade in the work of feminist, gay and other artists.
- <sup>89</sup> One of the most interesting interpretations of these debates from the time is found in Morse Peckham’s *Art and Pornography: An Experiment in Explanation* (1969). Written under the auspices of The Institute for Sex Research, Peckham’s lengthy treatise eschews the usual debates about freedom and obscenity. Roughly, he suggests that, at its heart, this is generally a self-interested debate between different actors over innovation for flexible order vs. stabilization or static order. In each case, these terms are so relative and flexible in practice, so contingent to the self-interests of those involved, that there is ultimately little distinction between them, a fact frequently missed by the confused ‘semantic branching’ used by intellectuals when analyzing sexuality. Both the ‘stable’ and the ‘innovative’ positions require the construction of taboos for policing. He applies this beyond the realm of the consumption of erotic materials, to sexual practices in general, stressing the effectively conservative function of all forms of sexuality, including BDSM and homosexuality.
- <sup>90</sup> Peter Michelsen’s *The Aesthetics of Pornography* (1971) provides one of the more complicated attempts to create a formally sensitive analysis of pornography in the period, fusing archetype theories with literary genre analysis. He regards the pornographic as the attempt to articulate the sexual aspect of the ‘mythos of animality’: this is expressed in hardcore as a kind of primitive animality that undermines the notions of personality and the social, and in softcore – which he stresses is a very recent phenomenon tied to the evolution of industrial pop culture – as the sentimentalist or gratifying (rather than grating or degrading) variant of this mythology. Peter Michelsen, *The Aesthetics of Pornography* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 23-24, 40-44.
- <sup>91</sup> Susan Sontag, “The Pornographic Imagination” in *A Susan Sontag Reader* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux Inc., 1982), 208. These attitudes are also noted by John Glassco who cites Margaret Mead’s insistence that the pornographic divorces sexuality from personality and meaning, leading to anti-sociality, and Steven Marcus’ insistence that the pornographic is a kind of grey formlessness that provides a spiritually void, mechanical vision of the world. John Glassco, “The Art of Pornography,” *Edge*, no. 9 (Summer 1969), 113.
- <sup>92</sup> One can also point to the degree to which the pornographic or erotic approximate the ‘dehumanization’ of art through abstraction and the elimination of traditional modes of representation and relationality discussed by Oretga Y Gasset. See his “The Dehumanization of Art” in *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essay on Art, Culture, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), particularly his remarks on the elimination of pathos, 48-55.
- <sup>93</sup> See the chapter dedicated to Playboy in Ethan Thompson, *Parody and Taste in Postwar American Television Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2011) and Lucy R. Lippard, “Eros Presumptive.” *The Hudson Review* vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 91-99.
- <sup>94</sup> Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1966), 214-215.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid., 270.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid., 273-285.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid., 271. The model of sexuality as a something bordering on a computer program also appears in a discussion of the relationship between fantasy, mental programming, and the use of sex devices (magazines, vibrators etc.) by UQAM sexologist Edouard Beltrami as part of an emerging common sense about the social scientific approach to sexuality. See Christopher Cobb and Bob Avery, *Rape of a Normal Mind* (Markham: PaperJacks Ltd., 1977), 79-87.
- <sup>98</sup> Peter Michelsen, *The Aesthetics of Pornography* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 59. According to Michelsen, the pornographic when identified with the obscene is effectively one of the most persistent genres of modern art. Ibid., 84. In a similar vein, Angela Carter argued that, “Pornography involves an abstraction of human intercourse in which the self is reduced to its formal elements.” Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001 [1979]), 4. While she relates this to the hieroglyphics of graffiti that inherited so much from ancient art forms – and were

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celebrated so frequently in modernist erotic art – the more efficacious comparison would be to things like Supermatism or Plasticism: pornography is to sex what Malevich is to painting.

<sup>99</sup> Glassco was a translator and poet, who became famous for the fake memoir *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970), and several literary hoaxes. He gained fame for his pseudonymous BDSM pornography, such as *Harriet Marwood, Governess* (1968) and *Fetish Girl* (1971).

<sup>100</sup> John Glassco, “The Art of Pornography,” *Edge*, no. 9 (Summer 1969), 101.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-111. Painter John Boyle will also stress these qualities of pornography in his article on the topic. This, and how it influences his reinterpretation of History painting, is discussed in a later chapter.

<sup>103</sup> For a discussion of the importance of scatology to literature in the postwar era, see Reinhold Kramer, *Scatology and Civility in the English-Canadian Novel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

<sup>104</sup> This was far more evident in Québec, see for example Jean LeDerff’s *Homolibre* and *Homosexuel? Et pourquoi pas!* ([both] Montréal: Ferron Éditeur, 1974) as well as Paul Chamberland, *Le Prince de Sexamour* (Montréal: L’Hexagone, 1976).

<sup>105</sup> Gilles Néret, *Twentieth-Century Erotic Art* (Cologne: Taschen, 1998), 30.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Waugh has also pointed out the degree to which the male body was the central erotic icon in much of Canadian documentary film production in the 1960s. Thomas Waugh, *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 58.

<sup>107</sup> Robert Fulford, “Pressure on the borderline,” *Toronto Daily Star*, October 1, 1966, 25.

<sup>108</sup> Phyllis and Eberhard Kronhausen, *The Complete Book of Erotic Art: Volumes 1 and 2; A Survey of Erotic Fact and Fancy in the Fine Arts* (New York: Bell Publishing Company, 1978 [1968/1970]).

<sup>109</sup> For a statement of the basic emancipatory clichés of this historical model in a broadly Western context, see the introduction to *Sexual Revolutions*, eds. Gert Hekma and Alain Giami (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 1-3. For a more extended and nuanced discussion of the many contradictions of the revolution in its specifically American context, see Jeffrey Escoffier’s introduction to *Sexual Revolution* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2003), xi-xxxvi. For a brief overview of the term ‘sexual revolution’ from the 1920s on, see David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution: An Unfettered History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 3-6. Allyn’s book gives an entertaining general narrative of different instances of the events in the 1960s and 70s in the States. Such accounts, however, are not particularly helpful in understanding what was happening in Canada in the period, regardless of how much the fantasy lives of many Canadians seem to take place in a foreign country. One of the more notable aspects of the sexual revolution was that it was often understood as either a passive by-product of capitalism or politically retrograde. The sense of déjà-vu for the shifting political and social mores of the period was noted rather famously by *Time* magazine in 1964 when it profiled the ‘sexual revolution’ as a re-treading of the 1920s. In fact, *Time* made almost the same argument Canadian anarchist George Woodcock would offer several years later, suggesting that while the 20s were rebelling against the status quo, the 60s were the product of a media saturated environment that had effectively turned the culture into a giant Orgone box. See “The Second Sexual Revolution” [originally published in *Time* on January 24, 1964] in *Sexual Revolution*, ed. Jeffrey Escoffier (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2003), 4-19; George Woodcock, “The 30s and the 60s,” *Saturday Night*, December 1969 and “Are the student rebels fascists of the Left?” *Saturday Night*, July 1969. The *Time* article was playing on the renewed popularization of Wilhelm Reich, whose book *Die Sexualität im Kulturkampf* (1936) had been translated into English as *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Regulating Character Structure* and who would provide much of the inspiration for the period’s libidinal politics. Other narratives gave the revolution even greater vintage. Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*, for instance, locates the initial sexual revolution in France’s revolution of 1789, but claims it didn’t occur in the English world until the 1830s and has come and gone several times since as an explicit retrenchment of liberalism. See Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2000 [1969]), 59-233. It is also worth noting that what she finally attacks is precisely the kind of functionalism that Trudeau sought to identify the Liberal state with.

<sup>110</sup> Rachel Middleman, *Radical Eroticism: Women, Art, and Sex in the 1960s* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 1.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 12, 118-126.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-10 and 17-29. It should be stressed that the emergence of women’s erotic art and later feminist art in Canada had a very different history than it did in the United States.

<sup>113</sup> Barrie Hale, *Toronto Painting: 1953-1965* (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1972), 6.

- <sup>114</sup> P11 were Ray Mead, Jack Bush, Jock Macdonald, Alexandra Luke, Hortense Gordon, Tom Hodgson, William Ronald, Harold Town, Walter Yarwood, Oscar Cahén, and Kazuo Nakamura.
- <sup>115</sup> For Toronto's significant architectural changes in the postwar era, see Bureau of Architecture and Urbanism. *Toronto Modern: Architecture, 1945-1965* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1987); Michael McClelland and Graeme Stewart, eds. *Concrete Toronto: A Guide to Concrete Architecture from the Fifties to the Seventies* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2004).
- <sup>116</sup> Iris Nowell, *P11: Painters Eleven; The Wild Ones of Canadian Art* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), xxxv.
- <sup>117</sup> Barrie Hale, *Toronto Painting: 1953-1965* (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1972), 8.
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.
- <sup>120</sup> Kay Kritzwiser, "Local artists called middle-aged, mediocre," *The Globe and Mail*, March 23, 1966, 12.
- <sup>121</sup> Robert Fulford, *Crisis at the Victory Bursk: Culture, Politics & Other Diversions* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 93.
- <sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.
- <sup>123</sup> Barrie Hale, "Their Town: Welcome to the Middle-class Capital of the World," *Maclean's*, April 1972, 33.
- <sup>124</sup> Anon. "U.K. paper says Toronto 'Centre of Pornography.'" *Toronto Daily Star*, March 20, 1969, 4. See also, Albert Coleclough, "Toronto's Pornography: Disease or Symptom?" in *The Underside of Toronto*, ed. W.E. Mann (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), 314-321.
- <sup>125</sup> Jack McClelland, "Jack McClelland's Toronto." *Toronto Daily Star*, November 29, 1969, 24.
- <sup>126</sup> For an account of the Strip's clubs, see Marilyn Salutin, "Stripper morality." *Trans-Action* vol. 8, no. 8 (June 1971): 12-22.
- <sup>127</sup> The scene's jazz cafés are highlighted in Don Owen's documentary *Toronto Jazz* (1963), which also features a young Michael Snow in his beatnik guise. In the film, "The act of playing jazz is initially defended in conventional, bohemian Romantic terms: as freedom, addiction, enigma and a battle against the Philistines." Steve Gravestock, *Don Owen: Notes on a Filmmaker and his Culture* (Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group, 2005), 19. Gravestock stresses the extent to which hipness functioned as a form of 'garrison mentality' within the city, see 20-21; Paul Bendetti, "Passion and Pain: Painter Graham Coughtry caught 'The Beat' four decades ago. Part of him has never let it go," *The Hamilton Spectator*, December 14, 1991, np. Nobi would also go in pursuit of the 'dharma bums' he'd read about in Beat literature, only by heading to Japan to study Zen. See Andy Wainwright, *Blazing Figures: A Life of Robert Markle* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 108.
- <sup>128</sup> For a survey of popular macho types, see Christina Newman, "The New Machismo," *Maclean's*, March 1, 1972, 32-35, 72. The macho typology casts a heavy shadow over profiles of William Ronald, see Barrie Hale, "From crisis to crisis with William Ronald," *Saturday Night*, July/August 1975; Ralph Thomas, "...and a look at the man who conflicted too much," *Toronto Daily Star*, December 10, 1966, 23.; William Cameron, "Portrait of the Artist as a Violently Honest Man," *Maclean's*, February 1, 1971, 33.
- <sup>129</sup> Marie Moreau, "Shoe shop goes groovy with gags," *Toronto Daily Star*, March 14, 1968, 60; Kay Kritzwiser, "At the Galleries: Taking the men's magazine approach to art," *The Globe and Mail*, November 6, 1965, 19.
- <sup>130</sup> According to Burton: "In 1960 Gord Rayner had bought some really explicit 'skin books' in New York. The women posing wore real everyday undies. The photos were shot in bright artificial lighting and everything showed – moles, blemishes, everything! These New York-bought skin books shows a 'reality' I'd never seen before, anywhere. Looking at them was like looking through a keyhole: when you zoom in on something, even a human face and watch the lips move, it becomes erotic, because your focus is directed to such a small area." Dennis Burton, *Dennis Burton: Retrospective: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery* (Oshawa. Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1977), 22.
- <sup>131</sup> Barrie Hale, "Canadian Artists – And Eros '65," *The Telegram*, May 21, 1965, 49.
- <sup>132</sup> Andrew Horrall, "'Adult Viewing Only' Dorothy Cameron's 1965 Trial for Exhibiting Obscene Pictures," *Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* vol. 34, no. 1 (2013), 58.
- <sup>133</sup> Phyllis Griffiths, "Dorothy Cameron: Guilty, Now What?" *The Telegram*, November 26, 1965.
- <sup>134</sup> Barry Hale, "Shocked, Disgusted and Indignant," *The Telegram*, November 26, 1965, 17; Anon., "Art in the prisoner's dock," *Toronto Daily Star*, November 26, 1965, 6.
- <sup>135</sup> Barrie Hale, "The Group of Sex," *The Telegram*, September 17, 1966, 13.
- <sup>136</sup> Helen Parmelee, "Joyce is a Zen Cook," *The Telegram*, November 23, 1963.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Robin Green, "Visitors' Opinions Sought," *The Globe and Mail*, November 23, 1963, 19.

<sup>139</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz has noted the 'sardonic' humour in *Balling*: "Wieland's unique representation of the penis portrays it in erotic terms traditionally associated with female sexuality – delicacy, sensuality, gentle activity." Lauren Rabinovitz, "The Development of Feminist Strategies in the Experimental Films of Joyce Wieland," *Film Reader* #5 (1982), 133. She takes the work as a celebration of heterosexual intercourse from the female point of view, with the penis denied depth and proportion, portrayed instead as flattened and flowing: "Wieland portrayed the penis as a banal object in much the same way other Pop Artists used the soup can, billboard, or flag as a means for celebrating and satirizing contemporary culture." Ibid., 133.

<sup>140</sup> Sheryl Taylor, *John Leonard: 10 Years: An Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings* (Sarnia: The Library and Gallery, 1981), Ibid., 4.

<sup>141</sup> Janice Cameron et al, *Eclectic Eve* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972), np.

<sup>142</sup> Clara Hargittay, *Home, Sweet Home. Zack* (Oakville: Oakville Centennial Gallery, 1985), 8.

<sup>143</sup> Sol Littman, "Zack takes off on a skull," *Toronto Star*, April 2, 1978, B6.

<sup>144</sup> Kay Kritzwiser, "At the Galleries: Classic sculptor in the grand manner," *The Globe and Mail*, November 10, 1973, 28.

<sup>145</sup> Coughtry had done calligraphic and figurative work for a set of poems by Surrealist André Breton. One review noted that "[t]hey go well beyond the most liberal reticencies[sic] accepted in representations of the nude, showing the figures in sprawling poses that are something less than polite, with modesty no consideration at all." Colin Sabiston, "Coughtry Illustrations for New Book on View," *The Globe and Mail*, May 28, 1960, 17.

<sup>146</sup> Barrie Hale, *Graham Coughtry Retrospective* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1976), 8.

<sup>147</sup> Hugh Thomson, "Galleries show graphic, classic cadaverous art," *Toronto Daily Star*, April 13, 1956, 8; Colin Sabiston, "Coughtry Illustrations for New Book on View," *The Globe and Mail*, May 28, 1960, 17.

<sup>148</sup> Robert Fulford, "World of Art," *Toronto Daily Star*, December 9, 1961, 31.

<sup>149</sup> Barrie Hale, *Graham Coughtry Retrospective* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1976), 14.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>152</sup> Burton admitted to being obsessed with recording everything for posterity, although he worried that he might be misinterpreted in his notebooks. He insisted that history should be understood through art above all else and writes of himself as a rare self-taught scholar in era when this is frowned upon, arguing his work is superior to that of the professionals and more orthodox. Dennis Burton, "Notebook 10," 172-176. *Dennis Burton fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO. Burton's appearance in Michael Snow's film *'Rameau's Nephew' by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen* (1974) seems to be a kind of self-parody of the artist as mad genius. He appears in the first half of the film to give a lengthy lecture in a gibberish language punctuated by visual glitches.

<sup>153</sup> Cited in Arnold Rockman, "Reflections on the Erotic in Art," *Canadian Art*, September/October 1965, 35. Rockman editorializes: "Well, the artist may believe he's quarrelling with the loss of woman's humanity, but that's not what his pictures say. *Squat Lady* [1965], like most of his recent work, is obscene because Burton is totally uninterested in the whole body animated by the human personality." Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Dennis Burton, "Notebook 51," IX. *Dennis Burton fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO. Such a tendency can also be seen in roughly contemporaneous painters such as Richard Lindner, but Burton lacked the same aggressive sense of fetishism and was more consistently spiritual.

<sup>155</sup> He claims, "IT IS A FACT THAT THE FEMALE IS NEVER NAKED, HER REGENERATIVE PARTS, ARE ALL ENCLOSED WITHIN. THEREFORE HOW CAN 'NUDITY', OR 'NAKEDNESS' HAVE ANY SHAME, OR PRURIENCE. THE WOMAN IS NOT EXPOSED." Dennis Burton, "Notebook '68 Vol. II," 156. *Dennis Burton fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO. He also claims that his embrace of explicit genital imagery is part of this turn against the Nude and toward exposure, but he had to be cautious: "To avoid vulgarity, to avoid medical clinicalism I followed the primitive as well as the highly intellectualized treatment of this area [the genitals] in Indian art and used it as a conceptual bridge to a subject matter not new to me but further advanced and more intense, perhaps, for the viewer." Dennis Burton, "Social Protest and the Heraldic Woman," *Edge*, no. 8 (Fall 1968), 62.

<sup>156</sup> Dennis Burton, "Notebook #A," np. *Dennis Burton fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO. These texts were appended to sketches for *Smokeshop Sex Marauder* (1960). Such a claim would resonate to tantric conceptions of sexual creativity detailed below. Ibid., 89 Ibid., 104. Burton later goes so far as to suggest that his thoughts might be the last communications of insects dying around him and being

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communicated through him “I COULD NOT SAVE THESE 3 INSECTS [sic deliberate] – I CANNOT SAVE MYSELF – I MUST ENERGY-TRANSFORM, I MUST EXPEND- I AM A ‘MEDIUM’ – I AM ALSO A SPEND BIGGER, NOT A BIG SPENDER. I SPEND MY LIFE, INSTEAD OF MONEY.” Dennis Burton, “Notebook 10,” 178. *Dennis Burton fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>157</sup> Dennis Burton, “Notebook 51,” IX. *Dennis Burton fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>158</sup> Dennis Burton, “Notebook ‘68 Vol. II,” 159-161. *Dennis Burton fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>159</sup> Dennis Burton, “Notebook 34B,” 32. *Dennis Burton fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>160</sup> “I HAVE MADE COMMENTS ON THE RELIGIO-SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF A PLACE OF SEXUAL WORSHIP CALLED NIAGARA FALLS, ALBEIT BOTH CRITICALLY NEGATIVE (IF YOU SEE IT VULGARLY) AND POSITIVELY SHRINE-ASSOCIATED.” Dennis Burton, “Notebook ‘68 Vol. II,” 161. *Dennis Burton fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>161</sup> Barry Lord, “Breeze in Retrospect – University of Waterloo January 1969,” *artscanada*, April 1969, 37.

<sup>162</sup> Boyle and Breeze were shown together, along with David Mays and Richard Turner, in a touring exhibition by the National Gallery called *On the Bias: Private Reflections of the Human Condition* (1969).

<sup>163</sup> Natalie Mazur, “An interview with resident artist Claude Breeze,” *Rintra*, Winter 1972, 14.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>165</sup> Val Sears, “You don’t hang Breeze in the parlor,” *Toronto Daily Star*, July 1, 1967, 65.

<sup>166</sup> Natalie Mazur, “An interview with resident artist Claude Breeze,” *Rintra*, Winter 1972, 14. His wife bought him the magazine as a joke. Lenore Crawford, “It’s a Breeze... Artist goes from lovers to landscapes,” *London Free Press*, April 9, 1973.

<sup>167</sup> Anon., “Turning on with resident artist Claude Breeze,” *Western News*, January 18, 1973, 1.

<sup>168</sup> Gail Dexter, “North American painting: The terror and joy,” *Toronto Daily Star*, April 27, 1968, 28;

Kay Kritzwiser, “At the galleries: A trio of painters produces maximum reaction,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 20, 1968, 25.

<sup>169</sup> Barry Lord, “Sunday Afternoon,” *artscanada*, January 1967, 13.

<sup>170</sup> *Claude Breeze: Selected Paintings 1962-1968; University of Waterloo Gallery January 1969* (Waterloo: University of Waterloo Gallery, 1969), np. I think they mean *Sunday Afternoon*, as there was no ‘Morning’ in the show.

<sup>171</sup> Barry Lord, *The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art* (Toronto: NC Press, 1974), 226.

<sup>172</sup> Fulford’s praised his illustrations but referred to his screeds against Canada as ‘stupid’ as well as ‘unimaginative and depressing’. Robert Fulford, “The Mysteries of Town,” *Toronto Daily Star*, December 17, 1964, 35.

<sup>173</sup> Harold Town, *Enigmas* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), np.

<sup>174</sup> David Silcox, “Viciousness and Love,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 19, 1964, A21.

<sup>175</sup> Pearl McCarthy, “Art and Artists: Critical Anarchy and Modern Taste,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 7, 1964, 15.

<sup>176</sup> Elizabeth Kilbourn, “Art and Artists: Virtuosity and Variety,” *Toronto Daily Star*, March 7, 1964, 30.

<sup>177</sup> Myrna Kotash, *The Long Way Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1980), 28.

<sup>178</sup> Walter Stewart, *Shrug: Trudeau in Power* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 7.

<sup>179</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 11-12.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 74.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-37. See Azar Gat and Alexander Yakobson, *Nations* (Cambridge University Press Textbooks, 2012).

<sup>183</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 91.

<sup>184</sup> “To see nations as composed largely of ‘invented traditions’ designed to organise and channel the energies of the newly politicised masses, places too much weight on artifice and assigns too large a role to the fabricators.” Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 130.

<sup>185</sup> C.P. Champion, *The Strange Demise of British Canada: The Liberals and Canadian Nationalism, 1964-1968* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 231.

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 12-14.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>188</sup> Terry Goldie, *Pink Snow: Homotexual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003), 115.

<sup>189</sup> José E. Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-71* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 14. Igartua and Champion's texts differ remarkably, both in interpretation and in method. Champion practices a kind of 'high politics' version of history which concentrates on the lives and micro-culture of a political elite, often to the detriment of embedding this within a broader socio-cultural context which would have made the 'Britishness' that concerns him more meaningful. Meanwhile, Igartua practices a form of discursive history that deals primarily with polls, editorials from urban newspapers and high school history books, assuming they all distill a kind of 'conventional wisdom'. Ibid., 9. As he repeats throughout the text, Igartua recognizes that it is largely unclear how much the wisdom is being shaped by these forms of media or being informed by them. Besides that, there is a strange assumption of clarity in his sources, a highly interpretive use of examples, and questionable personalization of newspaper's editorial positions from which he extracts a set of claims in his conclusion that don't seem supported. Ibid., 223-227. The larger problem is that Igartua's work, unlike that of Champion, provides no significant causal explanation for anything that he claims is happening.

<sup>192</sup> The following generalization is from Ramsay Cook's *The Maple Leaf Forever: Essays on Nationalism and Politics in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), 96-147.

<sup>193</sup> Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherford, "Introduction" in *Creating Postwar Canada: Community, Diversity, and Dissent, 1945-75*, eds. Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherford (Toronto, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>194</sup> Royal Bank of Canada, *A Conspectus of Canada* (Montreal: 1967), 20.

<sup>195</sup> Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherford, "Introduction" in *Creating Postwar Canada: Community, Diversity, and Dissent, 1945-75*, eds. Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherford (Toronto, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>196</sup> The formal changes in space in Canada will be a recurrent them in subsequent chapters.

<sup>197</sup> *Canada Since 1945: Power, Politics and Provincialism* [Rev. ed], eds. Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, John English (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 287.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>199</sup> Kenneth McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada: The Struggle for Canadian Unity* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 25.

<sup>200</sup> *Canada Since 1945: Power, Politics and Provincialism* [Rev. ed] eds. Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, John English (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 255.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>203</sup> John L. Finlay and D. N. Sprague, *The Structure of Canadian History* [6th ed.] (Scarborough: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 2000), 464.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 464.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 465.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 466.

<sup>207</sup> Philip Resnick, *The Land of Cain: Class and Nationalism in English Canada, 1945-1975* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1977), 18.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 126-143.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 107, 114-117. Trudeau tended to mock such concerns. In one exchange in the House, he explicitly ties sociological and technological 'progress' to American investment and ownership, suggesting that to privilege 'national survival' over them is tantamount to communist revolution. Walter Stewart, *Shrug: Trudeau in Power* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 124-127.

<sup>211</sup> Philip Resnick, *The Land of Cain: Class and Nationalism in English Canada, 1945-1975* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1977), 116. [my emphasis] The notion of Canada as a schizophrenic country will appear frequently in the statements of artists and theorists in the period.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 147.

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- <sup>214</sup> Ibid., 150. Resnick points to the irony that it was Nixonian nationalism that prompted the minimal nationalism reluctantly embraced by the Trudeau government in the 1970s.
- <sup>215</sup> Ibid., 162-163.
- <sup>216</sup> Ibid., 165.
- <sup>217</sup> Ibid., 27.
- <sup>218</sup> Ibid., 197-198.
- <sup>219</sup> Waffle (meaning “I’d rather waffle to the left than waffle to the right”) was concerned with creating a more modern form of social democracy, one which addressed American control of the country, to the NDP. James Laxer, *In Search of a New Left: Canadian Politics After the Neoconservative Assault* (Toronto: Viking, 1996), 148. In Laxer’s recounting of the Waffle’s history, it emerged in 1969 as a form of left-wing nationalism that was different from the heavily Americanized New Left. Ibid., 147. The American counterculture flowed into Canada unilaterally and American fights were taken on by Canadians “as though they were their own” right down to duplicating slogans and eliminating any significant cultural distinctions between the two countries. Ibid., 149. Tension between the party establishment and the Waffle persisted, particularly as the latter reached out increasingly to local unions when the NDP was dominated by international ones. Finally, by 1972, the party leadership set up a task force to investigate them and publicly denounced them, smearing them with a comparison to the Alabama segregationist governor George Wallace. Ibid., 161. Soon after, the party executive ordered them to disband.
- <sup>220</sup> Formed to promote Canadian economic and cultural interest and autonomy, the committee included former Liberal cabinet member Walter Gordon, journalist Peter C. Newman and Abraham Rotstein with involvement from publisher Jack McClelland, Mel Hurtig and Claude Ryan and others.
- <sup>221</sup> Philip Resnick, *The Land of Cain: Class and Nationalism in English Canada, 1945-1975* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1977), 170.
- <sup>222</sup> Ibid., 173. Resnick goes on to note that while there was a certain sympathy to nationalism in magazines such as *Maclean’s*, it had little specificity or substance.
- <sup>223</sup> Ibid., 171.
- <sup>224</sup> Jeffrey Cormier, *The Canadianization Movement: Emergence, Survival, and Success* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 27, 77. This can also be detected in Québec nationalism, for example Pierre Vadeboncoeur’s *Un génocide en douce* (Montréal: Les Éditions Parti pris, 1976) and in Marcel Rioux, *La question du Québec* (Paris: Seghers, 1971), 138. Nationalism in both instances was often conceived as a battle against this genocide and against the Canadian state’s role in American imperialism.
- <sup>225</sup> See the first two chapters of Jeffrey Cormier’s *The Canadianization Movement: Emergence, Survival, and Success* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). This entrepreneurship in manufacturing images of Canadian society was also prevalent in Québec, where social scientists often enjoyed an even deeper collaborative role with government. See chapters one to three of Stephen Brooks and Alain G. Gagnon, *Social Scientists and Politics in Canada: Between Clerisy and Vanguard* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988).
- <sup>226</sup> Jeffrey Cormier, *The Canadianization Movement: Emergence, Survival, and Success* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 87.
- <sup>227</sup> Ibid., 56.
- <sup>228</sup> Ibid., 92-111.
- <sup>229</sup> Robert Fulford, “Art on the edge of empire,” *Art News* (September 1974), 22.
- <sup>230</sup> Ibid., 22.
- <sup>231</sup> Ibid., 22-24.
- <sup>232</sup> Ibid., 25.
- <sup>233</sup> Ibid., 25.
- <sup>234</sup> Ibid., 26.

## Chapter Two: The bawdy politics of passionate functionalism

“Why is Canada fucked up?”<sup>1</sup>

Picking up from the general historical outline that concluded the previous chapter, this one will examine the development of a variety of English Canadian nationalisms in the period, the ideas and imagery of which will be ingredients in the artists that are studied afterward. The chapter looks at how Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau imagined the relationship between different nations within Canada and the state and ends with the issue of Canadian nationalism playing out in the discourses of the Canadianization movement, and in the writings of some scholars and activists involved in the early years of Canadian studies and the Canadian art world.

This chapter opens with a discussion focussed on some of the writings of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. I am not concerned with their real political significance, but with reading them as a way of imagining Canada as a kind of functionalist project for governing the passions of nationalism. Trudeau’s fantasy of Canada provides an important foil to much of what follows. It is within Trudeau’s imaginary Canada that we can read a clear instance of the technocratic imagery that will recur in subsequent discussions.

Turning to the writings of George Grant, I examine how eroticism, nationalism and nihilism operated in a unique philosophical triangulation that provided many of the broad contours for understanding what was at stake in Canadian nationalism for the artists discussed. These themes were also taken up by Dennis Lee, Scott Symons and others in unique ways as each offered a complex and erotically inflected image of what constituted Canadian nationalism and the nihilism that was its intimate.

Startling to many pundits, the late 1960s saw an upsurge in nationalism in English Canada. This came primarily from those who regarded themselves as leftists and was greeted frequently with horror. Although Stephen Azzi's essay "The Nationalist Moment in English Canada"<sup>2</sup> rightly stresses, as did many commentators in the period, the basic Americanism of Canadian anti-Americanism, he shies away from the theoretical complexities of Canadian nationalist discourses and the fact that they were often even more hostile to liberal Canada than it was to America.

Writing in the socialist *Canadian Dimension*, Gad Horowitz sarcastically noted that "[o]ur political and intellectual elites, true to the Canadian tradition, are moderately concerned about the impending demise of their country, and moderately determined to do something to prevent that demise, on condition that whatever be done, be moderately done. This moderation will be the death of us."<sup>3</sup> He claimed that this moderation was caused by a fear of nationalism, which was sublimated into the fake nationalism of the Centennial celebrations and the 'sentimental pap' that does nothing to halt the Americanization process.<sup>4</sup> To Horowitz, Canada could only stay open to the world by staying out of the U.S. economy.<sup>5</sup> The solution could not be liberalism or anti-Americanism, or "self-effacing, embarrassed cosmopolitanism" but socialism.<sup>6</sup>

Horowitz may have been reiterating common refrains of the time, but it should be stressed how heterogeneous the nationalists were. They had different, not necessarily compatible points of objection and critique, and different, not necessarily friendly, solutions (at least to those who thought there were viable solutions). What unified most of them was an objection to liberalism, a slightly nebulous term whether it was identified as progressivism or 'Yankee imperialism'. These arguments were articulated in debates

about Canadian literature in the period and in nationalist art history books being published. While sometimes patriotic, English Canadian nationalism was rarely chauvinistic or positive. In fact, a distinct negativity pervades much of it as does a general ambivalence or contempt for Canadian society. Despite often being accused of being eulogists for British imperialism, as C.P. Champion has noted, English Canadian nationalists tended to be Francophiles (or even Germanophiles) rather than Anglophiles and an anglicization of Germanic and French aesthetic and theoretical models pervades their thinking.<sup>7</sup>

One of the key, if unlikely, inspirations for this nationalism was George Grant and his *Lament for a Nation* (1965), which insisted, as its subtitle suggested, that Canadian nationalism had been defeated. However, the “emergent counter-culture, as with many youth cultures, felt exempt from history in a way that Grant and others could not. The revolution of feelings, of drugs and sex, that seemed to be sweeping North America was the key to transforming society. Personal angst thus merged with social utopianism.”<sup>8</sup> Deep pessimism about technology seemed to fuel fantasies about that future and he proved an inspiration to young activists who “read C. Wright Mills, Paul Goodman and George Grant, in whose studies of power, disclosures of social absurdities, and forebodings about the dissolution of the Canadian nation in technological ‘homogenization,’ respectively, the movement heard resonances of their own inchoate yearnings and deep dissatisfactions that the vocabulary and categories of Marxism did not evoke.”<sup>9</sup> Waffle leader James Laxer would likewise claim that *Lament* “galvanized a generation of Canadian nationalists” and the influence of Grant, Harold Innis and Donald Creighton was felt on the young political thinkers of the time.<sup>10</sup> Scott Symons claimed

that Grant was the spokesman of an entire generation, ‘Our Big Daddy’ speaking from within the ‘New Canadian Cathedral’ whose religion was politics.<sup>11</sup>

Trudeau’s writings (discussed below) explicitly rooted his political stance and the planned transformation of Canada in a reaction to the Nietzschean dilemma of nihilism and against the positions that Nietzsche took.<sup>12</sup> The topic of nihilism also had pivotal importance in the work of George Grant and his understanding of liberalism, as well as in Dennis Lee, Leonard Cohen, the currents of French thought percolating in Québec, and the Dadaism that inspired so much art of the period. *Nihilism* is an amorphous term and often a paradoxical one. “Nihilism,” according to Nietzsche, “represents a pathological transition stage... whether the productive forces are not yet strong enough, or whether decadence still hesitates and has not yet invented its remedies.”<sup>13</sup> We turn now to the remedy invented by Trudeau to either channel or repress this decadence.

### **2.1. Trudeau’s mania: Passionate functionalism**

“During a press conference following his convention victory, Trudeau said that he’d adopted his famous ‘reason over passion’ dictum to contradict Wilfrid Laurier’s observation that French Canadians had no opinions, only sentiments.”<sup>14</sup>

“It is as if the Prime Minister embraced Michael Oakeshott’s description of the ruling role, which is ‘to restrain, to deflate, to pacify and reconcile, *not to stoke the fires of desire, but to damp them down.*’ It isn’t so much that the Liberals since 1968 have succeeded in damping down the fires of desire, as that they have tried earnestly to do that, and apparently to do little else.”<sup>15</sup>

“If politicians must bring emotionalism into the act, let them get emotional about functionalism!”<sup>16</sup>

Pierre Elliott Trudeau had a well-established career as a public intellectual before his election. Although the English edition of his writings, *Federalism and the French Canadians* (1968), was reprinted three times in three months after publication, and

widely excerpted in magazines and newspapers, there is little evidence it was understood.<sup>17</sup> Acknowledging a common reading of Trudeau, Reginald Whitaker tips his hat to Anthony Westell's *Paradox: Trudeau in Power* (1972), as the basic lens through which the anglophone intelligentsia read a man who could advocate as a radical for strikers and later invoke the War Measures Act or wage controls. But Whitaker sees something remarkably consistent in Trudeau that is often missed, in no small part because Trudeau was adopting English liberalism after going through a very different French tradition. Whitaker claims that Trudeau's liberalism was constructed to counter the threat of separatist nationalism, yet "was undermined by liberalism's incapacity to legitimate the distributive results of the market."<sup>18</sup>

Trudeau's thought, with its battle pitched against nationalistic passion, was nonetheless a peculiar form of erotic thought. Or, as Whitaker puts it, a *ménage-a-trois* of "reason, passion and interests" resulting in "an eternal triangle, without resolution: a romantic liberal tragedy played out again and again."<sup>19</sup> The eternal triangle can never but fail to resolve itself.<sup>20</sup> This section of the chapter will stress both the libidinal and aesthetic dimensions of Trudeau's thought. His arguments about nationalism are rooted as much in rhetorical figuration as historical fact. The programme for the nation was an aesthetic one – an organization of space and formal relations with a projected end to its formalist logic designed to maintain the equilibrium of the state's reproductive apparatus.

Trudeau's passion was highly moral and individual.<sup>21</sup> Although an avowed secularist, his moral stances were rooted in both a personalist Catholicism and a veiled appeal to the broadly Protestant notion of virtue in public works and the sacred value of the individual.<sup>22</sup> As Whitaker glosses, "We find here the abstract basis of a social

liberalism which argues that the individual is the irreducible basis of the social order, requiring the maximum possible liberty so that autonomous wills may create the spontaneous nexus allowing for creativity and progress.”<sup>23</sup> This spontaneity was part of the general flux of the world. History is the progress of impermanence, a fact that ironizes any claim to stability or meaning and underpins his general hostility to nationalism. This sentiment was distilled by Trudeau on one infamous occasion as “the nation of French Canadians will some day fade from view and ... Canada itself will undoubtedly not exist forever.”<sup>24</sup>

Trudeau was not a believer in permanence; he was a humanist who insisted that human action was the major motor behind the flux of the world. This world is constantly remade through competition. In practice, this means there is no basic Good from the outset, only goods negotiated in the market.<sup>25</sup> *Good*, after all, would indicate an obligation to authority, but according to Trudeau, at least in his earlier writings, “what exists is not so much the authority as the obedience.”<sup>26</sup> A ‘free’ society then is the one within which obedience to the wishes of the maximum number (popular sovereignty) governs, though this must be tempered on pragmatic grounds since a minority today may come to rule tomorrow. As Whitaker notes, this is rather vague and, like most of Trudeau’s thinking, it evinces something like an allergy for specificity (cultural, ethnic or class content).<sup>27</sup> This vagueness extends to the state itself, which is cast as a neutral instrument, the functionaries of which solicit the approval of majorities for their actions which in turn treat the majority as mechanisms for their realization. Far from just a neutral tool then, by investment the state becomes “a much more formidable and autonomous organism...”<sup>28</sup>

This image of the social world, part machine and part curious organism, managing the flux of conflicting desires has a distinctly Hobbesian ring to it. It is, as Whitaker notes, however, a decidedly pessimistic kind of Hobbesianism that comes through Trudeau, albeit inflected with a strange hybridization of elements of Rousseau and Utilitarianism. For Hobbes, rational self-interest was paramount, and the conquering of the passions was the principle means to escape mutual destruction. For Trudeau, however, the passions are far harder to contain and this is precisely where part of his aversion to nationalism comes from: “It is a peculiarity of nationalism that one person’s interest is another person's passion: nationalism too involves its own individual interests, but they can only be achieved at the expense of a greater irrationality, an illiberal political regime.”<sup>29</sup> Nationalism is a passion, one which strives for the love of one’s own, for the particular and the Good, often at the expense of the individual or minority. Self-love and market fungibility are means to curtail such a potentially destructive desire, a passion particularly hostile to the personalism Trudeau regarded as the ultimate ethical end.<sup>30</sup> The deliberate fashioning of the state as an individualizing mechanism (via federalism and multiculturalism) was a way to promote rational self-interest (the flux of multi-desires and multi-cultures) over the singularization and inflation of desire.<sup>31</sup> Functionally, multicultural federalism is libidinal negentropy: its bureaucratization of the passions is designed to manufacture atomism, promoting stasis and avoiding explosive fragmentation.<sup>32</sup>

Deborah Cowen has argued that the class divisions of Canadian society have tended to be suppressed (symbolically and practically) through appeals to familial and ethnic/racial identities, the deployments of which function as part of the shifting scales of

social war. Outside of the military, welfare has served as one of the most essential tools for projecting a pan-Canadian model of nationalism with its economic interventionism functioning as a means for engineering a collective.<sup>33</sup> Within the framework of an interventionist nation-state, multiculturalism would be cultivated “as state welfare allowed political and civic traditions to replace ethnonationalism as the organizing framework of national identity. The social rights of citizenship replaced blood and soil as the basis for a national imaginary.”<sup>34</sup> As a means for social control, multiculturalism simultaneously allowed for the “universalizing aspirations of the welfare state”<sup>35</sup> through negotiated and largely privatized differences which were co-terminus with erasing the spectre of class conflict and personalizing the individual’s relationship (and reliance upon) the state.

The Canadian politician is then a meta-rationalist and meta-functionary, massaging and managing private vice for public benefit: a tool to keep the perpetual crises of the political-economic body in relative stasis. The function of politics through the state was the creation of this kind of stasis. If *l’indépendantisme* in Québec was the expression of a new middle-class, as Trudeau frequently insisted, the programme of a bicultural bureaucracy was the attempt to funnel that middle-class investment toward a federal state and equalize its disruptive capacities. As part of official state religion, the multicultural policies institutionalized in 1971 follow the same script, as Trudeau vowed to keep passion deflated while he ethnically balanced the state’s books so that “every single person in Canada is now a member of a minority group.”<sup>36</sup> The Trudeauvian image extends this to the state in general and in grand terms: “Trudeau in fact endows the concept of federalism with what he considers the most noble task on the agenda of

liberalism in the twentieth-century – the management of nationalist passions to the benefit of mankind.”<sup>37</sup> There is no small irony in this. As Whitaker notes, in attempting to defeat the passion of nationalism, Trudeau erected both a passionate *Politique fonctionnelle* and a federalism that he endlessly spoke of with ‘emotive rhetorical excess’.<sup>38</sup>

If anything, Whitaker substantially underplays the delirium that runs through the prime minister’s arguments all the way back to his days with *Cité Libre*. Trudeau’s concept of the nation is not so much complex as coiled, all the while attempting to unravel what he sees as the kinks within the image of it offered by separatists.<sup>39</sup> For him, the nation is not necessarily retrograde but the idea that it must be sovereign is. It is worth pointing out that, although his writings in *Cité Libre* do not overtly evince a psychanalytic bent, it is implicitly present. Trudeau had entered Freudian psychoanalysis in Paris in 1947 with the analyst Georges Parcheminey. As John English notes, Trudeau’s early writings – particularly in private – drew heavily from the Freudian model of psychic development. Parcheminey “agreed with Trudeau, to use Freudian terms, that he often ‘regressed’ to the anal phase, with its characteristic timidity, possessiveness, and occasional aggressiveness.”<sup>40</sup> In crudely Freudian terms, nationalism seemed to stand for Trudeau as a regression to an id dominated mentality, a fragmentary (scatological) imagination that needed to be carefully controlled. He consistently cast nationalism as a primitive and ‘backward’ realm that may momentarily stave off collapse but needed to be eliminated by global integration; finally, nationalism would be “discarded as a rustic and clumsy tool.”<sup>41</sup>

Trudeau affirmed that self-government, when tied to a progressive government that fulfills the needs of its people, is good.<sup>42</sup> However, the separatists have confused this with self-determination as a *good-in-itself*. They see this self-determination as enlightenment, a liberation from foreign tutelage so that creative desire can be freed. Nationalism is then both territorial and ethnic, cultural and libidinal. According to Trudeau, however, civilization is precisely the “subordination of tribal ‘nationalism’ to wider interests.”<sup>43</sup> The tribe is a family or clan that allows the individual to live. Yet, and rather incoherently, Trudeau insists that the nation has no biological basis and is a relatively recent historical event. The nation “is a concept that corrupts all: in peace time the intellectuals become propagandists for the nation and the propaganda is a lie; in war time the democracies slither toward dictatorship and the dictatorships herd us into concentration camps...”<sup>44</sup> It is only faith in “mankind before any national prejudice” that can lead to progress, by which he means technology and commerce, both of which he acknowledges can potentially be as destructive as national prejudice.<sup>45</sup>

Modern nation-statism is “the child of liberal democracy and the mystique of equality.”<sup>46</sup> Paradoxically, it turns on its parentage, placing the state in the service of the nation. The sovereignty of the monarch is replaced by the sovereignty of the nation. In doing so, the nation goes ‘beyond the law’, by which he means that it becomes Darwinian or Nietzschean and indifferent or hostile to other nations and their own minorities.<sup>47</sup> Nationalistic sovereignty and democracy are antithetical because a homogeneous ethnic community is “incapable of realizing a complete and perfect society” while a multi-national state could.<sup>48</sup> Multiculturalism, in effect, privatizes nationalism, polices its performance, and puts the state in the service of the global market.

In Trudeau's arguments, in spite of the separatists' cultural and social leftism, they are bound to be politically reactionary because they are a minority whose efforts will only serve the conservative status quo in Québec.<sup>49</sup> Plus, simply by their attachment to their ethnic nation, they are "when all is said and done, totalitarian."<sup>50</sup> He goes on to castigate the claims of separatists that nationhood will unleash a "creative energy that will bestow genius on people who have none and give courage and learning to a lazy and ignorant nation."<sup>51</sup> This is the 'faith' over 'reason' that dominates nationalism, and which only unleashes the magical powers of racism.<sup>52</sup> His contempt extends to English Canadian nationalism, which he says will also have to truncate itself and adapt to a pluralistic state if Canada is to have a future. That future is predicated on avoiding the American melting-pot and modelling itself on a more progressive and just society, such as Nigeria.<sup>53</sup> Only then can Canada "become a brilliant prototype for the moulding of tomorrow's civilization."<sup>54</sup>

The condensed history of nationalism that he offers culminates in the proliferation of nuclear weapons.<sup>55</sup> In Trudeau's imagination this is inevitable for there will be no end to wars between nation-states until nation and state are divided. Likewise, there will be no end to wars between states until the notion of sovereignty is dispensed with.<sup>56</sup> But even without nuclear war, the nation is intrinsically 'self-destructive' and 'absurd'.<sup>57</sup> It is absurd because the granting of sovereignty to a particularity can never end. English Canadian nationalism begat French Canadian nationalism.<sup>58</sup> Any state that results from secession, one way or another, will have minorities, and they will all be morally entitled to sovereignty so the territory will continue to fragment until it dissolves.<sup>59</sup> Yet, Trudeau is in the awkward position of half-recognizing that it is entirely logical. This is evident in

this incoherency: he argues that “no amount of logic can prevent such an escalation [perpetual secession and reinvention of sovereignty]. The only way out of the dilemma is to render what is logically defensible actually undesirable.”<sup>60</sup> The latter is made possible through violence or the threat of it. This could be active warfare (like the American Civil War) or cultural warfare. In the second case, Trudeau suggests federal ‘nationalism’ expressed through an enforced diversity celebrated by the state apparatus and its institutions as rational compromise, though even this may only be a stop-gap.<sup>61</sup> Barring this, the passions, those ‘heady stimulants’ of nationalism, will lead to nothing but ‘sterile’ expenditure.<sup>62</sup> And, he warns, if by some means a nation manages to be homogenous, it will not destroy itself through perpetual secession but turn to perpetual accession. Stepping up the hyperbole, and explicitly comparing separatists to the Nazis, he suggests that they might try to annex the Atlantic provinces and “turn Westmount into the Danzig of the New World.”<sup>63</sup>

In defense of Trudeau, one might argue that his hyperbole is only that, and that this is a sort of crude satire of the aspirations of nationalists. Yet, if nationalism is this absurd, and *needs to be* to legitimate the morality which animates federalist multi-nationalism, what does this say about the latter? One might also point out that the telos of multi-nationalism is the destruction of nationalism for the sake of universal homogeneity and that, as George Grant and others will point out,<sup>64</sup> the crushing of nationalistic homogeneity for the sake of transient diversity is only made possible by the practice of forms of imperialism that ultimately destroy both.

Trudeau rhetorically pitted the functionalism of an ever-expanding state apparatus against a turn to totalitarianism.<sup>65</sup> The state was a tool for his clerisy to re-educate,

culturally and otherwise, the general population on the model of a future-oriented civilisation.<sup>66</sup> It is worth recalling that one of Trudeau's principle critiques of the Duplessis regime was precisely that it failed to utilize the state *enough*.<sup>67</sup> In his style of rule, which rapidly became a parody of itself, Trudeau sought to replace the expression of hot emotions with cool nomenclature like *interface*, *feedback* and *output*.<sup>68</sup> The bureaucratic machinery served to manufacture an accelerating number of reports calling for more reports, an image that would recur in satirical cartoons of his administration. Trudeau himself refused to acknowledge a report's value unless they were cast in the language that he had helped cultivate in *Cité Libre* and placed into geometric charts using the appropriate buzzwords.<sup>69</sup> Suffering the after-effects of such visual stimulation, the excited prime minister once publicly declared, "I have the feeling of a mechanic who's retuning a car or something, and getting the thing ready to go."<sup>70</sup> Yet, the waste and inefficiency of his re-moulding of the state along lines that seemed more like an aesthetics of bureaucracy than a real engagement with political facts (he had come to reject his own calls for more public participation when the public's recommendations did not mirror his own) was greeted with the opposition chanting 'Heil Hitler' at him.<sup>71</sup>

In a speech given in Montréal in 1972, Trudeau celebrated advances of technology in language that could have been a description of a Walter Redinger sculpture or a Cronenberg film as he cited organ transplants and genetic experiments leading to "l'amélioration des espèces végétales et des races animales."<sup>72</sup> In the 1970s, a new period in the history of humanity had been reached where the "plus récent mutation de l'humanité a commencé avec l'intégration culturelle de la science: elle se complétera par celle de la technologie."<sup>73</sup> He pondered the role of the state in a period when new forms

of surveillance were accessible as were new forms of eugenics and their disastrous or utopian possibilities.<sup>74</sup> He defined technology as “avant tout la rationalisation scientifique de l’agir en sa quasi-totalité, car il est impossible de limiter a priori le champ technologique.”<sup>75</sup> This, he highlighted, meant there would be radical re-evaluations of what education means as well as reproduction.<sup>76</sup> The changes that technological advancement would bring to the empirical life of humanity also risked alienation, something he detected among the young.<sup>77</sup> Ignorant about science and technology, they seemed reluctant to take part in its ‘dynamisme’ and were paralysed in ‘attitudes réactionnaires’.<sup>78</sup>

For Trudeau, the project of liberalism was one of perpetual and controlled fragmentation and individuation. While the world was flux, rule was technologically harnessed flux, whether applied through welfare, health care, demographic management or cultural warfare in the promotion of a ‘pluralism’ that would reinforce the norms of liberalism. The social was a machine for managing flux, organizing and subverting the possible densities of passions so that they could be recalibrated and maintain the state’s reproduction for as long as conditions would allow. But this image of a technocratic regime of neutralizing the passions was met with considerable hostility by the nationalists that it was constructed to repress. The following two sections will survey a range of alternative ways of imagining nationalism in Canada.

## **2.2. The Nihilists of Canada**

“The time has come for no change, no revolution, for reaction. React, reactionaries, react. Socialism is a dead issue. Government is a dead issue. Perhaps even nihilism is a dead issue.”<sup>79</sup>

“Canada/ Home of nothing/ Home for nobody.”<sup>80</sup>

“Canadian politics is such a masquerade of folly and I wish I had the Aristophanean art to write of it.”<sup>81</sup>

This section of the chapter introduces some of what nihilism meant in Canada, specifically through looking at the work of George Grant. His adaptation of the notion, borrowed primarily from Nietzsche, serves as the necessary grounding for understanding the artists dealt with subsequently. To be clear, I am not offering a thorough précis of Grant’s philosophical positions as such, but of the figurative and thematic value of nihilism, of eroticism within a very specific strain of Canadian ‘tory’ thought, and of Grant’s rhetorical approach to thinking about nationalism and the stakes this involved, which should be obvious in light of the discussion of Trudeau above. What will emerge is that the political question of nationalism is significantly less important than the epistemological and aesthetic questions that it raises, and which provide some of the basis for the subsequent understanding of *Canada* developed in this dissertation.

Judging by the record of reception, neither Grant’s supporters nor his detractors had a very sophisticated grasp of his arguments, often deriding them as symptoms of a romantic attachment to a dead British Empire.<sup>82</sup> Grant insisted that only a fool would interpret him this way since his famous *Lament for a Nation* was not a lament for the loss of the British idea of Canada but an ironic ‘lament’ for the untenable romanticism of that dream.<sup>83</sup>

Like Nietzsche, Grant suggests that the claims of liberalism, if they are not outright untenable, merit no special privilege. An Anglican theologian and political philosopher from an establishment Liberal family, Grant broke his association with the NDP in 1963 over their part in bringing down the Conservative Diefenbaker government

and helping, as Grant saw it, to subvert Canadian sovereignty.<sup>84</sup> As he explained in a letter from 1964, the NDP had become a “vacuous extension of the Liberals” while the Conservative Party had little more to offer. His “only interest in the Canadian scene is in nationalism. Once they get rid of Dief. and co. they will have a party which I will prefer aesthetically to the Liberals but in which there won’t be much interest.”<sup>85</sup> This interest could have only been offered by conservatism, but one of his most recurrent arguments in that conservatism is fundamentally impossible in Canada.<sup>86</sup> Rejecting liberalism meant embracing the ancients as an alternative model of humanity. This was not, as his critics would suggest, out of nostalgia for a vanished order, but a method of severe *desentimentalization* that distanced him from the common sense of ruling ideology. Grant’s shift through the recognizable political register also came with a rejection of what he termed the ‘determinism and freedom’ problem, insisting that politics are better understood “through the eyes of Plato and Aristotle” than the terms derived from Machiavelli, Locke or Hobbes.<sup>87</sup> The rejection of the problems of determinism and freedom was a rejection of modern political philosophy and the social sciences. But it was a rejection performed through bringing together philosophies of modernity (Nietzsche, Weber, Hegel, Rousseau, Kant, Marx, Heidegger, Rawls etc.) and satirically pushing them to their extreme, of using historicism to reveal its own limitations and the vacuity of the ethical claims of liberal progressivism.

Grant would insist that liberalism had become the only discourse permissible in the public sphere, in practice marginalizing and pathologizing any claim that could potentially transgress its dogmas. In effect, lip service (at the very least) to its norms had the same obligatory function as lip service to Christianity had possessed in previous

periods.<sup>88</sup> This left it as the only respectable moral discourse, even if its claims to rationality were largely unconvincing.<sup>89</sup> In practice, liberalism increases the private realm while diminishing the public, leaving the public world ‘arid’ and relations between people little more than contractual. Religion and philosophy suffered a similar marginality, relegated to the space of private pursuits that can do nothing to dispute the dominant faith of public liberalism.<sup>90</sup> The upheavals within and against liberalism were in part because of the way it transformed people into calculators when they often desired more: “For example, the contemporary insistence on sexual life as the chief palliative of our existence is clearly more than a proper acceptance of sexuality after nineteenth-century repressions. It is also a hunger and thirst for ecstatic relations which transcend the contractual. After all, mutual orgasmic intercourse cannot finally be brought under the rules of contract, because it takes one beyond the realm of bargains.”<sup>91</sup>

For Grant, modernity brings to the forefront Socrates’ assertion that the opposite of knowledge is madness, and, as Grant argues, the moderns seem to need more therapy than humanity ever did before.<sup>92</sup> This therapeutic ideal is expressed in *technique*, which he identifies with the modern ideology of *freedom*. This is a negative freedom, achieved through a deprivation of the Good and a reliance on parasitic loyalty to a system of tyrannical dominance. As will be explained, this is shot through the entire modern conception of humanity as a socially malleable substance. The result of the dogma of freedom, for Grant, is a socially engineered schizophrenia.<sup>93</sup> But before we can get to that, we must sketch out the connotations of nihilism for Nietzsche and how Grant adopted them.

*Nihilism* itself possesses extraordinary plasticity for Nietzsche, sometimes appearing as the affirmation of truth beyond appearance, sometimes as the claim that there is no truth beyond appearance, sometimes as wanton destruction (active), sometimes as no more than irony (passive). It is inevitably ‘ambiguous’<sup>94</sup> and “the very same symptoms could point to decline and to strength.”<sup>95</sup> But, in any case, nihilism is a denial of being for the sake of becoming and in deference to a goal and authority (whether that of the ‘herd’ or of its ‘priests’).<sup>96</sup> This can take the form of the strong and active or willful and of the reactive or weakly willed.<sup>97</sup> The weak take action immediately, the strong defer it until it is necessary. These are the two primary speeds that create the rhythm of history and culture. Within these oscillations, “‘Mankind’ does not advance, it does not even exist. The overall aspect is that of a tremendous experimental laboratory in which a few successes are scored, scattered throughout all ages, while there are untold failures, and all order, logic, union, and obligingness are lacking.”<sup>98</sup>

In one of his notes sketching out the history of nihilism as the history of European modernity, Nietzsche summarizes Schopenhauer’s ‘honest but gloomy’<sup>99</sup> realization that “we are something stupid and, at best, even something that cancels itself”<sup>100</sup> while objecting to the ‘rechristening’ this would undergo. Cultures are normatively nihilistic, either accelerating in energy toward self-destruction or decelerating into the herd mentality. In practice, these seem to end the same way. These two vying aspects can co-exist, although the latter inevitably seems to triumph. Decadence appears as a necessary consequence of life. Far from an injustice or misfortune, the appearance of crime, vice, anarchism, and disease are the waste of a healthily productive society and a sign of its

aging: “The more energetically and boldly it advances, the richer it will be in failures and deformities, the closer to decline.”<sup>101</sup> There is no cure. These are only symptoms that need to be affirmed indifferently since the distinction between misery and happiness is ultimately a vacuous one.<sup>102</sup> However, an entire society becomes decadent when it has been so weakened that it can no longer ‘excrete’ this excess, the result of which is the sickness of ‘modern spirituality’ and the corrupt social fantasies that spring from it (Christian, socialist-communist).<sup>103</sup> These he pathologizes, stating that they take their “own instinct of decay for the norms of sociological judgement” and these pathological norms in turn serve as the base for their judgement of history.<sup>104</sup> In the modern, this is especially the case with the ‘cult of humanity’ and the ‘quantum of embitterment’ that arises from it and its excessive ‘humaneness’ due to inflated moralization.<sup>105</sup>

It is this decadent instance of history that catches Grant’s eye. According to Grant’s lectures on Nietzsche, published as *Time as History* (1969), modernity was marked by the scientific realization that teleology was not possible. There was no good end or perfection, just a process of becoming.<sup>106</sup> The world is made of change and chance; becoming has no fixed definitions, resulting in the irony that is the ‘finality of becoming’ in a world without eternity.<sup>107</sup> Nietzsche is at the forefront of accepting this and the implications of scientific truth, a truth which often expresses itself in the will-to-power as human mastery over both nature (the hard sciences) and humanity itself (the social sciences). What Nietzsche critiques is the failure of humanity to accept the lessons of hard science which demonstrate the ‘invalidity of commonsense’ and reveals the chaos of a world indifferent to Good.<sup>108</sup> Nihilism is not a matter of belief, or lack thereof, but what Dennis Lee (explaining Grant explaining Nietzsche) would gloss as a “[s]tructural

nihilism [that] is not just a private stance we can choose to adopt or reject. It is now woven into our history and institutions and daily assumptions; it's a concrete, impersonal milieu into which we're born and which we inhabit."<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps nothing demonstrates this vexing situation better to Grant and Nietzsche than the substantial lacunae in the supposed rationality of liberalism. Observing the generally ahistorical nature of liberal ethical claims, Grant goes on to echo Nietzsche's insistence that liberalism is little more than a secularized version of Christianity and its chief faiths – equality, the legitimacy of contract etc. – are maintained but no longer with any actual content.<sup>110</sup> The 'justice' of liberalism is that of technology. *Technology is the modern subject*, understood here as the exploitation of 'raw' material by the will.<sup>111</sup> Their 'justice' or 'liberation' are founded on the domination of the world (chance and necessity) for the sake of the convenience of the subject, a convenience that rests on the destruction of the weak, sick, unwanted, and the 'morally unconfirming'.<sup>112</sup> The policies of fascism and abortion are given as instances of this and they help to illustrate the major disjunction between the pre-modern understanding of justice and the modern. For Grant, the moderns are at an impasse. Because 'true' justice is no longer possible, the old ways cannot return, and there is no valid grounding, logically or materialistically, for modern ethics: they are simply vacuous conventions.<sup>113</sup> The pre-modern understood justice as the order which humans do not define but which measured and defined their lives; the moderns define it as what meets their measure, that is, what they select as convenient (contractable).<sup>114</sup>

To understand why this is so important for Grant, you need to understand the depth of the opposition between the moderns and the ancients. This is not an arcane

metaphysical argument, but fundamental to understanding what was at stake for Canadian nationalism. Grant explains the opposition through a complex intertextual discussion of the Hegelian philosopher Alexandre Kojève and a critique of him by Leo Strauss.<sup>115</sup> To state this in highly simplified terms: Kojève asserts that a universal homogeneous state is the best society and the end of progress. Strauss has serious reservations about the plausibility of this and Grant shares these reservations. The homogeneous state is a unique form of empire. Unlike the ancient empires, say that of Alexander the Great, the homogeneous state does not simply award citizenship indifferent to location or ethnicity yet still based on class. Instead, it overcomes the class bias of citizenship by insisting on social egalitarianism. While the ancients proposed a universality of essence but a real difference in particularity, the moderns proposed a *becoming equal* that is possible through synthesis and essential homogeneity (anyone can become a Christian and become one with God).<sup>116</sup> Not only does the homogeneous state overcome class, it also overcomes Christianity.<sup>117</sup> Since everyone can become a Christian, the state negates and synthesizes the Church into its own expansive totality. Modern society, and Canadian multicultural federalism as imagined by Trudeau above is clearly an example of this, rests on the advocacy for this expansionism. This is often manifested in the ideological claims for pluralism, the maintenance of which relies upon a contractual model of society and is wholly suited both to expansive corporate capitalist power and the increased immigration basic to imperialism.<sup>118</sup> If the ancients advocated for an eternal and unchanging truth, the moderns bind all truth to historically relative specifics. Human freedom as such is realized thanks to the state and the state's active expansion of powers through the negation of other structures. The modern can claim no transcendent knowledge, only a

comprehensive or cumulative one which is reliant and contingent on the power of the state. Modern freedom as such is that which is made possible by technique and ‘technique is ourselves’.<sup>119</sup> The result of this seems to be a “plush patina of hectic subjectivity lived out in the iron maiden of an objectified world inhabited by increasingly objectifiable beings.”<sup>120</sup>

Strauss rejected this Kojève-Hegelian account to insist that the ancient had no need to progress but was itself sufficient. What is more, the homogeneous state does not reflect an ideal state, but the end of history and the destruction of life as it suppresses natural differences through scientific means.<sup>121</sup> While Grant agrees with these criticisms (with some reservation), he adds several objections of his own. He insists that excellence and the Good are only possible when the eternal and unchangeable are guaranteed. The knowing of this truth is philosophy.<sup>122</sup> And he rejects the notion that Hegelian dialectics synthesizes the pagan (noble morality) and the Christian (slave morality). Instead, Hegelianism slides into the latter and in the process lowers or eliminates the standards of virtue so it can emancipate and fulfill the passions.<sup>123</sup> As such, modernity, especially with its advocacy of compassion over thought, is still just Christianity.<sup>124</sup> Quite remarkably, Grant argued on the side of paganism over a debased Christianity, for the ancients against the moderns.<sup>125</sup> There are rhetorical as well as theoretical reasons for this. He points to Jonathan Swift’s siding with the ancients over the moderns in this respect, implying that his own work takes up this attitude of Swiftian satire.<sup>126</sup> One can, much as in the case of McLuhan, read Grant’s work as a Menippean satire of modernity.<sup>127</sup>

Although Grant would claim that his famous *Lament for a Nation* lacked much in the way of irony, this distracts from the clearly satirical nature of his attack on liberalism

in his most widely read text.<sup>128</sup> That the work was a tragi-comedy seemed lost on those who read it. He insisted that the essay was a lamentation on the loss of Canadian sovereignty, thus it was not “an indulgence of despair or cynicism” but a “celebration of past good.”<sup>129</sup> More of a wake than a funeral. For several decades, he argued, the Liberal Party pursued policies that made Canada’s demise inevitable. The lament is for the contrarian hopes of Grant’s ancestors, in their very ‘insignificance’.<sup>130</sup> The potential Good of Canada was that of an ordered and stable society dedicated to the eternal. But this was not its fate. The ‘noble’ love fate and ‘narcissists’ rally against it; Grant does neither.<sup>131</sup> The nation’s fate has unfolded as a class comedy with the rural populist Diefenbaker (the ‘hayseed’) opposed to the urban intellectual/moneyed class.<sup>132</sup> Diefenbaker was a naive believer in nationalism, while Pearson was a cynical exploiter of the trope of internationalism to further imperial interests.<sup>133</sup> “The history of the race is strewn with gasping political fish,” says Grant, adding, “What makes the gasping comic, in the present case, is its involvement with such ambiguous and contrasting figures as Pearson and Diefenbaker.”<sup>134</sup> This was inevitable in a media age where “[r]educing issues to personalities is useful to the ruling classes” and a dread of concepts serves to reduce everything to psychology and tabloid entertainment.<sup>135</sup> Diefenbaker was ‘romantic’, he remarks ironically, before carving a portrait of him that undercuts this. The second chapter is a litany of Diefenbaker’s incoherencies in clipped sentences of condensed information reeled off with brute frankness to create the figure of the prime minister as a blur being rubbed out by accumulated bureaucratic details. Grant concludes with the appropriate cliché: “Nothing in Diefenbaker’s ministry was as noble as his leaving of it.”<sup>136</sup>

Diefenbaker's limited and compromised populist nationalism was doomed from the outset as the country's economic base in a branch-plant continentalism increased.<sup>137</sup> Whatever the Liberal government's claims to maintaining sovereignty might have been, in practice they only proved the "old adage, 'The operation was a success but the patient died.'"<sup>138</sup> The real threat to Canadian nationalism had always been Anglo continentalism not French separatism.<sup>139</sup> The Liberal Party was an instrument of the establishment and they both recognize Canada's disappearance as inevitable and good.<sup>140</sup> However, Grant adds, inevitability is not enough to make it Good.<sup>141</sup> Despite often being accused of pessimism, Grant is more accurately understood as being profoundly uncertain.<sup>142</sup>

In his Nietzschean mode, Grant argued that secularism, far from shedding religion with its instrumentalized rationality, only transformed its most irrational aspects. The result of this was the faith in progress, in betterment, and a future unfolding of exponentially greater justice.<sup>143</sup> In progressivism, the future becomes the space of redemption or eschaton. The social sciences serve this faith as the means for the sentimentalization of the will-to-domination that Grant detects in Marx and Marcuse.<sup>144</sup> This sentimentalization is a common feature of what Grant terms the *multiversity*, the expression of a will-to-power that 'inoculates' and 'sedates' consciousness from the chaos of becoming. The claims of progressives to ideals such as social democracy (rationality, freedom, equality) are not plausibly defensible, either rationally or materially.<sup>145</sup> Even rationality in this instance proves to be simply a tool of the will.<sup>146</sup> Two types of people emerge from this situation: the last men and the nihilists. The last men are progressives, who bear the "mark of mass liberalism," and who desire a petty happiness of comfort only made possible by eliminating all potential for nobility.<sup>147</sup> The

nihilists accept that values are man-made, that Good is unknowable, and the values of progressives are just a shallow and unwitting parody of Christianity.<sup>148</sup> Both carry on, in secular form, Christianity's basic spirit of *ressentiment* toward the indifferent and chaotic world.<sup>149</sup> Grant charts the basis of the liberal sense of the world not only in its lengthy imperialist history, but also in its profound relationship with puritanical Christianity.<sup>150</sup> In the United States, in particular, the distinction between the two is hard to maintain: "As secular liberalism became increasingly progressivist, the millenarianism in extreme forms of Protestantism often seemed to be saying the same thing as the secular idea of progress."<sup>151</sup>

While a Christian, Grant's work is uniquely rhetorically 'anti-religious', almost to the point of being a parody of the enlightenment critiques of religion. But he has changed the target. For Grant, liberal progressivism is simply another religion: "Like all civilizations the West is based on a great religion – the religion of progress. This is the belief that the conquest of human and non-human nature will give existence meaning."<sup>152</sup> This religion has its own sub-set of public religions such as Marxism and Freudianism and its own clerisy in the social sciences and state bureaucracy. What makes these religions is that they are designed to be *useful* and operate on the grounds of public utility while philosophy proper is not useful and serves no one's interests.<sup>153</sup> Philosophy is contemplation, the ability to apprehend without any sense of pragmatism, contractual value or utility and this is what North America does not have.<sup>154</sup> Contemplation is the desire for what is not 'calculable', for "amusements and ecstasies not seen as the enemies of reason."<sup>155</sup> It is, in the Platonic sense, Eros. Dennis Lee claimed that Grant's thought "rose to an eros of intellectual contemplation."<sup>156</sup> Contemplation is the capacity to think

indifferently to your own time, which is part of why Grant so consistently calls to the ancients, not as authority, but as a rival world that ironizes the universalist claims of modernity.<sup>157</sup> In spite of being ostensibly concerned with historical development, liberalism consistently ignores the degree to which the apparent validity of its claims have rested on the dominance of the anglophone world from which it radiated.<sup>158</sup> As he notes, the Whig insistence on the ascent of humanity has been one of the primary forms this has taken, a dogma that has left the anglophone world largely philosophically sterile since the time of Locke.<sup>159</sup> As the maintainer of the basic dogmas of the ruling class, liberalism has been the key ideology of both the left and right: “Ideology is here defined as surrogate religion masquerading as philosophy.”<sup>160</sup>

Liberal progressivism is a religion born from eliminating the autochthonous.<sup>161</sup> Departing Europe and the brutal settlement of the North American continent left the settler population permanently alienated, a process continued with the constant undercutting of tradition.<sup>162</sup> This process was simultaneously a ‘rape’ and an optimistic quest for equality.<sup>163</sup> The population was left with a sense of homelessness, a “particular mark of modern nihilism.”<sup>164</sup> Grant largely builds his account on the creation of North America through the arguments made by Marx and Weber on the relationships between puritanism and capitalism.<sup>165</sup> But he breaks from them to insist on the importance of the theology of self, which is secularized as the notion of ‘radical freedom’ and the concentration on the subjective which renders the world, and the body, neutral instruments to be shaped by the will.<sup>166</sup>

Calvinism provided the means for repressive self-mastery to allow for the mastery of nature and the overcoming of chance.<sup>167</sup> This technical mastery extends beyond

industrial asset stripping and expansive urbanization; it also includes the cultivation of selfhood and its therapeutic maintenance. In this situation, “When the chthonic has been driven back into itself by the conquests of our environment, it can only manifest itself beautifully in sexuality, although at the same time casting too great a weight upon that isolated sexuality.”<sup>168</sup> He detects this in Marcuse in particular. When discussing the Freudo-Marxist’s advocacy for ‘polymorphous sexuality’ and ‘orgiastic gnosticism’, Grant points out that for Marcuse these are only possible with the maintenance of conquest and the convenience that this domination gives to human liberty.<sup>169</sup> At best what sexual liberation can offer is a variant of *derepressive sublimation*.<sup>170</sup> Grant finds even this naïve: “Nobody minds very much if we prefer women or dogs or boys, as long as we cause no public inconvenience.”<sup>171</sup> Pluralism does nothing to offset the homogeneous public sphere of liberal capitalism and its ‘dynamic dominance’ which allows the passions and greed to flourish together.<sup>172</sup> He adds, “*Playboy* illustrates the fact that the young executive is not expected to be Horatio Alger. The titillation of the jaded tastes of the masses serves the purpose of the corporation élites so long as a sufficient quota of the young is siphoned off as scientists and executives. With automation, the work-ethic of Protestantism disappears.”<sup>173</sup> What Grant only hints at is that the vanishing work ethic coincides with a pleasurable automatism, which is what we have seen was one of the dominant tropes for understanding and portraying sexuality in the period.

Grant does not see erotic liberation as a possibility for North Americans. Such a liberation would require love, but *Eros* is not possible in the world of conquest. Because you cannot ‘love your own’, living in homeless alienation, you live in disgust, either *dropping out* (which is just another reform of *buying-in* that he detects with the

counterculture) or joining a rival, no doubt equally awful empire, like Marxists sometimes do.<sup>174</sup> Without love of one's own, there can be no real politics, only technical management. Because, in Classical terms, politics is one of the highest callings for a human being, this impossibility only makes life more absurd.<sup>175</sup>

But why is love impossible? Grant's answer is not direct. The *moral* answer seems to be because the guilt of conquest has poisoned love, that the modern alienation from the autochthonous has divorced 'love' from the erotic and liberalism has reduced it to utilitarian pleasure. One is then purely in the service of the will and liberal progressivism makes useless contemplation impossible. Love, for Grant, seems defined as a kind of ecstatic uselessness quite at odds with the liberal model of humanity.<sup>176</sup> This seems confirmed by the closing of the *Lament*, which expresses deep ambivalence about the loss of tradition but also the value of that tradition. Instead, he suggests affirming the eternal order that persists indifferently to history: "Whatever the difficulty of philosophy, the religious man has been told that process is not all."<sup>177</sup> Joyce Wieland's *The Far Shore* (1976), discussed at length in the final chapters of this dissertation, borrows both the general critique of technological society from Grant and its title from the closing statement of his *Lament*, a citation from Virgil: "They were holding their arms outstretched in love toward the further shore."<sup>178</sup>

The more nagging problem of Grant, and the thing that is crucial to understanding his nationalism, is the rather strange problem of love. As has already been suggested, love is at the core of all of Grant's arguments, but he does not provide much of an explanation of what it is. What he implies, and this is a substantial part of his loyalty to the ancients, is a bond between Eros and truth. Truth, which Grant insisted was ultimately

indifferent both to history and to God, was at the heart of the philosophical importance of contemplation. This contemplation is erotic and, Grant's work intimates, significantly aesthetic. Indeed, one of the principle apprehensions that he expressed toward Plato was the ancient philosopher's skepticism about art.<sup>179</sup> In the dialogues, Plato has Socrates variously describe Eros as desire, yearning, the charioteer of the soul capable of opening vision to mystical recollection, or even as something divine. It could apply to sex, food, or the perfecting of one's own area of specialization. It applies, in any case, to the Good. Rosen summarizes Eros as "wholeness or perfection, a combination of poverty and contrivance, of need mitigated by a presentiment of completeness."<sup>180</sup> This completeness is the One, the whole, the Good. But Eros also receives rather different treatment in the various Platonic dialogues. In *The Republic* it appears as a sign of tyranny and injustice, and is even connected to poetry itself. Poetry is erotic both in content and in making images rather than ideas. It is part of an excessiveness, also expressed in drunkenness, sex and 'divine madness'.<sup>181</sup> Such unchecked passions unleashed in the city threaten to turn the public into the private, allowing the tyrant to dominate the citizenry.

For Grant, the highest ethics are to be found in the erotic bond between the eternal and the bodily expressed in aesthetics: "the apprehension of the divine has had a lot to do with the apprehension of the beautiful."<sup>182</sup> In his one venture into writing on aesthetics, he chastises both Nietzsche and Freud for pretending to know what artists are doing better than they do.<sup>183</sup> For Grant, art is about *understanding* rather than reason and understanding is found in useless contemplation.<sup>184</sup> Rather surprisingly, the aesthetic that he was most fascinated by was the late work of the French novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline.<sup>185</sup> Grant explained that he identified with him "not in content, but in form. He

was a man full of self-pity, yet not self-indulgent. He has the modern emptiness, yet is not empty. He is not describing the world as it is without God, but the world as it is whether there is God or not – a very different matter.”<sup>186</sup> What is important in Céline, despite his absurdity, is that “everything is right there,” Grant explained.<sup>187</sup> He continued, “I hate concepts, words like ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ – but Céline combines the subjective and objective, all the time.”<sup>188</sup> Grant claimed that he had spent most of his life battling his own Dionysian passions. “I could have wasted my whole life on trivia,” he admitted.<sup>189</sup>

Finally, it is here that we get a glimpse of something else that was crucial for Grant and will be for the art going forward, albeit with unique inflections in each case. As will be the case with Boyle, Curnoe and Wieland, art is not identified with knowledge but with a kind of understanding conveyed through form. It cannot be knowledge because it has no recuperative value; one does not learn anything useful from art, either about the world or the self. In fact, what understanding gestures toward is the collapse of the subject-object dyad, opening up the ecstatic space of contemplation. In Wieland this will be an explicitly mystical space that is tied to her theosophical-tantric understanding of Canada as an erotic zone. This is the space of eternity which Grant gestures to as the space that awaits after death, including the death of Canada. For him, there is no way to turn back from this. Wieland’s direction is different, turning back through history to reach the ecstasy of the moment of death. Grant’s quest for an erotic ‘divine madness’ will be transformed into the ‘northern madness’ that finds its fulfillment on the far shore. Meanwhile, in Curnoe and Boyle ecstasy is a radically material form of presence that flattens the world and makes no distinction between space and the image, relishing trivia

without concept. Their work evacuates time, creating a non-mystical eternity through the erotic mapping of their region.

So, from Trudeau's highly mechanized, abstract and hedonic functionalism, we have moved to Grant's mixture of satire, pessimism and ecstasy; from the world of managed flux to the desire for erotic eternity. But there has also been a profound epistemic break between a social scientific conceptualization of nationalism and a rival set of metaphysical claims that distance themselves from such an attitude while transforming some of its trappings through parody. So, we will move from an anthropology that is derided as an absurd pseudo-theological fantasy (liberalism), to a mysticism or radicalized materialism that mocks anthropological claims (Boyle, Curnoe, Wieland).

But before we can turn to all of that, we must address another set of claims that complicate this passage. In the wake of Grant's position, a wealth of interpretations and arguments about what was at stake in English Canadian nationalism, particularly for artists, and some of these divergent positions are the concern of the rest of this chapter.

### **2.3. The problematic of English Canadian nationalism**

“For me Southern Ontario, Sou' West-O, if you like, is a nation with a rich and vital culture. Those people who still look to Europe or the United States for their standards are, to me, putrescent vestiges from the colonial era, and their dogma misbegotten piffle. New York built a sham culture on the long dead cadaver of European art and produced nothing of any consequence. Its missionaries knowingly or unknowingly represent the vilest and most noxious elements in the American business aristocracy and preach to an unaffected and unreceptive population.”<sup>190</sup>

“Therefore, an organism too long involved in the fight for survival becomes, inevitably and secretly, a schizophrenic organism as bent on destroying itself as its enemies...”<sup>191</sup>

Being a Canadian nationalist was not a particularly popular position in the arts. By the late 1960s, however, a handful of high-profile artists were, at the very least, open to nationalism. A 1968 article by Robert Fulford points to this change. Students in Halifax attending talks by Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe complained that the artists were more interested in discussing nationalism than art. According to the students, this made for bad art. Fulford pointed out that both artists used to think the same way. Postwar Canada was dominated by an internationalist ideology; specifically Canadian content was treated with derision. Eventually, these artists “realized that, try as they might to become Americans, the Americans didn’t care about them.”<sup>192</sup> This cut them loose to be spectators “at the American drama.”<sup>193</sup> Subsequently, younger artists no longer regarded nationalism as an ugly word. “Of course,” Fulford adds, “Canadian nationalism in art is still comparatively marginal – as it is in economics, as it is in politics, as it is in journalism.”<sup>194</sup>

But if nationalism was not necessarily an ugly word for a handful of people, they each had dissonant ideas of what it did or should refer to. As Barbara Stevenson has noted, Curnoe was ‘uncomfortable’ about Wieland’s sense of nationalism, regarding the pan-Canadian culture she advocated as an invalid and ‘frightening thing’.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, what Stevenson took to be “Wieland’s conception of the development of a national identity based on aspects of Canada which we all share seems irrelevant to Curnoe.”<sup>196</sup> In its place, he insisted on what he termed Regionalism and the conservation of local traditions. Some of his co-Regionalists, like John Boyle, considered their regions to be authentic nations of their own. What they shared with Curnoe was a hostility toward centralization.<sup>197</sup> Although centralization was often understood as being embodied in the Liberal Party, it would be a mistake to read any of these artists or their works in terms of

party politics. This does not mean that they did not respond to some of the broader, often amorphous, tendencies apparent in the history of Canadian politics.<sup>198</sup>

In 1964, approximately a third of the population were in favour of annexation by the United States.<sup>199</sup> The brief upsurge in nationalism over the course of the decade, especially around the Centennial celebrations, was such that by 1970 it was not uncommon to, at least performatively, be “*for* Canada, or you just don’t care.”<sup>200</sup> *Maclean’s* reported that Trudeau, who was “notoriously cold to nationalism” was being forced by backbenchers to be moderately more friendly, at least for economic reasons, while the NDP were doing their best to pre-empt it becoming a political issue.<sup>201</sup> Particularly among the young – and more particularly those on the left or in the cultural industries – nationalism was having a surge, also for largely practical economic reasons. This section of the chapter will give a general overview of some of the significant currents of English Canadian nationalism operative in the period and which will provide some of the background to the case studies that begin in the following chapter.

The tension between the different cultural-political factions and the often-blurry distinctions between them is readily illustrated in Gad Horowitz’s 1966 essay, “Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation.”<sup>202</sup> While Horowitz insisted that the dominant ideology at work in Canada was an American style liberalism, he also stressed that there were other vital elements that had been as historically present and had forced it to develop local characteristics.<sup>203</sup> Seeking to understand the uniqueness of Canada, or more particularly, the “non-liberal, un-American attributes of English-Canadian society,”<sup>204</sup> Horowitz located this in the “relative strength of socialism in Canada [that] is related to the relative strength of toryism.”<sup>205</sup>

Toryism was understood in this instance as ‘corporate-organic-collectivis[m]’, a tendency which is necessary both to socialism and to conservatism but basically hostile to liberals and Whigs. In Horowitz’s theory, the presence of toryism and socialism marked Canada off as genuinely ideologically diverse since, in 1966 at least, liberalism had still not triumphed as the controlling myth. This toryism was expressed both in the greater acceptance of hierarchy and inequality and of the state’s power to control the economy.<sup>206</sup> However, this toryism was not British Toryism, as Loyalists would claim, but “pre-revolution American whiggery with a ‘tory touch’,” or more accurately, it was a form of bourgeois elitism rather than feudal elitism.<sup>207</sup> Historically, this tendency was considerably supplemented by waves of British immigrants, who were also generally non-liberal.<sup>208</sup> In their bid to become American or continentalist, the liberals of the country dismissed both the tories and socialists as anachronisms, but in doing so they committed themselves to the erasure of ideological diversity.<sup>209</sup> An American Republican would always be a liberal, but a Canadian Conservative would be a liberal-tory hybrid.<sup>210</sup> The tory position was broader, not only because of their hybrid quality, but because their collectivism and aversion to ‘rugged individualism’ also made them open to ‘the people’ even if this was paternalistic rather than egalitarian or populist.<sup>211</sup> You might have found the CCF-NDP and the Conservatives in frequently greater harmony with one another than either with the Liberals.<sup>212</sup> As the third way, Liberalism in Canada had been considerably modified by these influences in order to retain control. As ‘American’ as it was, it still was not *quite* American and that was because of these countervailing tendencies.<sup>213</sup>

This sort of moderation is also a feature of Northrop Frye’s understanding of the development of Canadian culture. For Frye, writing in 1965, Canada offered no synthesis

but only an alternation between traditions, a tendency also present in its non-revolutionary politics of compromise and expediency.<sup>214</sup> It was a unique frontier society which possessed no distant horizons, but rather a sense that the frontier “was all around one, a part and condition of one’s whole imaginative being.”<sup>215</sup> But the frontier also reminded people that nature is devoid of human values and the terror of this indifferent world resulted in a ‘garrison mentality’ that sought to control and/or block out the *unsocial* as evil. With the growth of cities, ‘arrogantly abstracted’ from their surroundings, this tendency was only multiplied by an urban ‘herd mind’.<sup>216</sup> One expression of this uniquely urban variety of the garrison mentality was the attack on old normative standards, a strategy which helped maintain the strength of the herd while further splintering society.<sup>217</sup> To the outsider, Canada would appear to be a ‘zoo’, a vast space with no privacy where the people looked at each other as objects or obstacles.<sup>218</sup> As a result, Canadians were inclined to be technical, but largely inarticulate, and the artworks they produced tended to be both provincial and academic.<sup>219</sup> Although there was a strong romantic streak in Canadian literature thanks to its conservative origins, national consciousness was already disappearing by the 1960s with the rise of the global village.<sup>220</sup>

Building on aspects of Frye’s account of Canadian cultural development, Margaret Atwood’s *Survival* (1972) stressed that Canadian cultural forms, specifically literature, offered a means for people to see themselves. Without such knowledge, one is a ‘cultural moron’ and, she warns, “Without that knowledge we will not survive.”<sup>221</sup> What the knowledge revealed, and which spanned across regions, was a culture of ‘losers’ who barely hang on, never triumph, and live as ‘relics’.<sup>222</sup> Echoing so many other

cultural commentators of the period, she claimed that, “Canadians show a marked preference for the negative” and this was usually expressed in failure.<sup>223</sup> This was the result of Canada’s colonial status and constant victimization, a victimization that cannot be admitted because it would mean losing privileges in the colonial system.<sup>224</sup> The heroes of Canadian culture turn out to be failures who often die by accident and accomplish nothing.<sup>225</sup>

Atwood’s popular book was harshly criticized by Carleton professor, and fellow student of Frye, Robin Mathews, who represented one of the more socialistically inclined forms of nationalism. Mathews presented the anti-imperialist argument for Canadian nationalism in one of its more flamboyant guises, but he was more unique for his almost bizarre level of optimism and unambiguous righteousness about the situation. Mathews insisted that Canadian literature consistently asked what kind of character or situation can make a community of resistance possible.<sup>226</sup> Hedonistic individualism – linked to Americanism – was rejected as socially destructive, but the forces of order themselves were part of the rule of the Other. Canadians chose to be Canadians rather than Americans for the sake of organic relations and traditions.<sup>227</sup> These settlers, opposed to the ‘operating class’ of industrial exploiters, existed in the dialectical tension over the building of community and the possible reconciliation of these conflicts.<sup>228</sup> This resulted in a peculiar tradition of heroes.<sup>229</sup> Because of the peculiarity of this tradition, it has generally been misinterpreted using an ideology foreign to it.<sup>230</sup>

Mathews criticized Atwood’s ‘ideosyncratic’ [sic] assemblage of texts for concentrating on the ‘bizarre’ need for victimhood and an obsession with being a loser.<sup>231</sup> What she privileged was a “negative [literature], that appears to be struggle literature but

is, in effect, very often a literature of surrender.”<sup>232</sup> At its best, this literature idealized the ‘liberal individual anarchist’ and so expressed itself in largely American terms. Mathews conflated this literary position with the philosophical position of George Grant, claiming that Grant took an anarchistic point of view out of a “desperate sense of the failure of the conservative ideal in Canada.”<sup>233</sup> The result was a vision that “white men in Canada must be alienated from the land, must live in a relation to it which implies exploitation and conquest” an attitude that Mathews suggested is not “the mainstream of white Canadian experience.”<sup>234</sup> This ‘colonized’ form of critique, a critique made within the logic of ruling imperial ideology, was also expressed in the habits of writers who cast Canadians as the ‘negro’ in a drama where the repressed fight for their rights within imperialism and in affirmation of ‘humanity’.<sup>235</sup> Doing so was not rebellion, but masochistic adherence to power and an internalization of moral blame. To side with the exploited (the settlers) would mean to take a different ‘decolonized’ attitude, one which was spiritual rather than materialistic.<sup>236</sup> The inability to understand this attitude, he argued, forced Atwood’s American materialism to mistake Canadian moral success for failure and led her to interpret so many female characters as victims.<sup>237</sup>

Observing that most Canadians saw themselves as liberals – progressive, reformist, or liberationist – Mathews added that “until we destroy the liberal ideology in Canada, there can be no independence.”<sup>238</sup> Liberalism destroys cultural roots and in doing so also destroys the growth of any ‘genuine socialism’.<sup>239</sup> Liberal ideology was identified with British and American imperialism and “means the destruction of Canada.”<sup>240</sup> It was manifested in capitalism and the counterculture (he singled out Rochdale College as an

example), which were both expressions of ‘liberal anarchist individualis[m]’ and the “a-historical little ephemeral society of contemporaries.”<sup>241</sup>

One of the crucial points of his critique, one shared by many nationalists in the arts, was that any possible support for meaningful liberation (of the working class, women etc.), would necessarily mean rejecting the American influence in liberation movements.<sup>242</sup> The presence of American professionals in Canadian government, industry, culture and academia pointed to “the role U.S. immigrants play as cultural imperialists.”<sup>243</sup> American imperialism, expressed as liberal ideology, demanded the free movement of people, ideas and the ahistorical abstraction of ‘human beings’ over recognizing that they are in fact, ‘culturally conditioned entit[ies]’.<sup>244</sup> Objections to this imperialism, he claimed, specifically in the case of the staffing of universities with Americans, were pathologized by the ruling class as ‘fascist’ (often by American-born or trained administrators).<sup>245</sup>

The broad, primarily cultural, arguments briefly given above were situated more or less explicitly within an economic argument about American domination. This was articulated most extensively in the writings of James and Robert Laxer, who were associated with the leftist ‘Waffle’ splinter group of the NDP.<sup>246</sup> The Laxers argued that the Trudeau government confidently believed that they were pushing ahead a highly competitive economy, one which would ‘mature’ and move beyond dependency. But rather than developing, Canada had simply been inflated with “foreign investment and the evolution of a branch-plant economy.”<sup>247</sup> By the mid-70s, income had fallen precipitously, and the economic confidence was sinking to Depression-era levels.<sup>248</sup> In practice, there was a limited free-enterprise system in the country and it was primarily

dominated by a few foreign firms. Canada's economy was a debtor's economy, based on trading and investments, with Canada exporting resources and importing goods.<sup>249</sup> This debtor's economy was also indicated in the country's excessive consumerism and the failure of citizens to live within their means.<sup>250</sup> Liberalism, in effect, was definable by its reconciliation of continental elitist interests and populist consumerism.<sup>251</sup> Not only was Canada dependent, but it helped to fuel the expansion of the United States globally.<sup>252</sup> Canada's continentalist elite did not understand relations with the U.S. as internationalist but saw Canada simply as "an offshoot of American society, artificially going through the act of sustaining its own state structure."<sup>253</sup>

What the Laxers detected in Trudeau's liberalism was an abrupt shift from a vague, practical, at least ostensibly 'populist' and centrist position to one that was driven by an 'alien doctrine' and 'new morality'.<sup>254</sup> This came with the realization that postwar economic policy was a failure. Because blaming the system constructed by the Liberals themselves was unthinkable, Trudeau instead attacked 'liberal individualism' and the entrepreneurial instinct to justify increased state controls. This attack created a "a tidal wave of populist outrage on both the right and the left" and in doing so revealed that "the role of the individual had become a question of psychic trauma in the country."<sup>255</sup> The optimism that had once been integral to liberalism, was over.<sup>256</sup> They saw the seeds for this in Trudeau's own philosophical outlook and his elitist antipathy to the passions of the masses and their willful self-determination.<sup>257</sup> As a technocrat relying on a "simple, mono-casual interpretation of modern history," he was almost devoid of knowledge of the concrete world.<sup>258</sup>

The cultural “degeneration in the fabric of [Canada] by growing dependence on American imperial capitalism”<sup>259</sup> was the topic of several other notable books in the period. Among these were *The New Romans: Candid Canadian Opinions of the U.S.* (1968), *Notes for a Native Land: A New Encounter with Canada* (1969), *Close the 49th Parallel etc.*; *The Americanization of Canada* (1970), named after a Greg Curnoe painting, *The Star-Spangled Beaver* (1971) and Susan Crean’s *Who’s Afraid of Canadian Culture: Report of a Study of the Diffusion of the Performing and Exhibiting Arts in Canada* (1973). The first two were collections of short reflections by (primarily) poets, novelists and some activists, the fourth primarily the thoughts of academics and politicians. Crean’s book concentrated on cultural industries and *Close the 49th* was a collection of articles on the perceived colonization of Canada by the United States, covering politics, manufacturing, culture and education. The primary essay dealing with art was by critic and activist Gail Dexter, who we met in an earlier chapter, and which gives much the same argument as Crean does, in a more condensed form.

Gail Dexter’s essay pointed out that while the Massey Commission stressed the importance of defensively protecting Canadian cultural industries, it did not meaningfully extend this to the plastic arts, although it did note the ‘pre-eminence of painting’ at home and abroad as the expression of the ‘spirit of Canada’ even as it welcomed the dominance of a non-culturally specific abstraction.<sup>260</sup> This was a complement to what she saw as the Commission’s class bias for elitist over populist culture. Such a bias, and its ironic indifference to national culture, was also reflected in the art press and historiography that served to indoctrinate most artists. Art was presented there as a progression of styles and style became the means to make a career.<sup>261</sup> If something becomes a style, it becomes

reproducible and a form of representation. Representation, as such, is the style of reproduction. This trinity of style-representation-reproduction can mirror itself with slight variation infinitely and the artist remain “mystified by false purposes.”<sup>262</sup> Magazines served as one of the crucial ways that artists internalized and reproduced imperial culture. One way out of this would be rejecting dominant styles, finding them “bankrupt and worthless, and set about to make art on a completely new basis.”<sup>263</sup> This was unlikely in a country like Canada, which was so dependent on imperial capitalist norms. This was also why the lack of content in much of Canadian painting was praised and allowed it to readily serve the function of imperialist ideology and be collected by American corporations.<sup>264</sup> The concern with new materials and unusual venues, also served to make art more reliant on industry and helped in the process of ‘mystification’.<sup>265</sup>

Dexter opposed style to aesthetics, suggesting that, “Questions of aesthetics in the age of imperialism are questions of politics.”<sup>266</sup> Not recognizing this, and not understanding that American art is imperialist art, doomed Canadian art to being just another branch-plant industry. It was the fight against this imperialism that she detected in the artists of London and their rejection of the ‘metropolitan bourgeoisie’.<sup>267</sup> This was also the art scene that her partner Barry Lord privileged as the hope for the country’s art, one which “confronts us with the actuality of life in Canada today.”<sup>268</sup> Lord singled out Curnoe, Jack Chambers, Boyle and Claude Breeze as examples of artists who fused their everyday world and local history together in their work. He took this, rather than Wieland’s ‘flag-waving symbolism’ as a ‘hopeful sign’.<sup>269</sup> The other hopeful sign was the action of Canadian Artists Representation (CAR).<sup>270</sup> To protect themselves from the ‘depredations’ of imperialism, at a time when three-quarters of the ‘international’ art in

Canadian galleries was American, the first meeting of CAR passed motions recommending that *artscanada* be staffed entirely by Canadians and focused only on Canadian art, that there be an 85 percent quota on Canadian professors at universities to push out the Americans and Brits there.<sup>271</sup>

As Dexter intimated above, opposition to ‘Yankee Imperialism’ was not reserved to objecting to the war in Vietnam or race riots. For artists, the problem was more practical and required different types of refusal. This tended to involve less an attack on American art styles, than on the ideological framework of art in America and the type of art system that fostered it. This consisted to a substantial degree of attacking the discursive framework and historiography of American art, expressed in magazines like *Art in America*, *The New Yorker* and newspapers like *The New York Times* which were regarded as the propaganda organs of U.S. imperialism. Claude Breeze argued that the “trouble is that Canadian artists are highly influenced by those American art magazines that are constantly proclaiming ‘The Fad of the Month.’ Process art, conceptual art, mail outs, they are like the frozen tarts that you put in a pop-up toaster; phony, instant products that don’t last.”<sup>272</sup> According to Harold Town, rather than investigate the largely unknown aspects of the country and create something new, artists were constantly encouraged to look to foreign models, returning only with mediocre copies of elsewhere. “We are, in fact, savagely self-repressed, nevertheless ours is the only nation seemingly steeped in a consistent sort of idiocy.”<sup>273</sup>

More harshly, Wieland attacked *artscanada* for being distributed from New York, for not showing the turmoil of the art world in Canada or investigating Canadian identity: “It’s just all cute things... It’s all glossy. It’s incredible. In fact, it’s just

supercolonializing us – again!”<sup>274</sup> She explained that growing up under colonialism had meant that

Our history was nothing. A lot of our history has been hidden from us. We’re just like black people or women or other criminalized people. Now it’s even worse, as you probably know. [...] But the whole American idea is international. Unless you can be responsible to the piece of land you’re standing on and relate to the nature of it, not just a city, if you can start to do that, then can start in the most intimate regional way to be responsible for what you are.<sup>275</sup>

Curnoe’s attack on the magazine took a similar form. In his notes, he stated that, “The Autumn 1975 issue of Arts Canada is in a word – a piece of shit.”<sup>276</sup> The issue dealt with the ‘Canadian cultural revolution’ and Curnoe objected that the principle article on the topic was written by an American, who apparently conducted the research by phone. Curnoe attacked the magazine’s bias for American writers, for consistently alienating much of Canadian art world, narrowing the art produced in the country into a unilateral relationship with the U.S. under the claim of internationalism, and a refusal to engage with art in the terms laid out in Dennis Reid or Barry Lord’s histories of Canadian art.<sup>277</sup>

Dennis Reid’s *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* (1973), and Barry Lord’s *The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People’s Art* (1974) were avidly read by nationalist artists. The two texts are radically different in terms of method, analysis and tenor. Reid’s writing consists almost entirely of isolated artist biographies until he reaches the contemporary period. He provides little socio-historical context or significant thematic analysis. These are provided by Lord’s account, which is constructed more as general socio-historical narrative, and which is far more attentive to the artist’s social role. Lord’s controversial Maoist polemic garnered far more comment. Curnoe, Boyle and Harold Town all wrote lengthy comments on these books, usually for publication.

While Reid was critiqued for scholarly shortcomings and scarcely extending J. Russell Harper's work,<sup>278</sup> Lord was both ambivalently praised (by Curnoe and Boyle) and vehemently attacked (by Town) for his political take on the country's art, as well as his scholarly faults.<sup>279</sup> This is particularly striking since, unlike Town, Curnoe and Boyle were singled out as exemplary instances of what a 'people's art' should be moving toward. While agreeing with Lord's critique of abstraction and postwar art as decadent, Boyle nonetheless attacked him for treating art as "an instrument of the revolution; [one that] must shape rather than reflect the lifestyle of the people; it must invent, and therefore in the social context, deceive."<sup>280</sup> Although Curnoe also ambivalently admired Lord's book, particularly his critique of the American domination of institutions, he noted that Lord problematically interpreted Canadian art the way he interpreted Native art, and this was objectionable because Native art belonged to homogeneous societies but there has never been a homogeneous settler society. Canadian society, according to Curnoe, is defined by being *totally contradictory*.<sup>281</sup> This becomes especially difficult when Lord turns to the twentieth-century and addresses it in terms defined by Maoism, which is as foreign an ideological frame as that employed by the Americans.<sup>282</sup> This debate helped reveal the significant tensions between some practicing artists and the New Left around the issue of nationalism and how works of art could be interpreted.

Most of the perspectives just discussed were largely practical claims within the logic of political economy. While these arguments were certainly important from a careerist or activist perspective, they obscure the important question for us which is what 'Canadian nationalism' was artistically. This also distracts from what will be suggested in subsequent chapters, namely that Canada-in-art was in significant conflict with the

largely utilitarian or sociological claims that would make the above considerations sensible. The problems posed by 'Canada' was, as indicated at the end of the previous section, more fundamental.

Likely the most radical Canadian nationalist positions on art came from the authors Dennis Lee and Scott Symons, both in direct response to the situation discussed above and understood through the lens of Grant.<sup>283</sup> Lee's *Savage Fields*, eventually published in 1977 but circulating previously, and inspired largely by Grant, Martin Heidegger, Wyndham Lewis and Teilhard de Chardin, was written as a general framework for interpreting Canadian art.<sup>284</sup> It insisted on a basic impossibility at the heart of Canadian liberalism, one which tended to appear in Canadian art either in acts of violence or eroticism.<sup>285</sup> This was analysed through a model of what Lee termed *Planet*, which was composed of two apparently incompatible but all-encompassing spheres, Earth and World. *Earth* is the inscrutable, the sacramental, the instinctive and unself-conscious. It stands in mockery to World but cannot tolerate anything that does not appear as Earth. *World* is conscious and controlling. It dominates Earth and draws its energy from it. Lee associates this with liberalism, the notion that Earth is neutral or value free and so can be bent to the human will. The liberal world places its faith in the subject, but for Earth the subject does not exist. This is not traditional dualism, Lee contends; each sphere completely envelopes Planet and their intersection and conflict results in 'strife' or the war between elements that "keep turning out to be the same thing."<sup>286</sup> The irony of materialism then is that, as the condition for being, it is also the principle of rationality, though in practice this results in incommensurable accounts for everything, thus the perpetual strife of Earth and World at war.<sup>287</sup>

Liberalism arises through a sort of ‘deracination’. The earth is densely populated, but it has no subjects and no interiority. In its neutralization of the earth, liberalism relocated these ‘populations’ into the minds of subjects.<sup>288</sup> Animism or pan-psychism are reduced to the illusions of psychology. Yet, Lee detects an irony in this promotion of the human psyche. He notes that, from a serious materialistic perspective, subjectivity is only the “sentimental after-presences in the cerebral cavity”<sup>289</sup> but liberalism cannot accept the logical implications of its own allegedly materialist cosmology. Accepting that the mind is not a ‘reputable category’ and ‘consciousness is dead’ would mean rejecting the basic claims of liberalism, and not only to its alleged neutrality.<sup>290</sup> Because liberalism cannot legitimately distinguish between fact and value, the distinction that allows it to claim any rational merit, moral or descriptive plausibility, it becomes untenable.<sup>291</sup> Rather than accept the ‘idiocy’ or insanity of Earth and its subjectless planet, World tends to the absurd.<sup>292</sup> Finally, “[w]ith the bifurcation of planet, and the rejection of sacred carnality, the fall has occurred.”<sup>293</sup>

Reviewing Lee’s book, Scott Symons praised it as a ‘masterwork’. According to Symons, the result of liberalism was a ‘world-wide psychic Auschwitz’ where people lived out ‘consummated suicide’.<sup>294</sup> While Symons praised his liberal friend for honestly recognizing the reality of liberalism, he claimed Lee did not go far enough in identifying the “‘savage fields’ as the schizophrenic brainchild of Occidental gliberalism.”<sup>295</sup> While the young know no other world and are passively doomed, ‘cultural “Tories”’, such as Symons, unable to conform, are left to ‘imperceptibly kamikaze’ while liberals pretend innocence at forcing them into suicide.<sup>296</sup> What Lee stumbled on was that “the Canadian Identity, as willfully concocted since 1950 by Mackenzie King’s politico-cultural

kindergarten is simply a prime artefact of the ‘savage fields’.”<sup>297</sup> Symons, spelling out the vision of Canada overtly embodied by the Trudeauvian imaginary above, christened this power establishment the ‘SMUGLY FUCKLINGS’<sup>298</sup> and translated it into overtly erotic terms, insisting that their primary means to maintain control over the population was systematic sexual repression (‘Spermdrain’) specifically through cultural or media institutions.<sup>299</sup> To Symons, the Grit state is devoted to “procreating Schizos, hippies, separatos, lesbos, homos, Christians etc – because men with no-balls... are committed, patriotically committed, in our name, to attaining power. And to attain it they’ve got to geld – cut us off from land, love, heritage, life...”<sup>300</sup> It is a ‘political cancer’ organized to ‘Divide and Rule’ and expressed in generic Canadian ‘niceness’ or ‘smugness’.<sup>301</sup> This is what the new Canadian Identity amounts to: the technique of manufactured schizophrenia.

Unlike Lee’s ambivalence to liberalism, Symons did not shy away from taking a deeply pastoral view of a world decimated by the liberal order. Clearly keeping Trudeau in mind, and the Liberal vision of Canada in general, he explained that the passions are a sort of obsessive love, whether for bird-watching or furniture, that serve as a ‘discipline’ to commune with God.<sup>302</sup> Symons claimed that the passions are precisely “what Canada is against... The Canadian Identity is an artefact of will, everything is willed. The Canadian Identity is against life, all the way.”<sup>303</sup> By this, he meant that Canada ‘killed all eroticism’ by reducing eroticism to the ‘funfuck’, to ‘wanting’ and depriving it of its proper spirituality.<sup>304</sup> One of the fundamental byproducts of this was “modern ‘alienation,’ psychic solipsism, the advent of ‘black humour,’ and all of this is a predicate of our failure to understand and honour the reality of the ‘Trinity’.”<sup>305</sup> Although his own

work is saturated by a vindictive satirical style, Symons would insist that it was in the service of a holy battle to discover “the meaning of saintliness, of sainthood, in this modern era – and... the right death, the affirming (totally non-negative) death!”<sup>306</sup>

The death of Canada, either as that which had long since occurred or which could not be consummated, was the spectre cast over this section of the chapter. We have seen Canadians as anachronistic hybrids of indefinite identity being subsumed into a model of hegemonic liberal identity; we have seen them as inarticulate, romantic losers with a frequently self-destructive streak; we have seen them as heroic martyrs being eradicated by a liberalism hostile to both left and right wing populism; and finally, Canada’s hybridism subsumed by an ‘identity’ that is split into a kind of irresolvable living-death. It is in this absurd world of things where subjecthood seems constantly on the verge of disappearance that forms of English Canadian nationalist art will be developed. Three of those will be the concern of the rest of this dissertation.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Symons, *Civic Square* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 193.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Azzi, “The Nationalist Moment in English Canada” in *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties*, eds., Gregory S. Kealey, Lara Campbell, and Dominique Clément (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 213-228.

<sup>3</sup> Gad Horowitz, “On the fear of nationalism, nationalism and socialism: A sermon to the moderates,” *Canadian Dimension*, May-June 1967, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> C.P. Champion, *The Strange Demise of British Canada: The Liberals and Canadian Nationalism, 1964-1968* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 178.

<sup>8</sup> Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 208-209.

<sup>9</sup> Myrna Kotash, *The Long Way Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1980), 23.

<sup>10</sup> James Laxer, *In Search of a New Left: Canadian Politics After the Neoconservative Assault* (Toronto: Viking, 1996), 148.

<sup>11</sup> Scott Symons letter to George Grant, May 25, 1967. vol. 43 file 2 (Scott Symons Fonds (LAC) Letters and Place d’Armes 1967, 2001-0260), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Elliott Trudeau, *Federalism and the French Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), 161.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche; trans. Walter Kauffman and R.J. Hollingdale, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 14.

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- <sup>14</sup> Paul Litt, *Trudeaumania* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2016), 365.
- <sup>15</sup> Walter Stewart, *Shrug: Trudeau in Power* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 19. [My emphasis]
- <sup>16</sup> Pierre Elliott Trudeau, *Federalism and the French Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), 196.
- <sup>17</sup> Paul Litt, *Trudeaumania* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2016), 258. For an interpretation of the value of Trudeau's philosophy to the electorate that contradicts this, see Robert Wright's *Trudeaumania: The Rise to Power of Pierre Elliott Trudeau* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2016).
- <sup>18</sup> Reginald Whitaker, *A Sovereign Idea: Essays on Canada as a Democratic Community* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1992), 133.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.
- <sup>21</sup> His intellectual biographer Allen Mills has stressed the extent to which Trudeau attacked the Catholic Church in Québec for being both spiritually compromised and subverting the power of the civil state, as well as making the people of the province into 'constipated morons'. See Allen Mills, *Citizen Trudeau: An Intellectual Biography, 1944-1965* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2016), 140, 180.
- <sup>22</sup> For an overview of the centrality of Catholic Humanist political philosophy to Trudeau's intellectual development, notably through the work of Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain, see *Ibid.*, 78-99. See also E.-Martin Meunier and Jean-Phillippe Warren, *Sortir de la 'Grande noirceur': L'horizon 'peronsanaliste' de la Révolution tranquille* (Montréal: Septentrion, 2002) and Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, 1931-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), which both stress the significance of *personalisme* and Christian existentialism to the period's actors. Gauvreau's work stresses the unique colour that *personaliste* Catholicism put into the province's sexual revolution.
- <sup>23</sup> Reginald Whitaker, *A Sovereign Idea: Essays on Canada as a Democratic Community* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1992), 136.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 138, and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, *Federalism and the French Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), 177.
- <sup>25</sup> Reginald Whitaker, *A Sovereign Idea: Essays on Canada as a Democratic Community* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1992), 139.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.
- <sup>27</sup> In a famous anecdote, his wife once asked him what language he thought in and he responded, "I don't think in words, Margaret, I think in the abstract." Margaret Trudeau, *Beyond Reason* (New York & London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1979), 59.
- <sup>28</sup> Reginald Whitaker, *A Sovereign Idea: Essays on Canada as a Democratic Community* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1992), 144.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.
- <sup>31</sup> In his pre-governmental position, Trudeau tends to call them 'multi-nations'. See Pierre Elliott Trudeau, *Federalism and the French Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), 165-166.
- <sup>32</sup> One might point out that federalism, particularly in Trudeau's formulation, is less adequately understood as nationalism than as a special form of miniaturized imperialist rule by a clerisy. In a complementary interpretation of the policy as a political strategy, Kenneth McRoberts has pointed out that it functioned as an ironically 'inclusive' means to exclude biculturalism, which was seen by Trudeau as a threat since the doctrine of biculturalism would logically result in the necessity of sovereignty for Québec. This point has also been made by members of the civil service who implemented the policy. McRoberts adds that the concentration of multiculturalism and language over biculturalism was embraced by the state because it effectively privatized culture and reduced it to consumerism, increasing social fragmentation, and helped to serve the economy. See Kenneth McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada: The Struggle for Canadian Unity* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 121-127.
- <sup>33</sup> This change in government policy and self-conception is reflected in statements like this from the head of the civil service, Trudeau's Clerk of the Privy Council of Canada and later Secretary to the Cabinet, Michael Pitfield: "To say that we have passed from laissez-faire to the welfare state is old hat and even platitudinous. *Today we speak of government as having to deal with the revolution of rising expectations or even the revolution of rising entitlements.* But what all this comes down to for those of us concerned with the technical side of public policy and administration is that, like it or not, over the past couple of decades government has passed decisively from a reactive to an activist mode, and this has required and will

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continue to require far more fundamental changes in what we do and how we do it than have yet been generally realized.” Michael Pitfield, “The shape of government in the 1980s: techniques and instruments for policy formulation at the federal level,” *Canadian Public Administration* vol. 19, no. 1 (1976), 9. [My emphasis] The notion of entitlement and its marriage to the rights of consumerism were also central to Trudeau’s general conception of rights. See Allen Mills, *Citizen Trudeau: An Intellectual Biography, 1944-1965* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2016), 229.

<sup>34</sup> Deborah Cowen, *Military Workfare: The Soldier and Social Citizenship in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 29.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Reginald Whitaker, *A Sovereign Idea: Essays on Canada as a Democratic Community* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1992), 152. According to Mills, “Using Trudeau’s favoured phrased, ‘polyethnic pluralism’ will increasingly come to pass. Individual identity will be open and porous and exchangeable.” Allen Mills, *Citizen Trudeau: An Intellectual Biography, 1944-1965* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2016), 367. This would mark a move toward an idealized cosmopolitanism that would privilege no specific identity because it would assimilate them all to its own model while showing anything non-assimilable to be an ‘invalidity’. *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Reginald Whitaker, *A Sovereign Idea: Essays on Canada as a Democratic Community* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1992), 151.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>39</sup> For Québec nationalist critiques of Trudeau and federalist language at the time, often offered in equally sexually hyperbolic terms, see Hubert Aquin, “La fatigue culturelle du Canada français,” *Liberté* vol. 4, no. 23 (mai 1962), 299-325 and “Le corps mystique,” *Parti pris*, no. 5 (février 1964): 30-36; Pierre Lefebvre, “Les 32 positions du fédéralisme coopératif OU le kâmasoutra de l’hon.lamontagne,” *PartiPris* vol. 1, nos. 9-11 (printemps 1964), 168-173. 168. This persisted for years in anti-Trudeau rhetoric. See, for example, Jean Marchand, “La réalité c’est qu’à l’analyse, on se rend compte que le Québec, de région oubliée par le fédéral qu’il auparavant, est devenu la femme entretenue de la Confédération...” *Le Devoir*, March 21, 1972 and Gerald Godin, “Une ‘call-girl’ nommée Québec et un ‘pimp’ nommé Trudeau,” in *L’anti-Trudeau: choix de textes*, eds. André Potvin, Michel Letourneux and Robert Smith (Montréal: Éditions Parti-pris, 1972), 132-134. The liberal sexual pathologizing of Québec nationalism is still commonplace. For a few examples, see Jean-Philippe Warren, “Un parti pris sexuel. Sexualité et masculinité dans la revue *Parti Pris*,” *Globe* vol. 12, no. 2 (2009), 129-157; Patricia Smart, “When ‘next episodes’ are no longer an option: Quebec men’s writing in a postfeminist, postnationalist age,” *Quebec Studies*, no. 30 (2000), 28-43; Katherine A. Roberts, “Making women pay: revolution, violence, decolonizing Quebec in Hubert Aquin’s *Trou de memoire*,” *Quebec Studies*, no. 30 (2000), 17-27; and Robert Schwartzwald, “La fédérostrophie, ou les lectures agitées d’une révolution tranquille,” *Sociologie et sociétés* vol. 29, no. 1 (printemps 1997), 129-143.

<sup>40</sup> John English, *Citizen of the World: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau Volume One: 1919-1968* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2007), 156.

<sup>41</sup> Allen Mills, *Citizen Trudeau: An Intellectual Biography, 1944-1965* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2016), 264.

<sup>42</sup> Pierre Elliott Trudeau, *Federalism and the French Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), 151.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170. He cites Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain’s *Man and the State* (1951) in support of this claim. It is worth noting that the horror of homogeneity that Trudeau suffers from seems to mirror the dread of the homogeneous suburbs that had been projected on them by urban commentators which was mentioned earlier in this chapter.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-169, 207-212.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-175.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 179, 153. This is particularly ironic given the fate of Nigeria during Trudeau’s early years in office.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>59</sup> This would anachronistically bring it back to the individual in a state of nature rather than the person that he celebrates, and which is the basis of his whole ethos – but the idea of an actualized personal sovereignty for him, as for Hobbes, is a complete nightmare. Ironically, liberal hegemony's avowed minoritarianism produces a completely neutralized parody of this.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 193-195, 202.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>64</sup> This issue will be dealt with in the next chapter.

<sup>65</sup> There is clear irony, or hypocrisy, to this claim. As an avid reader of Maritain, Trudeau understood that totalitarianism was precisely the utilization of the state apparatus in the ways that he would come to embrace. Trudeau's early advocacy for a 'just society' has clearly Maritain-derived connotations, though this just society was predicated on the limitation of the state to the enforcement of law. Once the state moves beyond this to the management of industry or legislating of welfarism it has become 'perverted' by totalitarianism. See Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 20.

<sup>66</sup> In spite of the enthusiasm McLuhan had for Trudeau, it is worth remembering his point that space travel and futurism are just as backward as fantasies about the past – the electronic age is that of anesthetics, still basically reactive and transferred, "With anesthetics, what was really new was convalescence." Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 127. In this light, Trudeau's perfect society is a convalescent home.

<sup>67</sup> Richard Gwyn, *The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980), 54-55. For a (harsh but fair) critique for the extent to which Trudeau had reformed the state to his own power interests (already by 1971), substantially undermined parliamentary procedures and tradition, and cynically abused the rule of law, see Walter Stewart, *Shrug: Trudeau in Power* (Toronto: New Press, 1971).

<sup>68</sup> This was in keeping with the language of an interactive politics that would allow people to 'plug into' their representatives. Pauline Jewett, "How To 'Plug In' The People," *Maclean's*, November 1, 1968, 14.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Gwyn, *The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980), 97-98.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 99-101. Trudeau's government was also denounced for its 'Liberal fascism' by protestors on Parliament Hill in 1969. Lubor J. Zink, *Trudeaucracy* (Toronto: Toronto Sun Publishing Ltd., 1972), 39.

<sup>72</sup> Pierre Elliott Trudeau, *Trudeau en direct* (Montréal: Éditions du jour, 1972), 82.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> John B. Boyle, "Address to the general assembly of the Nihilist Party of Canada," *20 Cents Magazine*, October 1969, np.

<sup>80</sup> Lyrics for the Nihilist Spasm Band [Manuscript, 1967], 2. Box 1-11, Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>81</sup> George Grant, *George Grant: Selected Letters*, ed. William Christian (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 337.

<sup>82</sup> For example, "according to Doull, Grant may be right to lament, but his lamentation is not properly of Canada but of a specific British connection to Canada that Grant by education and family tradition saw as equivalent to Canada itself: 'Professor Grant calls his lament 'the failure of a nation.' There is much confusion in his use of the word 'nation.' What has failed in his account is British America. The failure Professor Grant speaks of is of the effort to establish British culture directly in Canada from above through

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higher education and the arts. It would be better described as the failure of colonialism.” Neil G. Robertson, “Freedom and the Tradition: George Grant, James Doull, and the Character of Modernity” in *Hegel and Canada*, eds. Neil G Robertson and Susan Dodd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 247. But such complaints are common to lazy readings of Grant.

<sup>83</sup> George Parkin Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), lxxiv.

<sup>84</sup> George Grant, *George Grant: Selected Letters*, ed. William Christian (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 144.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>86</sup> George Parkin Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 65. W.L. Morton likely gave the most sympathetic and genuinely critical review of the book on publication. While he shared some of Grant's feelings and found the work ‘profoundly disturbing’, he also found it excessively philosophical to the point it “oversteps all reasonable bounds” and upbraided Grant for not being a real conservative. This last point rests on Morton's insistence that conservatism is, above all else, a form of tested practicality. But this is exactly not how Grant understands it. Conservatism was crucial because it was both un-useful and diachronous, and so transgressed the homogeneous pretensions of progressivism and, not simply the notion of continentalism, but contemporaneity. It was this materiality of conservatism that is objectively important for Grant. See W.L. Morton, “A spate of wild words,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 15, 1965, A18.

<sup>87</sup> George Grant, *George Grant: Selected Letters*, ed. William Christian (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 244.

<sup>88</sup> George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974), 7. Grant is here echoing the arguments of one of his principle influences, Leo Strauss, who similarly claimed that philosophers usually have to occlude or dissimulate – often using ambiguous satire – in order to communicate in a hostile environment. See Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953 [1980]), 22-38.

<sup>89</sup> George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974), 8.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 11

<sup>92</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Empire; Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 139.

<sup>93</sup> In a letter to Grant, Symons also asserts that *Place d'Armes* ‘proves’ the ‘validity’ of *Lament for a Nation*, supplementing it with a more erotic analysis. Scott Symons letter to George Grant, May 25, 1967. vol. 43 file 2. Scott Symons Fonds (LAC) Letters and Place d'Armes 1967, 2001-0260, 6 and Scott Symons, *Civic Square* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 213.

<sup>94</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche; trans. Walter Kauffman and R.J. Hollingdale, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 17.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 60. ‘Cancels’ is a translation of *Aufheben*, which suggests not only negation but possibly retention or sublation.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 25. This theme will be overtly recast by Scott Symons as ‘schizophrenia’. Scott Symons, *Civic Square* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 80-84.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>106</sup> George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1969), 6-8.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, 17.

<sup>109</sup> Dennis Lee, “Grant's Impasse” in *By Loving Our Own: George Grant and the Legacy of Lament for a Nation*, ed. Peter C. Emberley (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990), 21.

<sup>110</sup> George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974), 77-78.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 83-84.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>115</sup> Hegel has had a significant presence in Canadian intellectual life, especially since the Second World War. See eds. Neil G. Robertson and Susan Dodd, *Hegel and Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 3, 278-279. The influence of the German philosopher was already keenly felt in the nineteenth-century, particularly under Queen's University's John Watson, philosophy professor and one-time leader of the Liberal Party. After the war, debates over the significance of Hegel and the dialectical understanding of history were brought to the fore by George Grant, Charles Taylor, Emile Fackenheim, James Doull and others.

<sup>116</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Empire; Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 87-88.

<sup>117</sup> As Alasdair MacIntyre has argued, in the Hegelian system "The Absolute Idea realized itself in rational form; this is why Hegel was only being consistent when he wrote in the *Logic* that his pen was writing the thoughts of God." Alasdair MacIntyre, *Herbert Marcuse: An Exposition and a Polemic* (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), 28.

<sup>118</sup> George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974), 56-57.

<sup>119</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Empire; Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 137.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 142. Grant is, of course, making a clear allusion to Weber here and the attack on utility.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 92-94.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 103-105.

<sup>125</sup> Grant took this critique even further. His rejection of Necessity or progress, the refusal to identify it with the Good, was the rejection of historicism, conceived as the reduction of the universe to the subject and the will. Robert C. Sibley, "Grant, Hegel, and the "Impossibility of Canada" in *Hegel and Canada*, eds. Neil G. Robertson and Susan Dodd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 282. This failure, Grant insisted, was also one of the primary failures of Christianity since it also confused the Necessary with the Good through acts in the temporal world. Ibid., 282. "In identifying progress and providence, Hegel effectively calls evil good and good evil in the sense that he casts the future as necessarily better than the past, thus justifying suffering as necessary for the sake of historical progress." Ibid., 282.

<sup>126</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Empire; Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 67; also George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974), 50. Swift, like the authors that Strauss discussed in his *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, tended to write through impersonation and satirical voice, techniques Grant also takes up. Speaking of Swift, it has been suggested that there were few other options if one was writing as a Royalist in a colony at a time when being a tory was futile. See Warren Montag, *The Unthinkable Swift: The Spontaneous Philosophy of a Church of England Man* (New York: Verso, 1994), 3-10.

<sup>127</sup> McLuhan claimed that his own work was a form of Menippean satire that "presented the surface of the world we live in as a ludicrous image." Marshall McLuhan, Matie Molinaro, Corinne McLuhan and William Toye, eds. *Letters of Marshall McLuhan* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 517.

<sup>128</sup> George Parkin Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), lxxiii.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 26, 51.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 8 Grant also insists that the nature of capitalism and its relationship to media and education actually make the idea of democracy absurd. Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 39.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>142</sup> This is particularly apparent in his discussions of the problem of fate and his discussion of the pessimism-optimism problem in Leibniz.

<sup>143</sup> George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1969), 10.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 19. See Grant's "A critique of the New Left" in *Canada and Radical Social Change*, ed. Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1973), 55-61 and Charles Taylor's roughly contemporary critique of the Marcusean New Left, "Authoritarian Utopia," *Canadian Dimension*, August-September 1970, 49-53. Northrop Frye likewise saw the New Left as an essentially reactionary phenomenon. See Frye, "Student radicals and right wingers are all the same," *Toronto Daily Star*, June 9, 1969, 7.

<sup>145</sup> George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1969), 32.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>149</sup> For an account of the importance of *ressentiment* in Canadian thought, see Michael Dorland, "A Thoroughly Hidden Country: Ressentiment, Canadian Nationalism, Canadian Culture." *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue Canadienne de theorie politique et sociale* vol. 12, nos. 1-2 (1988): 130-164.

<sup>150</sup> George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974), 48-68.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 59. In her autobiographical account of the New Left and second wave feminism in Canada, Myrna Kotash admits, "We were into some kind of Christian moral fervour although we wouldn't have called it that." As 'secular evangelists' these 'disillusioned liberals' represented a new kind of puritanism as they "hoped, through protestant action, to force bourgeois society to realize the liberal rhetoric concerning freedom, justice and equality." Myrna Kotash, *The Long Way Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1980), 18, 6-7. This would seem to apply to the sexual revolution as well. A book by American theologian Herbert Richardson, who was lecturing for a significant part of this period at Toronto's Saint Michael's College, offers a fascinating Christian re-encoding of the sexual rituals of American youth by their commercial culture during the postwar era. Richardson argued that patriarchy was the enemy of democracy and capitalism and was being overthrown by a renewed puritanism with its own 'New People' who were 'psychologically bisexual'. Herbert W. Richardson, *Nun, Witch, Playmate: The Americanization of Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 67-89. He suggested that 'heavy petting' and the general eroticization of culture were the puritan versions of the old codes of Catholic chivalry, a kind of polymorphous inheritance from Shakerism. Ibid., 130.

<sup>152</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Empire; Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 77. It was on this score in particular, that Horowitz distanced himself from Grant. According to Horowitz, while liberalism is open-ended, anti-essentialist and opposed to anything that limits the human idea of freedom, conservatism blocks progress and so is doomed. He attacks Grant for lacking "faith and hope, period," particularly in the sense espoused by the utopian left. The sense of determinism and pessimism that Grant projects is overpowering and Horowitz suggests that the compatibility of technological and liberal ideas of progress are not necessarily co-extensive. Finally, "Grant's tory fatalism has sucked the life out of his socialist humanism." Gad Horowitz, "Tories, Socialists and the Demise of Canada," *Canadian Dimension*, May 1965, 15.

<sup>153</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Empire; Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 59.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 36. The aesthetic aspect of this attitude struck his acquaintance, the painter Alex Colville, who wrote that "I think George's interest in my work arose partly out of his sensing that my use of geometry (sometimes described as obsessive) was like the ancient Greek (non-utilitarian and, therefore, in some sense religious) ..." Alex Colville, "A tribute to Professor George. P. Grant" in *By Loving Our Own: George Grant and the Legacy of Lament for a Nation*, ed. Peter C. Emberley (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990), 6.

<sup>156</sup> Dennis Lee, "Grant's Impasse" in *By Loving Our Own: George Grant and the Legacy of Lament for a Nation*, ed. Peter C. Emberley (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990), 22.

<sup>157</sup> Grant extended this in other places to a critique of religious dogmatism as well. In a letter from 1961, he wrote, "The exclusion of all Greek wisdom from modern Protestant thought is driving me to distraction. I

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cannot understand it. One does not have to be a liberal to see wisdom outside biblical categories.” George Grant, *George Grant: Selected Letters*, ed. William Christian (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 209. Perhaps not uncoincidentally, McLuhan highlighted a comparable frame of mind in Wyndham Lewis and his general critique of the ‘time cult’ essential to modernity.

<sup>158</sup> George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974), 48.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-51.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>161</sup> *Autochthonous* has a special meaning in Platonic philosophy since it is the mark that separates the just of the Good city from the unjust (imperfect) who have come from elsewhere. Stanley Rosen, “The Role of Eros in Plato’s,” *Republic Review of Metaphysics* vol. 18, no. 3 (March 1965), 471. Without such a state, Eros is doomed to likely tyranny. In using this term, Grant is clearly intimating this. Eros, as Rosen stresses, is private and excessive, something that usually happens outside of the rational bounds symbolized by the city. *Ibid.*, 455. Note that there is also an Eros of the city and its boundaries, expressed in the legislation of sexuality etc., but the city operates by erotic necessity, not erotic excess. *Ibid.*, 462. Grant’s Eros, however, is more ambiguous than this schematism would suggest since it simultaneously insists on the value of the autochthonous as justice but also the ethical value of the inutilitarian. The concentration on the autochthonous also connects his thinking to the concern with ‘deracination’ common to Québec nationalists and to some of the questions of mystical Christian socialism found in Simone Weil’s *L’Enracinement* (1949).

<sup>162</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Empire; Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 17.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>166</sup> He frequently cites existentialism and Sartre as particular instances for opprobrium in this regard.

<sup>167</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Empire; Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 24, 33.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>170</sup> Discussed at length in Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 56-83, notably 74-81, with its analysis of the “mobilization and administration of libido” and its functionalist ‘socialization’ for the ‘de-eroticized environment’ of bureaucratized society.

<sup>171</sup> George Parkin Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 56. Grant is practically quoting Jacques Ellul here: “But these phenomena, which express the deepest instinctive human passions, have also become totally innocuous. They question nothing, menace nobody. Behemoth can rest easy; neither Henry Miller’s eroticism nor, Andre Breton’s surrealism will prevent him from consuming mankind. Such movements are pure formalisms, pure verbalisms. No one has ever carried out the famous ‘pure surrealist act.’” Jacques Ellul; trans. John Wilkonson, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 416-417.

<sup>172</sup> George Parkin Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 56.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>174</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Empire; Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 76.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>176</sup> This also, and I do not believe any Grant scholar has pointed this out, places him in strangely shared territory with Georges Bataille. Though there are *very substantial* differences between them, what they shared was a critique of liberalism (and capitalism) on the grounds of its utilitarianism and the understanding of history they were predicated on. Like Grant, Bataille’s critical relationship to these things developed through a critique of Kojève-Hegel and in favour of a form of ‘negativity’ (a term Bataille uses but Grant does not) that was irrecoverable by capitalist rationality. Similarly, both figures took Simone Weil as their exemplar for the possibility of a modern ethics. For more, see Alexander Irwin, *Saints of the Impossible: Bataille, Weil, and the Politics of the Sacred* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) and Lawrence Schmidt, “Grant on Weil as Saint and Thinker” in *George Grant and the Subversion of Modernity: Art, Philosophy, Politics, Religion, and Education*, ed., Arthur Davis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 263-281.

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- <sup>177</sup> George Parkin Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 95.
- <sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.
- <sup>179</sup> George Grant, "Céline's trilogy," in *George Grant and the Subversion of Modernity: Art, Philosophy, Politics, Religion, and Education*, ed., Arthur Davis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 30. Grant admits to being hesitant in his Platonism only because of the Greek's attitude to poetry.
- <sup>180</sup> Stanley Rosen, "The Role of Eros in Plato's," *Republic Review of Metaphysics* vol. 18, no. 3 (March 1965), 453.
- <sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 454-455.
- <sup>182</sup> George Grant, "Céline's trilogy," in *George Grant and the Subversion of Modernity: Art, Philosophy, Politics, Religion, and Education*, ed., Arthur Davis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 13.
- <sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 18.
- <sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.
- <sup>185</sup> Louis-Ferdinand Céline was a French novelist famous for his often nihilistic and blackly humorous picturesque of his impoverished childhood and Europe decaying through two world wars. In addition to being an innovative prose stylist, he was also infamous for his collaboration with the Vichy regime and subsequent vilification by Jean-Paul Sartre, one of Grant's privileged targets of contempt. In particular, it was Céline's post-war trilogy, *D'un château l'autre*, *Nord*, and *Rigodon* (1957-1961), that aroused Grant's attention. His planned book on the French author was not completed, although surviving portions were published in *George Grant and the Subversion of Modernity: Art, Philosophy, Politics, Religion, and Education*, ed. Arthur Davis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). See also Gerald Owen's commentary on the manuscript in the same volume.
- <sup>186</sup> George Grant, "Céline's trilogy," in *George Grant and the Subversion of Modernity: Art, Philosophy, Politics, Religion, and Education*, ed., Arthur Davis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 44.
- <sup>187</sup> *Dear Reader: Selected Scott Symons*, ed. Christopher Elson (Toronto: Gutter Press, 1998), 190.
- <sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.
- <sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 195. Symons was attentive to this in part because it pointed to their shared celebration of the spiritual value of nationalism, a nationalism rooted in its general inutility. This was a stark contrast to the largely pragmatic nationalism of many Canadian nationalists.
- <sup>190</sup> John B. Boyle, *John B. Boyle*, London Public Library and Art Museum exhibition card, 1974.
- <sup>191</sup> Sylvia Fraser, *The Candy Factory* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 141.
- <sup>192</sup> Robert Fulford, "Nationalism is no longer such an ugly word in Canadian art," *Toronto Star*, February 12, 1972, 65.
- <sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* In the same newspaper a few years earlier, Gail Dexter complained about the persistence of the Canadian biennial on the grounds that it was created for "a nationalism which clearly does not exist." Gail Dexter, "We've outgrown biennials," *Toronto Daily Star*, July 6, 1968, 32. A few months after Fulford's article, a critic in Kitchener would complain that "Joyce Wieland's current show at the University of Guelph seems to me clear proof of that old saw: Great artists should have no country." Susan Mackenzie, "Nationalism comes on a little thick," *Kitchener Waterloo Record*, October 21, 1972, np.
- <sup>195</sup> Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis: Carleton University, 1987), 56.
- <sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.
- <sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.
- <sup>198</sup> While the formal traits of Regionalism will be covered in the following chapter, this chapter deals with how they played out on a national stage. Likewise, Wieland's sense of nationalism is dealt with at length in the chapters dedicated to her.
- <sup>199</sup> The majority of the respondents in favour of joining the United States were in Québec and the Atlantic provinces and among the poorest portion of the population. Anon., "Who's for Canada - and who's for the U.S.A.?" *Maclean's*, June 6, 1964, 12-13.
- <sup>200</sup> Courtney Tower, "The heartening surge of a new Canadian nationalism," *Maclean's*, February 1970, 1.
- <sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>202</sup> Gad Horowitz was a Harvard and McGill trained political scientist specializing in labour history. He was also one of the major early contributors to *Canadian Dimension*, a leftist journal founded by Cy Gonick in Winnipeg in 1963.

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- <sup>203</sup> Gad Horowitz, "Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science/Revue canadienne d'Economie et de Science politique* vol. 32, no. 2 (May 1966), 156.
- <sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.
- <sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 143. This socialism is not Marxist, but rather British "Protestant, labourist, and Fabian." *Ibid.*, 160.
- <sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.
- <sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.
- <sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.
- <sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.
- <sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.
- <sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.
- <sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 158-159.
- <sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.
- <sup>214</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden; Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), 219-220.
- <sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.
- <sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 224-230.
- <sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.
- <sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-221.
- <sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.
- <sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 248-250.
- <sup>221</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), 17-19.
- <sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-34.
- <sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35. A rather different articulation of this theme in contemporary aesthetics was present in Robert Stuart Grant's "Negative nationalism and the poetry of Dennis Lee" (MA Thesis: University of Windsor, 1971).
- <sup>224</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), 36.
- <sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-167.
- <sup>226</sup> Robin Mathews, *Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution*, ed. Gail Dexter (Toronto: Steel Rail Educational Publishing, 1978), 1-2.
- <sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.
- <sup>230</sup> In his public statements, Mathews frequently debated internationalists, whose positions he argued were "a lot of hypothetical bunk" that would only result in neo-colonialism and obscure a 'truth' that was deeply communitarian. Jeffrey Cormier, *The Canadianization Movement: Emergence, Survival, and Success* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 78.
- <sup>231</sup> Robin Mathews, *Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution*, ed. Gail Dexter (Toronto: Steel Rail Educational Publishing, 1978), 119, 127.
- <sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.
- <sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.
- <sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.
- <sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.
- <sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.
- <sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-130. His critique of Atwood was originally published in *This Magazine*, as was her rebuttal, which was republished as "Mathews and Misrepresentation," in *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1982), 129-50. Among other things, she accused him of providing a distorted interpretation of her arguments which suggested she had political opinions she did not hold. She did, however, praise him for not trying to 'cram' an understanding of Canada into the normative claims of leftist discourse imported from other countries. *Ibid.*, 150. For a good overview of their similarities and divergences concerning the notion of Canadian identity, see Robert Williams, "Robin Mathews and the Canadian Dialectic: Forms of Nationalist Thought in Canada" (MA thesis, The University of Northern British Columbia, 2009), 30-48. It is worth adding that Atwood insisted in her rebuttal that a dialogue was not possible, only monologues, a notion in keeping with a remarkable amount of Canadian and Québécois nationalist discourse.

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- <sup>238</sup> Ibid., 191. Even the notion of the ‘progressive’ is bound to the imperial centre-colony model of development. Ibid., 196.
- <sup>239</sup> Ibid., 191.
- <sup>240</sup> Ibid., 193.
- <sup>241</sup> Ibid., 191-192.
- <sup>242</sup> Ibid., 194. He singles out Women Unite! as an instance of this colonizing ideology and speeches by feminists that echoed the ideologies of multinational corporations. Ibid., 195.
- <sup>243</sup> Ibid., 200.
- <sup>244</sup> Ibid., 200.
- <sup>245</sup> Ibid., 201-203. See Mathews’ work with James Steele on the extreme privilege granted to foreign born or trained academics within the university system: *The Struggle for Canadian Universities* (1969). Regarding the media vilification of Mathews, see Jeffrey Cormier, *The Canadianization Movement: Emergence, Survival, and Success* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 58-59.
- <sup>246</sup> The Waffle were addressed in the introduction. It is worth adding that Robin Mathews was closely associated with the group.
- <sup>247</sup> James Laxer and Robert Laxer, *The Liberal idea of Canada: Pierre Trudeau and the Question of Canada's Survival* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1977), 30.
- <sup>248</sup> Ibid., 31.
- <sup>249</sup> Ibid., 32.
- <sup>250</sup> Ibid., 36.
- <sup>251</sup> Ibid., 74.
- <sup>252</sup> Ibid., 39.
- <sup>253</sup> Ibid., 104.
- <sup>254</sup> Ibid., 74. This, they observe was, in spite of its restrictions on social spending, marketed to the post-60s morality of anti-consumerism and environmentalism. Ibid., 97.
- <sup>255</sup> Ibid., 76.
- <sup>256</sup> Curiously, they define the populism that they regarded as intrinsic to Canadian liberalism as the “quasi-religious product of American social circumstances and American imagination,” a kind of pragmatic utopianism. Ibid., 84. Yet, they go on to note, the Americans in practice, if not rhetoric, largely abandoned nationalist populism and most free enterprise long ago in favour of monopoly corporate capitalism and international expansionism.
- <sup>257</sup> Ibid., 92-93.
- <sup>258</sup> Ibid., 94.
- <sup>259</sup> George Grant, introduction to James Laxer and Robert Laxer, *The Liberal idea of Canada: Pierre Trudeau and the Question of Canada's Survival* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1977), 9.
- <sup>260</sup> Gail Dexter, “Yes, Cultural Imperialism Too!” in *Close the 49th parallel etc.: The Americanization of Canada*, ed. Ian Lumsden for the University League for Social Reform (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 158.
- <sup>261</sup> Ibid., 160.
- <sup>262</sup> Ibid., 160.
- <sup>263</sup> Ibid., 160.
- <sup>264</sup> Ibid., 164.
- <sup>265</sup> Ibid., 165.
- <sup>266</sup> Ibid., 166.
- <sup>267</sup> Ibid., 166.
- <sup>268</sup> Barry Lord, “Living inside the American empire of taste,” *Saturday Night*, December 1971, 33.
- <sup>269</sup> Ibid., 33.
- <sup>270</sup> Ibid. CAR, now known as CARFAC, was founded in London in 1968 by Chambers as an artists’ collective to fight for their rights, particularly artist fees for exhibitions and fees for the right to reproduce their imagery.
- <sup>271</sup> Ibid., 29.
- <sup>272</sup> Sol Littman, “Indignant Vancouver artist speaks out,” *Toronto Star*, March 29, 1974, E8. He goes on to attack *artscanada* for simply speaking to the converted and obsessing over ‘Eskimo art’.
- <sup>273</sup> Harold Town, *Enigmas* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), np.
- <sup>274</sup> Anne Wordsworth, “An Interview with Joyce Wieland,” *Descant Magazine*, Spring/Summer 1974, 109.
- <sup>275</sup> Ibid., 110.

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<sup>276</sup> Greg Curnoe, Manuscript notes, Box 2-6 "Writing 1975." Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO. A more polite version of the article was published as "Feet of Clay planted Firm in U.S.A." *The Canadian Forum*, May 1976, 9-11.

<sup>277</sup> Curnoe would also criticize Reid for not being overt enough in his understanding of nationalism and the socio-political context of the production of art. See Greg Curnoe, "The Dilemma of Provincialism: A History of Canadian Painting," *The Canadian Forum*, February 1975, 30-32.

<sup>278</sup> Harper's *Painting in Canada: A History* was published in 1966. Though Curnoe was also critical of Reid's text, Town was considerably harsher, and the men attacked one another in print. Town's initial critique even spawned a rival attack on Town by Dennis Burton and then an attack on Burton and Reid by Town, where he referred to 'Reid's thalidomide book' as "inaccurate, ineptly written and festering with undocumented, personal opinion." See Harold Town, "This leg has a hollow sound," *The Globe and Mail*, November 17, 1973, 35; Dennis Burton, "The elusive exhibit and the reclusive critic," *The Globe and Mail*, November 21, 1973, 7; and Harold Town, "History? Humbug!" *The Globe and Mail*, November 29, 1973, 7.

<sup>279</sup> A typically colourful review of Lord by Town stated that his book was "trash, yet I hope the zealots of the right will not exclude it from study in Canadian schools, for it is a near-perfect example of what can happen in our society to a soft boy pampered to middle age by a system which allows 10<sup>th</sup> rate sensibilities to feed at the trough and then spit in it." Harold Town, "In the service of doctrine. Compelling as a dripping tap," *The Globe and Mail*, November 2, 1974, 35. This led to some sparring, equally colourful editorials letters from both men, as well as one from Esther Mathews, Robin Mathews wife, who accused Town of being a "has-been darling of the Toronto art-set groveling in thanks for the crumbs tossed to Canadians by that patron, Imperial Oil..." Esther Mathews, "Book review," *The Globe and Mail*, November 9, 1974, 6.

<sup>280</sup> John Boyle, Written response of Barry Lord [Typescript], 6. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO. A version of Boyle's commentary was published as "People's Art: Does it include the nude? – Barry Lord on People's Art," *This Magazine* (March/April 1975), 3-6.

<sup>281</sup> Greg Curnoe, Commentary on Barry Lord's *The History of Painting in Canada*, Box 2-5, 4. Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>283</sup> According to Lee, "I define myself against Frye, in another way against McLuhan: I define myself by Grant." Dennis Lee Collection – Drafts of essays ca. 1970 "Meditations on themes that characterize Savage Fields," Box 47:1, np. MS Coll 00271 Dennis Lee Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. In a letter to Grant, Symons also asserts that Place d'Armes 'proves' the 'validity' of Lament for a Nation. Scott Symons letter to George Grant, May 25, 1967. vol. 43 file 2. Scott Symons Fonds (LAC) Letters and Place d'Armes 1967, 2001-0260, 6.

<sup>284</sup> Lee's notebooks indicate that the work would have originally had six sections: (1) realist works on the denial of life (2) the denial of life but also an explosion of repressed life energy in still relatively realistic fiction and advocating 'savage individualism' and a new way of unrepressed civility (Scott Symons as example) (3) new forms of unrealistic art, that he terms, after Wyndham Lewis, 'vorticism' or 'field-writing' (4) a study of the relation between these forms and the new emerging cosmology of liberalism (5) a study of six books following these forms (6) an addendum on recent relevant books. Lee never wrote this book and was relieved when Atwood published *Survival* since it covered most of what he would have in first two chapters. "Not characters but voices - polyphony," Dennis Lee Collection – Savage Fields – Rough Drafts "Notes 1972," Box 48:2, np. MS Coll 00271 Dennis Lee Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

<sup>285</sup> A comparable claim is also made in John Moss, *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel: The Ancestral Present* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977).

<sup>286</sup> Dennis Lee, *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1977), 7.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>292</sup> Although Lee distances himself from the consequences of this Thersitist argument since it would make the notion of human 'consciousness' either deeply stupid or, at best, psychotic, this is not a refutation.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>294</sup> Scott Symons, "Savage Fields," *The Globe and Mail*, November 12, 1977, 43.

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Scott Symons, *Civic Square* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 209.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 212-213.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 84, also 257.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 371, 379.

<sup>302</sup> Scott Symons, *Dear Reader: Selected Scott Symons*, ed. Christopher Elson (Toronto: Gutter Press, 1998), 195.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 195, 203.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 209.

### Chapter Three: Anti-politics and erogenous regions

“Nationalism in Canada, as elsewhere, is very often the doctrine of the discontented. Indeed, it might be argued that while a patriot is a man who loves his country, a nationalist is a man who hates it.”<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how John Boyle and Greg Curnoe embraced aspects of the nihilism and negative nationalism outlined above. This includes both their overt borrowing from the histories of nihilism, anarchism, Dada and Surrealism, but also the ways that they performed these things and the ambiguous political connotations they flirted with. What is crucial in this is that their nationalism *is* in their irrationality, meaninglessness and negativity, and the realization that these are not generated abstractly but within the specifics of place. In this, they mirror one of the basic structural aspects of the erotic, namely its fracturing and reduction to absurdity of the sociological understanding of the world.

If Grant’s work outlined the nihilism of modern Canada and not only the impossibility of its nationalism, but the absurdity of imagining it involved more than a vacuous farce, or as Dennis Lee would put it, *idiocy*, Boyle and Curnoe embodied this as a form of aggressive absurdity. In fact, their work assumes the position of Nietzschean nihilism, not as nay-saying, but as an affirmation. In addition to sharing Grant’s satirical sense, they also greatly exaggerate it. If Grant had recognized that the enemy was dialectics, Curnoe and Boyle’s pushing of discourse to self-destruction knowingly mocked not only any positivistic claim for knowledge, but any positive claim for politics or social relationality beyond the level of parody. This discussion of their nationalism will then be followed by one of their related, but very different, theories about Regionalism. These two sets of attitudes – the nationalist and the regionalist – will play

significant formal roles in the work of both artists, both as considered here in their more explicitly (anti-)political register and subsequently in terms of their erotic art.

### **3.1. The rejection of politics: Boyle, Curnoe and continental refusal**

“Without its culture, a nation has no reason to exist. English speaking Canada has not realized this.”<sup>2</sup>

“...Greg Curnoe the Canadian nationalist with a great sense of irony. That’s not irony, George, he would say, that’s just the way I see things.”<sup>3</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, most of the scholarly work on Curnoe has been of a biographical bent and this has meant twisting it into expressions of his personality rather than, as he would insist, as things in the world that have their own anarchic autonomy. This has also resulted in making the nihilism of the artworks more digestible. For instance, Curnoe’s politics have sometimes been conflated with those of the New Left, largely glossing over their complexity and ambiguity – as well as the potentially uncomfortable or socially unacceptable suggestions contained within much of the work he and his colleagues produced – through the excuse of their presentation in the guise of generic Dadaist absurdity.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, while an anti-politics persisted in his work, Curnoe’s most overt and extreme political statements and imagery largely preceded the emergence of the New Left in the country and his general hostility to the state was not compatible with their socialism.

Based in the relatively isolated and famously conservative city of London, the art scene that evolved received a remarkable amount of press attention. Highlighted as a hub for artistic innovation, Curnoe hoped for other areas to become as productive as London but was wary of the nationalistic significance it was often dressed as having. “A naïve

Canadianism is to be avoided,” Curnoe warned. “However the desire to reassure ourselves of our own importance by measuring ourselves with the standards of international culture is also to be avoided.”<sup>5</sup> He noted John Boyle as an example of an original artist who might receive recognition and added that, “My personal aversion to international thinking has led me to make my painting as obscure as possible so that no one but my intimates know what is happening in it.”<sup>6</sup> He concluded, “Above all we live in a mediocre country, where life can proceed quietly (in my opinion a pre-requisite for doing things).”<sup>7</sup> Maintaining mediocrity is (ironically) necessary to the production of quality art. In this, Curnoe, as will be the case with Boyle, was closer to a negative nationalist than a patriot.

I have borrowed the term ‘negative nationalism’ from a 1971 MA thesis by Robert Stuart Grant which he wrote about Dennis Lee, specifically his *Civil Elegies* (1968). Building on a suggestion by the poet and scholar Louis Dudek, Stuart Grant<sup>8</sup> argues that literary nationalism after the First World War evolved in terms of a “negative bias; it is an expression of the rational disillusionment presented in terms of Canadian reality.”<sup>9</sup> The earlier tradition of Canadian nationalism, personated by someone like Charles G.D. Roberts, was romantic, patriotic and idealistic.<sup>10</sup> In some respects, it lives on in a Camp form in Joyce Wieland as we will see later. The rival tradition, however, is a ‘nationalism-in-reverse’ that concentrates on a fragmented vision of the nation, regrading it as a vast ‘wasteland’.<sup>11</sup> While Stuart Grant notes that many would not call this nationalism, he points out that its practitioners, such as Lee, did. The usually sardonic love/hate of Canada would become common to poets as diverse as Earl Birney, Irving Layton and Margaret Atwood.<sup>12</sup> Negative nationalism was part of the realization that

progress, manifest explicitly by American technological liberalism, developing “without malice or premeditation” had cost ‘sensitive Canadians’ their “personal and political identity.”<sup>13</sup> This negative form of nationalism, which was often expressed through satire and deliberate offensiveness, was also a strong characteristic in both the work of Scott Symons and the some of the London Regionalists.

An early, and perhaps the most focussed statement of Curnoe’s anti-politics and its relationship to art is given in notes from 1963. He opened them with a quote from Antonin Artaud that he re-wrote as, “And if there is one infernal, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like lovers who wave from the embrace.”<sup>14</sup> So, immediately, one has an unsubtle rejection of ‘formalism’ and a conflating of artistic value with erotic value. This would also chime with Boyle’s work. One critic noted that the rejection of formalist discourse and other models of sophistication was a strategy for being anti-American, while still warning that “Boyle should beware, however, of impoverishing his art for the sake of his political feelings.”<sup>15</sup> In a catalogue essay for a group show featuring Boyle, Curnoe would tie this eschewing of modernist painting explicitly to nihilism: “John B. Boyle is involved. In order to paint what he is thinking about he chooses to ignore most of the formal devices used in painting. He is President of the Nihilist Party.”<sup>16</sup>

Curnoe ironically suggested that everyone should be politically involved, even if only privately. He rejected ‘dilettantish’ political statements, citing Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937) as an example, suggesting that jokes were a better strategy. Younger artists seemed to understand this so “they are going to provide us with dirty jokes. DADA was a dirty joke. Neo-Dada... is a clean joke.”<sup>17</sup> Quoting Artaud again, he insisted on art’s

gratuitousness, its lack of practical use value. Curnoe's personal anarchism was a paradoxical discipline since "the removal of discipline is the most difficult discipline" and was usually expressed in random interjections that break things up, justifying 'any action whatsoever.'<sup>18</sup> Personal anarchism translates to the belief that "the individual should have a voice equal to that of the majority, I believe that there is no universal moral standard; for example, I think that killing is wrong, yet if I were in the army and were ordered not to kill I would possibly go out and kill if I felt so inclined."<sup>19</sup>

As to political involvement, Curnoe despised moderation more than apathy, voting more than boycotting. Involvement was largely a kind of aesthetic gratuitousness "often only of value as a kick."<sup>20</sup> The sincere, politically involved art of the American realists was dismissed as 'specious' and commitment to political programmes a dead end.<sup>21</sup> It was better to go underground, he wrote, adding, "It is elegant to appear to submit while taking control."<sup>22</sup> He claimed to be pro-nationalist for Canada *and* agree with the FLQ.

Although the FLQ bombings and the assassination of Pierre Laporte that culminated in the October Crisis are often regarded as a summary moment of the intersection of politics and violence in Canada, a very different terrorist act was central to how Boyle and Curnoe understood this intersection. This was the botched bombing of the House of Commons by Paul Joseph Chartier. A drifter from Alberta with mental problems, Chartier spent a year planning to bomb parliament, only to fail and accidentally blow himself up in a parliamentary bathroom on May 18, 1966. As a result, he became one of the folk heroes for Boyle and Curnoe's unique brand of nihilistic nationalism, with Boyle going so far as declaring his desire for "the destruction of the

R.C.M.P., the National Gallery, the Government of Canada. My heroes are Paul Joseph Chartier, John Diefenbaker and Jehovah's Witnesses."<sup>23</sup> One of the striking things about the Chartier incident was how intensely aestheticized it was by the press, who reported it with a mixture of gory detail, very mild outrage, and black humour.

Much of the press were absent during the event, covering the inquiry into the Gerda Munsinger sex scandal instead.<sup>24</sup> Reports stressed the 'acrid black smoke' that filled the hall following the blast, and Chartier's "blood caking on the tile floor."<sup>25</sup> According to one report, his last word was, "Yes."<sup>26</sup> Front page coverage showed a damaged window frame and his body in a bag being transferred to an ambulance. The images were perched above articles on the inquiry into the Munsinger scandal and hair styling as sculpture. [Fig. 35] A lead account asserted, "He died there, alone as usual, unable to do this job right any more than he had succeeded at the numerous other jobs he had held."<sup>27</sup> Chartier's mom said he was 'happy go lucky',<sup>28</sup> his landlady insisted he was "a nice quiet person' with a toupee he never wore, who "spoke about ordinary things."<sup>29</sup> His ex-wife explained that he was politically indifferent, indifferent to family and "got mad at funny things."<sup>30</sup> The coverage also stressed that he was a former mental patient and glossed a lengthy speech found in his room that he planned to read in the House (it was refused) as a "rambling, disjointed complaint about parliament wasting time on sex and scandal. It also mentions injustices to Indians and working people" and suggests that 'Leveck' should be Prime Minister.<sup>31</sup> Calling for the country's independence, the bomber also suggested that his act would be a wake-up call, an attempt to do what CBC news programs claimed to do, only he would do it successfully: "Every backward country in the world got their independence. You mean to tell me that we're the dumbest people in

the world[.]”<sup>32</sup> Other coverage continued to stress the aesthetic elements of the case. One article went into the kind of detail that would make Curnoe proud, documenting all the things Chartier left behind in his hotel room, describing his handwriting style, the stains on his papers, spare TTC tickets, junk ads, even the smells of the paper bags he abandoned.<sup>33</sup>

Chartier was celebrated by Curnoe and Boyle with the same affection they showed all their heroes. In a sense, the bomber was emblematic of everything that they held up about Canada and both the aesthetic portrayal of his demise and the ‘madness’ of his ‘politics’ functioned as a real world echo of what they presented in their art. Chartier’s importance, much as Diefenbaker’s to Grant, was in his absurdity and his failure. Boyle and Curnoe’s political positions are best understood as falling somewhere between their heroes Chartier and Diefenbaker, the two great failures of parliament.<sup>34</sup> In 1966, Boyle would commemorate the two men, united together in oil with *Fathers of Confederation*.

As if to demonstrate his kinship with Chartier, Curnoe placed him and his manifesto into his series of *Family Paintings* (1966).<sup>35</sup> [Figs. 36-39] These four paintings, loosely mimicking the layout of a newspaper, recount the narrative of the pregnancy of Curnoe’s wife Sheila and the birth of their son Owen. This is related in four square oil paintings on plywood with ink text stamped on them and sealed under plexiglass. The first shows Sheila in labour, her abdomen at the centre of the work. Superimposed on this is a text about the death of the family bird, which provides a juxtaposition of life and death with domesticated animality. The next image shows Owen, now two months old. Cradled by Sheila, he is accompanied by the family cat against an

abstract ground. Superimposed over the scene is a text from Chartier's manifesto vowing to exterminate the country's political class. The next image is structured in a similar manner, this time the text is one of Curnoe's banal observations of daily life. The final work in the quartet shows Curnoe smoking a pipe in a block at centre, a text from Chartier running along the top and one of Curnoe's journal entries along the bottom; contemplative banality and polemical revolution juxtaposed and equalized; terrorism and contemplation unified.

Reviewing the works, Kay Kritzwiser would claim that Curnoe's texts were stamped on as "an integral gospel and comment," though she did not acknowledge that the majority of the 'gospel' in the paintings was Chartier's and what this shared space may imply.<sup>36</sup> Pierre Théberge would insist that the presence of Chartier and the violence he figured was little more than a negative contrast to family life.<sup>37</sup> Yet, the superimposition of Curnoe's domesticity and Chartier's terrorism highlighted one of the most basic tenets of the artist's anarchism. As Barbara Stevenson has pointed out, Curnoe's anarchism, while certainly more pacifistic than Chartier's, promoted the family as a means for opposition to the state.<sup>38</sup> The family and the bombing are two models of opposition. Given the context, especially in the years to come, of advocacy for sexual rebellion and the destruction of the traditional family from the New Left, it is worth keeping in mind that the "combination of conservatism and radicalism in anarchist thought is an interesting aspect of the philosophy which undoubtedly appears in Curnoe's art and writings."<sup>39</sup> Chartier would also appear in the infamous Dorval mural (1968)<sup>40</sup> and as the endpiece of Curnoe's five panel text work, *The True North Strong and Free* (1968). [Fig. 40] Here, Curnoe paints the mock slogans that Canada 'feeds the brain',

calls for closing the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel etc., claims Canada ‘costs less than drugs’, always loses and asks if Chartier died in vain. It is unclear what the meaning is. As over-the-top as the statements may be, they seem designed to be cumulatively unclear.

Although Diefenbaker scarcely appears in Curnoe’s work, he did notably portray the *bête noire* of the Tories, Mackenzie King, and anticipated Grant’s attack on the liberal state. *For Ben Bella* (1964) [Fig. 41] was a large oil on plywood with mixed media constructed in three dimensions, a set of bars running on either side giving the image the quality of a carnival ride. King is recognizable, his face taken from an election poster.<sup>41</sup> He sits in a large wing-backed chair against an abstract ground. By his foot is a note about where his dead pet used to sit and further along, rendered in three dimensions, is a box containing parts of a vibrator. King’s body is made of a series of abstracted blobs and lines that look like the guidelines for a sewing pattern. A blue arm labelled ‘Ebert’s’ reaches down and stimulates him with the vibrator. Running along the perimeter of the piece are a series of texts highlighting the names of nationalist leaders (such as Ben Bella, Mao, Riel, Malcolm X) and statements regarding Canadian economic dependency on the U.S. Stevenson suggests that, “The sexual connotations of the vibrator may involve King’s and the Liberals’ impotence in resisting pressure by the United States.”<sup>42</sup> While Barry Lord interprets the work depicting King as “a traitor among the world’s patriotic and anti-imperialist leaders,” he also notes, but does not extrapolate from, the text by Curnoe that runs across the top of the work: “THE LIBERALS SOLD US TO THE U.S.A! THE P.C.’S DESTROYED THE PARLIAMENT! THE N.D.P. BETRAYED THE C.C.F.! THE NIHILIST PARTY OF CANADA AWAIT WITH JOY THE DEATH OF OUR COUNTRY AND ENDORSES UNION WITH OUR BELOVED AND SHY

NEIGHBOUR THE U.S. & A.!!”<sup>43</sup> Ironically, the painting was shown as part of Expo 67 and graced the cover of *Canadian Art*'s rebranding as the momentarily more nationalistic *artscanada*.

In John Boyle's work, Diefenbaker exists between masturbation and turning scatological humour into an art form. One of Boyle's celebrations of Diefenbaker was *Drawbridge* (1965) a three-part wood construction with images of the prime minister and others spread over its surfaces. The elements were drawn together using a protruding crank which also happened to be the erect penis of a nude. Diefenbaker received an equally ambiguous treatment from Boyle in *Little Daisy* (1974). [Figs. 44-45] The work featured pilot Billy Bishop, champion oarsman Ned Hanlan and Diefenbaker painted across the body of a large three-dimensional model airplane, cut in half and suspended across the image of a landscape from around Boyle's home. When installed, Boyle would place a freestanding wooden painting of Joseph Pujol 'Le Pétomane,' the infamous French flatulist, poised to flatulate on the other figures. As we will see, Boyle would position himself in sympathy to Diefenbaker and no clear significance for these superimpositions of figures is easy to discern, unless one takes the implied scatological hymn to be a commemoration of Diefenbaker's failure to keep the Avro Arrow project alive.

Anarchists and terrorists would often populate Boyle's work, mixed in with people from the London art scene. For instance, *Making Bombs* (1965) [Fig. 45] featured painter Ron Martin (discussed in the following section) along with various nihilists and anarchists from world history. An unpublished text written by Boyle on nihilism claims that it is a pivotal system in relation to the past and future, yet goes unnoticed or ignored

as, “Hourly, millions of statements are made that bear absolutely no relevance to our way of life.”<sup>44</sup> Seemingly to illustrate this tide of the random and meaningless, the text, complete with mock academic footnotes, then turns into a series of disparate and seemingly random quotations that set statements from philosophy and political science next to poetry and sex manuals. This recurs several times, but is interrupted by more connected statements like “many people are, in effect, what may be termed Nihilists, without realizing it themselves, and this has been true down through the ages.”<sup>45</sup> A page later he says that nihilism and anarchism “hope to see the complete liberation of the individual by the individual, as quickly as possible.”<sup>46</sup> A nihilist, and Boyle strings Curnoe together with Kropotkin,<sup>47</sup> acts as an individual and is therefore banished, suppressed or ‘martyred’ as he unleashes ‘the good’ by destroying the old machinery.<sup>48</sup> The *good*, in effect, comes from liberating the individual from the meaningful.

But Regionalism or nihilistic nationalism as ironic means to liberation from meaning, politics and social bonds tended to go unnoticed by those who wrote on it. Gail Dexter examined the political content of Curnoe and Boyle, concentrating on their claims to be ‘anti-nationalistic’ and ‘anti-American’. Curnoe told her of Canada’s consistent status as a loser, adding, “Our very ineffectiveness gives us our freedom.”<sup>49</sup> Boyle said that, due to their lack of patriotism, Canadians were citizens of the world without any specific characteristics or culture. Building on this, Curnoe claimed that it was not having a culture that allowed you to “do what you want.”<sup>50</sup>

The tendency in their thinking that was the most readily comprehensible, at least to journalists, was their often rather performative anti-Americanism. Boyle explained that, “Indeed, a Canadian patriotism might very well be based on Anti-Americanism. As

well as an increased awareness of the real Canadian culture, a culture developed by people living in the country drawing upon their environment, as opposed to professionals working along lines developed in the international cities.”<sup>51</sup> Of course, Boyle would sometimes ‘shun’ being referred to as a nationalist, and as just indicated, insisted that the uniqueness of Canadian culture was its non-existence.<sup>52</sup> He once stated, “I’m not as anti-American as people think. It shows you that people tend to think of strong pro-Canadian feelings as anti-American.”<sup>53</sup> Curnoe and Boyle’s anti-Americanism was a peculiar variation on what Scott Symons, nearly a decade earlier, had highlighted as a commonplace: the ‘Anti-américanisme positif’ that would celebrate and protect Canadian heritage.<sup>54</sup> Curnoe often made statements in line with this and understandings of his nationalism tend to fixate around them. More complexly, the painter claimed that

I’d rather be called anti-American than pro-Canadian. I’m not talking about isolation. [...] The only one we can possibly understand is what we come in immediate contact with. There are so many nomads, people of the university circuit who move in and out of a suburb, rootless people who have forgotten about boundaries.<sup>55</sup>

Whatever this might have meant personally, what it did artistically was far less practical. Appearing at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre of Queen’s University on March 11, 1970, Boyle presented the essay *Continental Refusal*, a direct homage to the Automatistes’ *Refus global*, and Curnoe presented a series of ‘Amendments’ to it. Both statements were couched in hyperbolic anti-continentalism and illustrated the very different styles of the two authors, styles that would be reflected consistently in their work and public personas for years. Curnoe’s style was noticeably jokey, cartoonish and primarily absurdist. Boyle’s was more rhetorically complicated, mixing anecdote, polemic and sardonic negative nationalism.

As Boyle would frequently do, he placed autobiographical anecdote, specifically from his childhood, in the forefront. In his high school years, he wrote angry letters to the editors of newspapers, accusing them of being under the influence of the Kennedy's and assassinating Diefenbaker's character since he was, "One of the great intuitive Canadian patriots."<sup>56</sup> He railed against the Liberals for abolishing British symbols and having nothing to replace them with. Finally, he realized that "Americanization was complete, that Canada is not a political satellite of the United States, not even the economic parasite that it appears to be, but an integral part of the American society and economy. We are parasitic in that we share in the booty of the American pillage of the world, but not in the unpleasant or even pleasant acts of rape and robbery."<sup>57</sup> The continental economy is so deeply integrated that Canadians would invite annexation if it meant avoiding a drop in the standard of living. For Canadians, success is measured by the degree to which they shed their native ways and master a foreign way of life. However, it is "not possible to live an honest, conscientious, exploratory and free existence within the structure of the United States" since it is predicated on lies.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, independence is necessary at the expense of ease of life, competitive earning power and the comfort of the future: "This way of life must be destroyed in Canada if we hope to continue as a nation."<sup>59</sup> Although some co-operation and a general 'inoffensive' relationship to the Americans would be necessary, independence would also entail a drop in the standard of living of up to forty percent. This would allow Canada to avoid becoming a copy. Culture would have to be guarded. Canada seems to be the prime place to do this, especially since death would be preferable to life in the U.S. or its 'twin' Soviet Russia. There is "no other country with the potential of Canada for becoming a satisfactory place to live, with no magic, no

mystery, no myth, no blind patriotism.”<sup>60</sup> This culture of nihilism then finds itself mirrored in an equally strange kind of calling: “I feel that if there is such a thing as duty for a Canadian, it may be to harness and institutionalize Canadian apathy and scepticism, and to remove foreign impositions so that the idea of Canada may grow and give birth to things of worth and beauty.”<sup>61</sup>

While Boyle’s thinking hinged around paradoxes like ‘engineering’<sup>62</sup> productive apathy and nihilistic patriotism, Curnoe was jokier, a “burlesque of the most intolerant aspects of English-Canadian nationalism.”<sup>63</sup> He read eleven amendments in Kingston and later added two dozen more after seeing how offended and confused the audience was.<sup>64</sup> Curnoe mixed mock totalitarianism with mock liberalism (the ‘amendments’ are a clear swipe at the progressive amendments to the American Constitution): only Canadian content would be allowed in computers, 100-mile-wide dead zone would be set up between Canada and the U.S., crossing the border would be a capital offense, U.S. art would be shown in a ‘degenerate art’ show, sovereignty would be given to Québec and the Natives, etc. But this clear use of irony also, in a way, made him less successful than Boyle. Curnoe was easily funny and so digestible, even if people found him mildly annoying or boring. Boyle genuinely offended, disturbed and annoyed people. If Dadaist absurdity was already declared old hat by 1962<sup>65</sup> and Neo-Dada too insipid, a less readily legible strategy in the culture war was necessary and *Continental Refusal* was one of its awkward forays. The cultural revolution that both men performatively espoused was unique for being deeply, in a sense, perversely conservative. It was not concerned with establishing a new and meaningful identity, which is what the Liberal state was attempting to do, but the embrace of nihilism and the maintenance of a nihilism, not with

creating a dynamic and living culture but with accelerating fossilization, a point that will be made even more evident in their Regionalism.

Inconsistency, performative or unintentional, was also tied to Boyle's basic conception of Canadian ontology. For Boyle, Canadians are trapped in a fantasy that cuts them off from reality. He goes on: "Canadians by contrast are a meek, mild and foolish lot who are too frightened even to blunder, captives of circumstance, ashamed of their lot, indecisive, greedy but lazy, and envious of their neighbours. Canadian believe they are Americans."<sup>66</sup> Saturated by American culture, they are embarrassed and ashamed to be Canadian. So, "Canadians live the American dream, but, significantly, unsuccessfully."<sup>67</sup> Their failure stems less from lack of mercilessness than laziness, disembodiment and incompetence.<sup>68</sup> As a 'demoralized race' of parasites with no bodies of their own, Canadians always take the easy way out, and that is mediocrity. Resistance to this indifference (by people like Robin Mathews) is met with accusations of racism and fascism, usually led by American 'refugees' and 'Canadian Uncle Toms'<sup>69</sup> but he wonders, "What do we want from life if we do not want our own country?"<sup>70</sup> He goes on to note that the universities and colleges are staffed at least 50 percent by foreigners (he includes the British), that the school texts are published by foreigners, that the country's natural resources are sold too cheaply, that workers belong to American unions.

When Canadians start to reflect on themselves, according to Boyle, they tend to be horrified by what they find, which is cold and unimaginative. But Boyle embraced this, declaring, "I love losers, underdogs, cowards and Canadians. May the day never come when Canada is a nation blinded by its own propaganda. May the day never come when we can no longer look with shame at our history and humility toward our future."<sup>71</sup>

What would this humility entail? In a review he wrote of Barry Lord's book, Boyle contended that Lord had failed because he "approached his subject without humility, without a flicker of humour, and with preconceived notions about what his research must reveal, fatal errors in the land of humility, good humour and no notions at all."<sup>72</sup>

For Boyle, like Curnoe, only a culture with an 'adhesive' relation to the land can hold together and artists are essential to this, even if they must live on the brink of starvation, supported by government funds: "The artists themselves must force conditions to change."<sup>73</sup> This means withholding work from the public until the state of affairs is radically altered and the artist will be paid as a worker like craters, guards, insurance men, secretaries, and curators. "If art has to be paid for, it will be taken seriously, and the lot of this aspect of the nation's culture will be greatly improved," he suggested.<sup>74</sup> But it is not enough to join the petty bourgeoisie, you must lower it. Although art advocacy may sound practical and in line with CAR's insistence on things like artist's fees, it should be recalled that Boyle is arguing that the average person should be impoverished and then art should be paid for, leaving everyone, including the artists, on the brink of starvation.

Despite the subversive humour, blatant absurdities, non-sequiturs, and lack of clear allegorical significance in Boyle's paintings, one review suggested that his work was an expression of 'romantic nationalism', full of "yearning for a coherent past that may never have been" that appeals to the young, eager to find something meaningful in regional history.<sup>75</sup> Boyle would reject such an interpretation and insist, "While I love Canada and the people of our history, I am not a romantic. We are very fortunate in Canada to have custody of this land and the heritage of its peoples. We have yet to show we are worthy of the trust."<sup>76</sup> This heritage was that of the frontier, of anti-statism,

exemplified by anarchism, the *coureur de bois*, the Masterless Men of Newfoundland, radical Québécois nationalists, Doukhobors and Métis militias. An article on Boyle by Wayne Edmonstone highlighted the frequent country and western themes in his work as expressions of his nationalism and the prevalence of imagery of old men, once soldiers now reduced to hobos or shrunk in age, as signs of the disappointment of this nationalism. He related these themes, along with Boyle's psychedelic colour palette and still images, to the films of director Sam Peckinpah, who "uses slow motion to turn more obvious violence into art."<sup>77</sup> Boyle's work, by implication, was a kind of slowing down to reveal Canada's death.

The rural imagery, central to Boyle, was also part of the general Regionalist attitude and the attitude of outsiders to Regionalism. Michael Snow and others used to condescendingly refer to Curnoe as 'Country Greg' to annoy him.<sup>78</sup> Curnoe treasured the eccentricity that rural life allowed and the necessity of retaining strangeness for autonomy.<sup>79</sup> Regionalism aside, Curnoe would also chide Dennis Reid for not publicly identifying himself with the George Grant or Donald Creighton idea of Canada, though he did not clarify what this was.<sup>80</sup> Did he mean the untenability of nationalist politics? That it was a dead-end non-society? Both would fit quite comfortably. Surprisingly, while the tropes of 'Red Toryism' run throughout Boyle's writing, he does not mention Grant. But looking for coherency on this point is probably a mistake and Grant's trace in their work is more affective than rational. For Boyle and Curnoe, nationalism was not politics but the refusal of politics or the perversely 'political' insistence that they were no longer viable as anything other than absurd performance.

Curnoe and Boyle were anarchists practically (creating a parallel aesthetic society: Regionalism) and nihilists impractically (in their artworks). As George Woodcock, in one of his texts on anarchism stressed, anarchists are not nihilists – they do not believe in perpetual social chaos but in a natural order that can allow for the maximization of human freedom.<sup>81</sup> Anarchism rejects the economic model of the social embodied by the state and insists on the self-sufficiency of individuals who, left to themselves, would live in peaceful co-operation.<sup>82</sup> Anarchy is society without a state or government. All states, even democratic ones, according to Woodcock, are inherently authoritarian and unjust.<sup>83</sup> Politics are “incompatible with justice and liberty,” but this does not forbid non-coercive forms of participation.<sup>84</sup> An anarchist society would be ‘organic’, ‘spontaneous’ and ‘dynamic’, disavowing any rigid social planning.<sup>85</sup> Freedom is, precisely, ‘freedom from politics’.<sup>86</sup> The *good* of the anarchist is the good of everyone, but only as individuals, not as minorities or majorities.

For an anarchist like Woodcock, this made nationalism extremely problematic. Even though he recognized the ‘insidious American colonialism’<sup>87</sup> that was dominating the country, Woodcock was deeply resistant to nationalism, cultural or otherwise, equating it with militarism and other traits he found undesirable.<sup>88</sup> Canada had something that could only be “rather loosely called nationalism.”<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless he was alarmed by people advocating for a nation state in such a loose country of ‘vaguely conceived federation’.<sup>90</sup> To repeat, however, Curnoe and Boyle were not simply anarchists, they were anarchist-nihilists, and this conflation seemed designed to upend the good of anarchism as much as the chaos of nihilism.

One of the clearest instances of the relationship between nihilism, anarchism and negative nationalism is demonstrated by the Nihilist Spasm Band.<sup>91</sup> The group was made primarily of teachers and artists who constructed their own instruments and played together with the aim to drive the audience away. Performing as loudly as possible, the band members each improvised as individuals rather than as a group, resulting in a cacophonous explosion of noise.<sup>92</sup> Band member Murray Favro explained that, “I like destroying stuff. I like ignorance. I don’t like intellectual shit. I don’t like explaining things.”<sup>93</sup> The result was the paradox of a group bound together by non-civility. This operated both as an assault on those passing by – a sort of auditory bomb – but also as a satirical attack on American music (the electrified loudness of rock and the improvisation of jazz). Laced within the noise were ‘lyrics’, usually recited in a theatrical bellow or computerized monotone, that were primarily nonsensical, but in the early years focused on screeds against Canada: “O Canada so strong/ And brave the greatest/ Branch off in the world/ Who has made no impression/ Who has no identity/ Who has no religion/ Who banks money/ Who kills us inside so that we can live.”<sup>94</sup>

Commemorating the band, Curnoe created the large wooden *Kamikaze* (1967). [Figs. 46-47] Designed like a pyramid with images of different members of the band on each side, it was also suggested a communal privy that could be entered. Rather than typical public toilet graffiti, the work contained a speech from one of the picnics thrown by the Nihilist Party. In rallying them around scatology, Curnoe seems to suggest that at the centre of their micro-society is a shit hole. This would be in keeping with lyrics of the band itself: “O Canada/ Asshole of the world.”<sup>95</sup>

The contradictions and evasions common to Boyle and Curnoe were ways of making their statements affectively exciting but useless. What they praised was losing, failure and the aversion to social solidity. Part of this was about *putting on* journalists, part of it was about changing their minds, but primarily it was about a joy in paradox and the capacity of paradox to eliminate identity and short-circuit any kind of dialectical reasoning, and so to disavow any plausible recourse to either progressive or conservative ideology. To take one indicative incident: in wake of the riots that had occurred in July 1967, Curnoe made the following speech at the Nihilist Party picnic. He started

I'm sure we have all been watching Detroit and Quebec with interest these last ten days, and I'm sure we've all been heartened by what is happening in those places. It is pleasing to see the American government further its adoption of our philosophies by helping the situation in the Northern American cities along, particularly by beefing up their police state apparatus and by laughing out [sic] the recent American urban rat control bill.<sup>96</sup>

Curnoe goes on to note that while American Blacks and the Québécois are agitating, Natives are not. So, he suggests that the party begin disseminating Native nationalist literature and agitate for them becoming the equivalent of the state of Israel. After that, they should hire George Chuvalo and an Orange Lodge to set up an English resistance group. "For only if a coloured race like the Eskimos were in power would our great and fair neighbour to the south tolerate a resistance movement here," he concluded.<sup>97</sup>

Canadian nationalism in this instance was not community but perpetual insurrection, something already suggested in the incivility of the Nihilist Spasm Band. This is not simply a matter of destroying the state apparatus but of using aspects of it to keep community formation minimized or in ruins. In this, it is a kind of parody of Trudeauvian functionalism, only rigged to maintaining disorder. It is, as Curnoe and Boyle's statements and art repeatedly demonstrated, a perversion of political discourse to

anti-political ends. One might argue that the nihilists were simply being comical, that their rhetoric was a game, unlike their more serious endeavors such as founding CAR. But it is not this simple or that clear and the lack of clarity cannot be solved by appealing to their “true intentions or beliefs” without demeaning their art practices and their art practices’ demeaning of the political. As George Bowering would say, “There was Greg again, being ironical while pretending not to be ironical; or was he?”<sup>98</sup> As negative as Boyle and Curnoe may have been, their work was simultaneously the optimistic affirmation of the world as it was and the satirization of any bid to change it.<sup>99</sup> If they would affirm the anarchistic to negate the political, they would also affirm nihilism to negate the value of the gesture.

While for Grant the coming of nihilism implied the demise of nationalism, for Curnoe and Boyle it seemed to spell the possibility of a paradoxically anti-political nationalism. In both cases, this was a nationalism that was excessive and opposed to the narrative of progress and universalism. In the following section, this will be complicated with a more in-depth discussion of the implications of the theories of Regionalism that were percolating in London and what these will mean for the aesthetics of their erotic art.

### **3.2. Regionalism and Objectivity**

“Man looks at the world, and the world does not look back at him.”<sup>100</sup>

“I remember a phrase that Greg Curnoe used to begin what he was going to say about something. ‘I may be completely wrong, but...’”<sup>101</sup>

“In Canada these artists are known as ‘regionalists’ because their interests and allegiances lie in the general area where they live or grew up, and because a larger national or patriotic allegiance is a problematic concept for the colonial mind.”<sup>102</sup>

As indicated in the previous discussions of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and George Grant, the question of technology was part of the underlying problem of liberalism. For Trudeauvian passionate functionalism, the technocratic management of human and natural resources was the means to allow for the blossoming of a liberal person and the cultivation of fluid human capital. In Grant's critique, the liberal person was not separable from this technocracy but both its product and its fuel. Liberal subjectivity was predicated on the imperialistic binding of the passions to utility, repressing the excess of eros and the Dionysian, best expressed in the autochthonous, or the erotic bind to place that exceeded personal time through the impersonality of tradition. As nihilists, what Boyle and Curnoe's work suggests is a perverse variant of this situation that does not reconcile whatever contradictions it might contain. While the technological aspect of this will be raised both in this section and the first part of the following section, what is more pertinent for the moment is to recognize what the artistic implications of Regionalism are, which are less a matter of content or style, than of attitude and methodology.

For Curnoe and those more closely associated with him, questions of technology and the erotic, the erotic and society, the erotic and the remaking of the landscape would often play out under the term *Regionalism*. This term was defined in substantially different ways at different times by different people within the London scene. This section of the chapter will examine the way that regionalist artists undermined the sociological understanding of Regionalism employed by journalists to insist on a critical understanding of Regionalism that drove it away from such models and into a form of materialism that ultimately makes interpolations of meaningful content nonsense.

One of the first examinations of the scene, that of Rae Davis, cast it in broad metaphysical terms as a way of treating life and death.<sup>103</sup> A less thematically grand approach came from Ross Woodman. In “A New Regionalism,” Woodman argued that Regionalism was an aversion to anonymity, expressed in a cataloguing of the world around the artist.<sup>104</sup> He painted Curnoe as a visionary in the Walt Whitman mode, “who has shaped an authentic myth out of the stuff of his region.”<sup>105</sup> In another article on the London scene two years later, Woodman described the city as ‘ultra-conservative’, ‘waspyish’ and suffering from a ‘garrison mentality’ that helped to preserve the ‘Establishment’.<sup>106</sup> It was an artificial society, exemplified by neo-Gothic buildings, that transposed the forms of England onto the Canadian wilderness, insisting on the norms of its colonial identity to avoid dealing with what was there. Its population operated strictly in ‘cliques’; it was a city that “declare[d] its sense of alienation.”<sup>107</sup> According to Woodman, the young artists active in the city and represented in *The Heart of London* show at the National Gallery (1968), were “seeking a return to origins” that would provide a rupture to this façade of colonial normality. The artists allowed for nature to invade the garrison and Curnoe was ‘the town crier’ bringing news of the outside in and, like his colleagues, giving the invisible quotidian world form.<sup>108</sup>

However, this understanding of Regionalism stressed things differently than a definition offered by Curnoe and seems to romantically misinterpret the strategic games that some of the Regionalists played with their ostensible community. The remoteness of London between major urban centres (Toronto and Detroit) allowed the regional to crystalize in two different ways. The broader idea of Regionalism and its accompanying *Oregionalism* was examined in some detail by the poet Christopher Dewdney. He

explained that Regionalism developed in London painting in the early 60s, as well as with *Region* magazine and Gallery,<sup>109</sup> but soon diverged and changed into Oregionalism. The first, which he associated with early Curnoe, was a “concern with locale proper,”<sup>110</sup> the specifics of place and a native outlook, expressed indifferently to academic questions.<sup>111</sup> Regionalism was never a school or a style but an ‘event’.<sup>112</sup> The classical Regionalists (1962-1963) stressed intuition, auto-didacticism and lack of decoration; they were non-intellectual, anti-sentimental, unmannered, and ‘ontologically consistent’.<sup>113</sup>

Oregionalism, by contrast, was not so much event as process. It developed in the process-oriented work of Ron Martin,<sup>114</sup> whose early artist’s statement read, “I FEEL THAT I AM A MECHANICAL ESTHETICIAN.”<sup>115</sup> This was expressed in paintings that were the product of a series of structural processes, such as the *World Paintings* (1970-1973) [Fig. 48], wherein he painted N formations in variations of an eight colour spectrum (plus black and brown), both upright and one their side, or the *One Colour Paintings* (1971-1973) which concentrated on variations with a single colour. [Fig. 49] From this would be generated a set of paintings, both simple and of great complexity. As Roald Nasgaard insisted, the point was not the analysis of the structure or the understanding of the construction of the series,<sup>116</sup> but the experience of perception as the viewer’s orientation to the work allowed the painting to fluctuate and reveal itself.<sup>117</sup> The paintings were important not as ‘vessels of meaning’ but as ‘literal realities’ and ‘devices’ that treated the work of art as a phenomenon in the world, separate even from the taste or meaning imbued to it by the artist.<sup>118</sup>

Regionalism splintered into the metaphysical/psychological art of Martin and the Rabinovitch brothers and a continuation of the ‘geocentric original’ model begun by

Curnoe and carried on by Murray Favro.<sup>119</sup> In an interview, Favro contextualized this within his London associates' embrace of nihilism, their rejection of "toute morale, toute vérité de connaissance traditionnelle."<sup>120</sup> The Nihilist Spasm Band was formed in light of this, to create both instruments and music as though music were being created for the first time. This illustrates the empirical bent of Oregionalism, its insistence on creation as a way of testing things to get at truth through the process of invention and the observation of mechanical specificity.<sup>121</sup> Dewdney approaches this in an article about Favro, observing the artist's insistence that it is function above all else that counts. A computer does not need electricity, it could run on air, as long as it runs. Its presence as a recognizable thing called a computer, simply hides its reality: "The real machine is the *function* of that machine."<sup>122</sup> More elaborately, Dewdney glosses Favro's body of work as

assembled out of a self-referential machine-language, itself imbedded in a metalanguage or semiology of function. They are language-oriented post-structuralist critiques of technological utility in a strictly conjectural mode. His mechanistically semiotic vision, operating in a kind of deviant Hegelian dialectic, unearths absolutely original structures. His involvement with transactions between referential systems could only be described as translation. Finally he is also the translator of machine language into sensual amalgams of theory, experience and passion.<sup>123</sup>

There is also an ironic component to this methodology for Favro. Speaking of his desire to make machines using acid rain (the most overtly materialized environment), he says, "Je souhaite faire de la technologie à partir de ce gaspillage, c'est là la position critique de mon travail, ma force d'ironie."<sup>124</sup>

Oregionalism was based on Curnoe's neologism *oregional* and had two very different connotations. The first was ironic, suggesting a chimeric or utopian possibility

of the new that was basically a myth and was dismissed as naive.<sup>125</sup> The second connotation was non-ironic and suggested that originality was the measure of art and this “proceeded naturally from region, itself posited as a kind of engine of differentiation which generated all native and truly original minds. [...] To be true to one’s region was of necessity to be intrinsically different from all other regions.”<sup>126</sup> This notion is Darwinian, implying adaptation to geographic specificity. The longer a people stay in a region, the more they adapt to it, finding their equilibrium, and the more static their culture becomes since it can only proceed apace with evolution. As a result, a culture derives its archetypes from its region. Dewdney adds, “Of the London regionalists it was firstly John Boyle who identified native culture as a prior context, although his own response was more historical & socio-political rather than an apprenticeship to the actual imagery evolved by regional native cultures.”<sup>127</sup> What Dewdney misses here is the implication that image content and group meaning were not very important to Regionalism; what counted was the growth of the autochthonous in a spatial context. ‘Native cultures’ displayed in Boyle’s imagery are analogous to the ‘N’ in a Ron Martin painting.

Objecting to Woodman’s understanding of Regionalism outlined above, Curnoe insisted it was not a matter of creating a place or drawing direct inspiration from it: “Far from regionalism meaning only the use of things from this region, some of the best examples of our city culture like the work of Chris Dewdney or Murray Favro tends to go unrecognized here, because it does not follow the supposed regional criteria suggested by Ross Woodman.”<sup>128</sup> Instead, Regionalism was an “indigenous method of analysis”<sup>129</sup> developed to address the local class structure. This structure was primarily a form of

provincialism, one which included both economic and intellectual models. Thus, Curnoe's general hostility to the approaches of art schools and magazines was not because he was anti-intellectual but because they were not being serious enough about constructing and applying the appropriate analytical methods.<sup>130</sup> Being local or regional does not mean being recognizable, sharing any great empathy with your surroundings or having a positive role in the community. He cited the value of eccentricity, of Innis and McLuhan being ignored until fairly late in their careers, as examples of this.

Retrospectively, Curnoe would argue that, "It is hard to realize now, just how anti-art, specific references were seen to be in the early 70's. It is also difficult to realize that political or local references were avant-garde at the time."<sup>131</sup> In other words, Regionalism was a practical means for maintaining an active alienation from both the broader art world and the local community. Though he does not explain what made local references avant-garde, the answer seems to be that they made the work more difficult for most people to read, whether they were familiar with the content or not, and not due to any great theoretical convolution.<sup>132</sup> In effect, the local produced a language game that could fool, confuse, control, or undermine lines of communication. In this respect, the employment of the regional, or of historical obscurity in the works of Boyle and Curnoe, helped to create a pseudo-language for the initiated, something like a visual *joual* that often made little semantic sense but did indicate a localized loyalty.

Boyle was drawn into the events around Curnoe, the Region Gallery and magazine, but found it all rather strange: "All of these things were alien to me, and, as I later discovered, to nearly everyone else. In fact, that was the point. We were all alienated from the events, the issues, the beauty, the mystery of our own home region, from our co-

regionalists, by some force.”<sup>133</sup> The *force*, he claimed, was American cultural domination. Frequently keeping his distance from London, Boyle found a unique culture in the Niagara region, one which was mostly clearly expressed in its sports – lacrosse and rowing – but also in local slang and the pink clay bricks made nearby. “It now seemed obvious to me that local and regional conditions help shape a regionally indigenous culture, and that these regional cultures are probably the foundation for a national culture.”<sup>134</sup> All of this was discouraged by the cultural and political establishment and thrown away “to vanish into the Canadian culture pit.”<sup>135</sup> The Regionalists set out to construct a parallel society to ‘contextualize’ the images and idea they had been colonized with, whether it was Flash Gordon or Hans Hoffman.<sup>136</sup> This is not so much about protesting colonialism as it is about increasing alienation, a tendency attested to by Boyle’s own roving between regions.

Regional traits often came out as parody, the Nihilist Party being one of the principle examples. Founded in 1963, it protested voting in the Ontario provincial election with their own anti-voting posters. They began holding a raucous annual picnic, supper meetings, sporting events and rented a cottage in Port Stanley to function as the Party Lodge. As Marie Fleming observes, “The nihilist designation became an apt handle for other projects, giving them a fictional cohesiveness and a Dadaist reference.”<sup>137</sup> Nihilism was a code word for the establishment of a parallel ‘parodic’ culture within the existing society, one which did not set out to displace it but, Boyle claimed, to “replicate a primal culture by re-embedding and engaging ourselves in our local bio-region and in the already extant regional culture.”<sup>138</sup> This included adopting many of the standard clichés of common Ontario traditions and is not reducible to simple mockery but a sort of

bizarre toryism. The nihilists were reinvesting in established tradition, “to recontextualize them by means of memories of our own. We borrowed from cultural traditions of the region and modified them to meet the needs of the already marginalized sub-community of artists and creative thinkers.”<sup>139</sup> Embracing ‘colonial heritage’, the heritage celebrated in part by Robin Mathews and Scott Symons, rather than the new cultural colonialism of contemporary art or the new Canadian Identity espoused by the Federalist state, and keeping themselves at the ‘periphery’ were means of being *oregional*.<sup>140</sup> The Regionalists lived in a parody of London which was already, with its branch-plant economy, in many ways a parody of the United States. Deliberately or not, the aesthetics of Regionalism managed to articulate what the Laxers had highlighted about Canada’s economy and culture – that it was basically split between the excavation of the earth (the sedimentary notion of culture) and an excessive surface culture made of garbage (nonsense, noise, the detritus found in their collages etc.).

So, Regionalism is an event, a strategy and a mode of analysis. Just to clarify what this might entail, it is useful to think in terms associated with one of Curnoe’s often cited influences, the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein.<sup>141</sup> In a useful text, Peter Sloterdijk explains Wittgenstein as a *secessionist*. This involved two things: First, an analytical position that assumes an objective stepping away to recognize form; second, an aesthetics capable of existing in this form. And so, to begin, one looks at a specific grammar, a set of rules and games “whose sum produces a form of life” and gives it a specific character.<sup>142</sup> This means, in practice, that one enters into this grammar and all of its rituals without being absorbed into ‘collective life’ but realizing that one is “joining a tribe that contained no natives.”<sup>143</sup> It is a deliberately artificial life, actually, if not

rhetorically, detached from the ordinary, and so available to other things: “the miracle that forms of life can be clarified through logical analysis and technical reconstruction.”<sup>144</sup> Sloterdijk stresses Wittgenstein’s ‘aesthetic secessionism’,<sup>145</sup> one which is suggested by the concrete example of the Vienna Secession movement, and which fused form and life in such a way that the result was internal exile from broader society as artistic form. With the Regionalists, this involved a number of different formal strategies: an ironic and decadent romanticism, a view of history as impersonal erotic forces (both discussed in detail below), and a form of realism discussed next.

The importance of Dada and Duchamp for Curnoe has been noted extensively.<sup>146</sup> This tends to provide an easy art-historical reference to pin him down and place him within the formal norms of a more global Neo-Dada. However, the most useful discussion of the matter was offered by Curnoe in an article he wrote about Picabia. He offers a lengthy citation from Lévi-Strauss regarding several surrealist artists. This allows him to stress that ‘primitive’ artists may not have known anything of international art, but they knew what their neighbours were up to, that proximity suggested no commonality, and that their attitude was one of rejection rather than assimilation since liberal assimilation risked destroying the artist’s culture.<sup>147</sup> Likewise, Pop, which he was often, to his consistent distaste, associated with,<sup>148</sup> does not really explain much unless one is being more specific.

Curator Mario Amaya’s interpretation of Pop, or what he often terms *New Super Realism*, is identified with Realism, but not in the nineteenth-century sense of Naturalism. New Super Realism is a ‘Radical Empiricism’ that rejects humanist naturalism, refusing any teleological (in this case useful or meaningful) end to art. It is an

art that can explain nothing because it insists only on effects and rejects the notions of causes or relationships.<sup>149</sup> Instead, it is the art of the ‘strange, inhuman, synthetic,’ an art made of mass culture’s ‘byproducts’.<sup>150</sup> He suggests it is a form of urban folk art, only sophisticated and disposable rather than naïve and precious.<sup>151</sup> It is an art that treats ‘immorality’ as another commodity, in a world where “[l]ife is threatened less by the almost mythical Bomb, than by the terrifying spread of urbanisation.”<sup>152</sup> Such a reality cannot simply be represented, but cast in a *super* form, much the way products are in a *supermarket*. The goal of this is not commentary but of *overstressing* form so what is presented is the excessiveness of its presence as a *thing*. This presence is also exaggerated by the fragility of the materials used, making the decay of the thing more palpable.<sup>153</sup> This interpretation of Pop or New Super Realism carries over to the *Realisms ‘70* show Amaya curated for the AGO/MMFA. Among its 46 artists, the show included Joyce Wieland, Curnoe and Boyle.<sup>154</sup>

One of the principle referents for New Super Realism was the French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet. The writer, along with several of his French contemporaries (Michel Butor, Nathalie Sarraute), was often spoken of under the header of the *nouveau roman*, a term that taken from Robbe-Grillet’s theoretical manifesto, *Pour un nouveau roman* (1963). Curnoe himself frequently namedrops Robbe-Grillet and Butor as significant influences, a point frequently mentioned in biographical accounts but never examined in any theoretical detail.<sup>155</sup> The theorization of art provided by Robbe-Grillet proves most succinct for framing Curnoe’s project and serves as a useful complement to the notion of Oregionalism that was being developed by Curnoe and Dewdney. In the latter, the notion of region and its materialistic consequences are developed in *A Palaeozoic Geology of*

*London, Ontario* (1973), a book of collages, poems and textual fragments fashioned as a fake government pamphlet from “The Canadian Department of Mined and Technical Memory.” The pieces that make it up are gridded out in ‘systems’ that provide ‘explanations’ of one another, interrupted by collaged images that suggest a monstrous crypto-zoology of Southwestern Ontario. Acknowledging that human experience and memory is barely communicable and ‘chronologically ephemeral’, the fossil, by contrast, exists as ‘PURE MEMORY’ rendered three dimensionally and perceptible to anyone.<sup>156</sup> The work of art, which is also the process of fossilization and the erosion that makes the fossil apparent, is the making solid of moments. Time, as such, becomes *transubstantiated* as matter. Form itself is independent of time’s three dimensions and only manifests in the ‘static’ where it has collected and concentrated to appear as a ‘raw extrusion’.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, “Form, though intensely faithful to the age it flourished in, is nonetheless infinite and eternal... Men are powerless but to obey its command” while the objects they construct are simply mirrors of form’s ‘eternal narcissism’.<sup>158</sup> This sort of Regionalism-as-fossilization is clearly practiced in the processes of Martin discussed above and in the themes of Walter Redinger.

This eccentric materialism would seem to sit ill at ease with the practical and commonsensical way that Curnoe has often been cast, both by himself and by journalists. For instance, according to his friend, the writer George Bowering, Curnoe “has always had a profound mistrust of mysticism and anything that smacked of the irrational or psychological, any system of belief or theory, in fact, that supplanted logical & clearly perceivable descriptions with anything that referred to hidden realities or symbolic meanings.”<sup>159</sup> For Bowering, Curnoe is “a radical materialist of profound proportion who

can articulate his position logically and clearly to anyone with an ear for common sense.”<sup>160</sup> He stresses the coherence of the position that the artist takes to the point of being self-evidential. As Curnoe once put it, “I’m not sure I have any opinions.”<sup>161</sup> But this underestimates the peculiarity of the materialism that the painter and his colleagues flirted with which, as is evident above, is certainly not mystical in a transcendent or spiritual sense but which does differ distinctly from common sense.

Perhaps the easiest way to come to terms with what a materialism or *realism*, to use a popular term from the time, would look like, it is best to listen to what Robbe-Grillet had to say about it.<sup>162</sup> As the French novelist, whose work was more than frequently enmeshed in eroticism, explained “the world is neither significant nor absurd. It is, quite simply.”<sup>163</sup> What *is*, is a world “defying the noisy pack of our animistic or protective adjectives, things are there.”<sup>164</sup> So, rather than a

universe of ‘signification’ (psychological, social, functional), we must try, then, to construct a world both more solid and more immediate. Let it be first of all by their presence that objects and gestures establish themselves, and let this presence continue to prevail over whatever explanatory theory that may try to enclose them in a system of references, whether emotional, sociological, Freudian or metaphysical.<sup>165</sup>

The only thing that has much, if any, truth is *the thing*, which mocks these very serious, if delusional, systems of reference; delusional because they practice that most regrettable of exercises – the reduction of a thing to something meaningful.<sup>166</sup> Meaning, found in digging beneath the surfaces and returning from the depths with adjectives that could summarize the inner qualities of the world, is just “a trap in which the writer captured the universe in order to hand it over to society.”<sup>167</sup>

Character and story are how such universes are conveyed to the public and the traditional novel offers ‘a slice of life’ that indicates its elements were carved out of a

world that the author knows and to which they could speak inexhaustibly.<sup>168</sup> This, of course, is also precisely the way that Curnoe and his colleague were often presented by journalists, offering authentic ‘slices’ of their regional lives. This sort of narrativity creates the naturalism of the organic, and also the notion of the artwork as a sociological document, but this is precisely what a novel or work of art is not. Art does not represent, it intervenes. Once this is realized, storytelling – at least in the traditional sense – is impossible. Rather than story, there is plot and action.<sup>169</sup> And if this is bad for the conventions of the novel, it is at least as bad for politics, psychology and sociology, which suffer the same illusions. The demand that art be redemptive, that it works for something beyond itself, is a demand that misunderstands art.<sup>170</sup> As much as the description diagrams a world, it erases it at the same time. What results is the paradox of a subjectivity wherein all perceived objects are alien and a space of gestures and things that are unstable precisely because they are frozen. The result is “a world without a past, a world which is self-sufficient at every moment and which obliterates itself as it proceeds.”<sup>171</sup>

Roland Barthes will compare Robbe-Grillet to painters for he creates a visual world with neither opacity nor transparency (since either would imply dualism).<sup>172</sup> Sight takes over the other impulses and interiority is excised. This is why, after all, the superficial tends to be treated as morally reproachable.<sup>173</sup> In the process, the object is radically transformed, denied metaphoric value, refusing adjectives and a gestalt that would socialize it. This kind of writing-painting, that Barthes situates as peculiarly modern, eliminates orientation to situation in the classical picture by nailing the spectator into space to release “the spectacle upon him.”<sup>174</sup> Time adds no dimensions, only serving

to cut space up just as the frames in comic strips do. The result is a perpetual ‘almost the same’,<sup>175</sup> or as Robbe-Grillet summarizes it: “Here space destroys time, and time sabotages space. Description makes no headway, contradicts itself, turns in circles. Moment denies continuity.”<sup>176</sup>

Surprisingly, it is this conceptualization of an alien, fossilized world that destroys narrative and denies any redemptive interpretation for, or value to, art which will form the ground for the creation of a highly eroticized reconceptualization of Canadian History painting. This, and the formalization of regionality as a kind of erogenous zone that directly builds on what has been discussed over the course of this chapter, will be the subject of the following chapter. And it is the almost mechanical cultivation of this erogenous zone as part of a more general fossilization process that manufactures the autochthonous.

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<sup>1</sup> Ramsey Cook, cited in Robert Stuart Grant, “Negative nationalism and the poetry of Dennis Lee” (MA Thesis University of Windsor, 1971), 2.

<sup>2</sup> John B. Boyle, “Canada as Colony” [Manuscript], 14. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>3</sup> George Bowering, *The Mustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1993), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Milroy, Judith Roger and Dennis R. Reid, *Greg Curnoe: Life and Stuff* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2001), 66-67. Milroy, Roger and Reid consistently treat Curnoe’s work with the kind of personalizing via anecdote that his aesthetics would mock. Although Milroy notes the presence of New Left literature in Curnoe’s library, she ignores the presence of Tory writing. The significance of Mel Watkins or the Laxers to Curnoe’s understanding of his contemporary situation is necessarily dependent on his understanding of Canadian history derived from Grant and Donald Creighton. Her claim is also problematic given that the New Left in Canada, unlike much of the counterculture, were notoriously humourless. See Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 232.

<sup>5</sup> Greg Curnoe, [Manuscript] (1966), np. Box 1-10, Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> I am referring to him as ‘Stuart Grant’ to avoid confusion with George Grant.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Stuart Grant, “Negative nationalism and the poetry of Dennis Lee” (MA thesis, University of Windsor, 1971), ii.

<sup>10</sup> Though rather than nationalist, it is more accurate to call much of this Imperialist Federationist, as Stuart Grant implies. Ibid., 15. He also notes that, beyond an interest in landscape, there is never much unity in Canadian nationalist poetry. Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 2.

- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 35-37. Robin Mathews' attack on Atwood (cited above) similarly casts her and the texts she highlights as a form of negative nationalism, though this has very different connotations for him.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 108.
- <sup>14</sup> Greg Curnoe, "The Relation of Art to Politics" [Typescript] (1963), 1. Box 1-7, Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>15</sup> Liz Wylie, "John Boyle plays off 'Pop' with polemic," *The Georgian*, March 7, 1978, 19.
- <sup>16</sup> Greg Curnoe, Exhibition essay for "Redinger/Zelenak/Boyle" at the McIntosh Gallery, London (1964), np.
- <sup>17</sup> Greg Curnoe, "The Relation of Art to Politics," [Typescript] (1963), 2. Box 1-7, Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 4.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 8.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 9.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 5.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 6.
- <sup>23</sup> Cited in Katie Cholette, "Memory and mythmaking: the role of autobiography in the works of Jack Chambers and Greg Curnoe" (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2007), 285.
- <sup>24</sup> The 'Munsinger Affair' involved East German prostitute Gerda Munsinger and her relationships with several members of Diefenbaker's cabinet during the 1950s. Munsinger was deported in 1961 but was brought to the public's attention by Pearson's Liberal government in 1966, which exploited it in their battles with the Tories. Though an inquiry was held, no wrongdoing could be determined. For an account of the Munsinger case, see Bryan D. Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 80-109. Palmer states that the case "fuelled the engine of the RCMP's security state within the state, a powerful motor driving the undemocratic and irrational scapegoating of all dissidents and 'deviants,' be they self-defined communists, closeted homosexuals, or seemingly sexually predatory female agents." Ibid., 106. See also Danielle Roy, *L'affaire Gerda Munsinger* (Chicoutimi: Les Éditions JCL, 2014).
- <sup>25</sup> Martin Goodman, "MPSs stifling yawns when bomb went off," *Toronto Daily Star*, May 19, 1966, 8. The 'gleaming washbasins' detail was used in other descriptions of the event printed in the paper that day. The article notes that 'unofficial tours' were then given to parliamentarians who wanted to see what was left behind after the body was taken away. In their more systematically graphic account, *The Globe* claims the smoke was white. Norman Webster, "MPs say explosion premature. man's bomb meant for chamber," *The Globe and Mail*, May 19, 1966, 1.
- <sup>26</sup> Anon., "Weak 'yes' bomber's last word," *Toronto Daily Star*, May 19, 1966, 9.
- <sup>27</sup> Anon., "Safe – MPS and hundreds of children," *Toronto Daily Star*, May 19, 1966, 1.
- <sup>28</sup> Anon., "Bomber 'happy-go-lucky,' liked travel, says mother," *Toronto Daily Star*, May 19, 1966, 1.
- <sup>29</sup> Jack Cahill, "'He was so nice,' landlady weeps," *Toronto Daily Star*, May 19, 1966, 8.
- <sup>30</sup> Anon., "He got made at funny things says wife who left Chartier," *Toronto Daily Star*, May 19, 1966, 1.
- <sup>31</sup> Jack Cahill, "Bomber planned massacre," *Toronto Daily Star*, May 19, 1966, 1.
- <sup>32</sup> "The speech parliament Hill bomber never gave," *Toronto Daily Star*, May 19, 1966, 8.
- <sup>33</sup> Peter Trueman, "Dreary Hull hotel room Chartier's last haven," *Toronto Daily Star*, May 19, 1966, 9.
- <sup>34</sup> Chartier also appears as one of the characters in Dennis Lee's *Civil Elegies*, who is taken to warn of the death of the nation, the death that the poems mourn. He is also, Stuart Grant suggests, placed in a relationship with Mackenzie and his failed rebellion. Stuart Grant wonders if Lee is suggesting their violent failures might not be 'the best solution.' Robert Stuart Grant, "Negative nationalism and the poetry of Dennis Lee" (MA Thesis University of Windsor, 1971), 73-79. Like the London painters and Wieland, Lee also singles out Tom Thomson for honour. Importantly, unlike Lee's lamentation over the destruction of civil society, Curnoe and Boyle both rage against and celebrate it in equal measure.
- <sup>35</sup> *Family Painting #1, In Labour; Family Painting #2, The Woolworth's Rattle; Family Painting #3, Under the Apple Tree at Mitchell Hts. Cor. Robert & Walter Sts.; and Family Painting #4, For the Mad Bomber, His Infernal Machine.*
- <sup>36</sup> Kay Kritzwiser, "Four painters, four directions," *The Globe and Mail*, November 19, 1966, 17.
- <sup>37</sup> Pierre Thériage, *Greg Curnoe, Retrospective* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1982), 87-88.
- <sup>38</sup> Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis: Carleton University, 1987), 104-106.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 106.

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- <sup>40</sup> Curnoe was commissioned to create a mural for the Dorval airport in Montréal. Among other things, the imagery in the 26-panel work included Chartier, Louis Riel, Curnoe's neighbours, imagery from the Second World War, a figure assumed to be a caricature of American president Lyndon Johnson (with bombs flowing from his body), and boxer Mohammed Ali, who had recently, and very publicly, refused the draft. The imagery offended U.S. Custom officials, who complained. Changes were ordered but Curnoe would not comply as specified and the mural was removed.
- <sup>41</sup> The same image of King would also appear in the collage painting *The Great Canadian* (1965) where he was labelled, "THE OLD TURD." [Fig. 42]
- <sup>42</sup> Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis: Carleton University, 1987), 79.
- <sup>43</sup> Barry Lord, *The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art* (Toronto: NC Press, 1974), 229.
- <sup>44</sup> John Boyle, Notes on nihilism [Manuscript], 1. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>47</sup> Pyotr Alexeevich Kropotkin was a Russian anarcho-communist who advocated for voluntary co-operation and mutual aid and was harshly critical of both capitalism and bolshevism.
- <sup>48</sup> John Boyle, "Notes on nihilism" [Manuscript], 6. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>49</sup> Gail Dexter, "The art of London, Ont.," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 21, 1968, 38.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* Boyle and Curnoe's language here directly parallels and parodies that of Gad Horowitz, who in a 1966 review of John Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic* suggested that the lack of a utopian myth in Canada and a strict left-right divide hobbled the left from enshrining the kind of ideology that would be their 'essential fuel'. As a result, Canada lacked 'creative politics' because it lacked "values general to the society." This would be necessary to nationalism but seemed to be institutionally retarded; rather than being nationalistic, people were regional and tribalist. "Most mosaic celebrators take the line that the very nothingness of Canada is its most praiseworthy characteristic," Horowitz argued, adding that, "When this way of talking is not fake, it is literally nihilistic." Gad Horowitz, "Mosaics & identity," *Canadian Dimension*, January/February 1966, 17.
- <sup>51</sup> John Boyle, "Queen's Paper: Continental Refusal /Refus Continental," *20 Cents Magazine*, April 1970, np.
- <sup>52</sup> Roger Bainbridge, "The heroes of John Boyle: Painter who's learning art of survival," *Kingston Whig Standard*, January 14, 1977, A1.
- <sup>53</sup> Susanne Tausig, "Artist John Boyle 'a patriot's dream'," *The London Free Press*, November 25, 1975, B8.
- <sup>54</sup> Scott Symons, "L'Américanisme: ennemi commun et héritage aigre-doux," *La Presse*, April 5, 1961, 5.
- <sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Dingman, "The art world beats a path to London, Ont., mousetrap," *The Telegram*, November 28, 1970.
- <sup>56</sup> John Boyle, "Queen's Paper: Continental Refusal /Refus Continental," *20 Cents Magazine*, April 1970, np.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>62</sup> As part of his general costume, for years Boyle wore an engineer's hat for public appearances.
- <sup>63</sup> Pierre Théberge, *Greg Curnoe, Retrospective* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1982), 21.
- <sup>64</sup> Katie Cholette, "Derision, Nonsense, and Carnival in the Work of Greg Curnoe," *Revue d'art canadienne/ Canadian Art Review* vol. 37, no. 1 (2012), 53.
- <sup>65</sup> Pearl McCarthy, "Nicaraguan Provides Gallery's First Show," *The Globe and Mail*, February 10, 1962, 13.
- <sup>66</sup> John Boyle, "Americanadians" [Typescript] (1973), 2. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

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- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., 4.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., 5.
- <sup>72</sup> John Boyle, Written response of Barry Lord, [Typescript], 14. *John Boyle fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>73</sup> John Boyle, "Queen's Paper: Continental Refusal /Refus Continental," *20 Cents Magazine*, April 1970, np. He would also contradict this and insist that artists could never be expected to drive change.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>75</sup> Joan M. Vastokas, "John Boyle," *artscanada*, April/May 1978, 48.
- <sup>76</sup> *Oh Canada!: Catalogue* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1976), 24.
- <sup>77</sup> Wayne Edmonstone, "Artist John Boyle preoccupied with the aging man of action," *Toronto Star*, February 9, 1973, 28.
- <sup>78</sup> George Bowering, *The Mustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1993), 25.
- <sup>79</sup> Greg Curnoe, "The Relation of Art to Politics" [Typescript] (1963), 7. Box 1-7, Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>80</sup> Greg Curnoe, "The Dilemma of Provincialism: A History of Canadian Painting," *The Canadian Forum*, February 1975, 30-32.
- <sup>81</sup> George Woodcock, *The Rejection of Politics and Other Essays on Canada, Canadians, Anarchism and the World* (Toronto: New Press, 1972), 21.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid., 20-21.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid., 21-22.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid., 23-25.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid., 26.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid., 27.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., 76.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid., 73-74, In an attack on Québec nationalism, he referred to it as 'dangerous' and 'atavistic', unlike regionalism. 86. Unsurprisingly, he held Robin Mathews in contempt. See Ibid., 76.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid., 75.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid., 75. He conceived of federalism as a 'post-national state' (77-78) but later came to believe that federalism was unworkable, largely thanks to the Liberal Party. See *Confederation Betrayed* (Madeira Park: Harbour Pub, 1981).
- <sup>91</sup> See Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1987), 104.
- <sup>92</sup> "...The Nihilist Spasm Band has always insisted on its own territory of interstitial investigations involving random sound emissions within the context of an incrementally sophisticated language of improvisation specific to the individual band members." John Boyle, Funding Application to the Canada Council (1997), np. *John Boyle fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>93</sup> Quoted in Sarah Milroy and Dennis R. Reid, *Greg Curnoe: Life and Stuff* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2001), 62.
- <sup>94</sup> Lyrics for the Nihilist Spasm Band [Manuscript, 1967], 3. Box 1-11, *Greg Curnoe fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid., 1.
- <sup>96</sup> Greg Curnoe, "Speech at Nihilist Party picnic" (1967), 1. Box 1-11, *Greg Curnoe fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>98</sup> George Bowering, *The Mustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1993), 59.
- <sup>99</sup> Another profitable way to read Curnoe and Boyle is as what has been termed 'tory anarchists'. Peter Wilkin has charted this specifically English phenomenon of (often ironic) cultural conservatism, mixed with Dada inspired irreverence and a deep hostility to American pop culture and an expansive bureaucratic state in the work of George Orwell, Evelyn and Auberon Waugh, Peter Cook and Spike Milligan. See Wilkin's *The Strange Case of Tory Anarchism* (Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing, 2010) for a detailed examination of the formal qualities and theoretical contradictions of this position.
- <sup>100</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet; trans. Richard Howard, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 58.

- <sup>101</sup> George Bowering, *The Mustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1993), 83.
- <sup>102</sup> Robert Fones and Andy Patton eds. *"We are not Greg Curnoe": Materials from a Symposium on the Work and Life of Greg Curnoe, May 11-12, 2001* (London: Open Letter, 2002), 98.
- <sup>103</sup> Rae Davis, "Chambers—Cumoe—Urquhart: The Life of Death in London, Ontario," *Canadian Art*, July 1966.
- <sup>104</sup> Ross Woodman, "A New Regionalism," *artscanada*, August/September 1967 [pamphlet], np.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, np.
- <sup>106</sup> Ross Woodman, "London: regional liberation front," *The Globe and Mail*, December 13, 1969, 27.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>109</sup> *Region* magazine was initially handmade by Curnoe and published from 1961-1990. The Gallery was launched in 1962 at 352 Richmond Street.
- <sup>110</sup> Christopher Dewdney, "Oregionalism; Geocentrism and the notion of originality" [Draft], 1. Box 19-1 "Provincial Essays Part Two – 1984-1989," Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>111</sup> Though Curnoe was its most active promoter, this was a notion that occurred in several different minds in Southwestern Ontario at the same time.
- <sup>112</sup> Christopher Dewdney, "Oregionalism; Geocentrism and the notion of originality" [Draft], 1. Box 19-1 "Provincial Essays Part Two – 1984-1989," Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>114</sup> He adds that both have been superseded by hyperoregionalism, which has an ironic attitude to both.
- <sup>115</sup> National Gallery of Canada, *Heart of London [le coeur de London]* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1968), np.
- <sup>116</sup> For instance, in *The Water Drawings* (1973), which are drawings done with water on paper that look reminiscent of soiled sheets, the drawing itself and any sense of structure is made to be absorbed or evaporate. [Fig. 50] The basically unmemorable quality of these monochromatic works, the fact that their marks, though palpable, are not especially legible and register only vaguely, also allows them to retain a kind of absolute present that *re-presents* itself with each viewing without being remembered. He summarized the creation of these works in terms of how 'INTENSE' it was to arrive at 'INSIGNIFICANCE'. *Ron Martin* (London: London Public Library and Art Museum, 1974), np
- <sup>117</sup> Roald Nasgaard, *Ron Martin: World Paintings* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1976), 6-7. Martin calls this the celebration of the "natural ability to experience," [*Ibid.*, 24] a capacity he considers severely retarded among those 'well-informed' in art history and criticism. *Ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 7. Martin explicitly refused the notion that his work possessed any intentions regarding the audience. He completely rejected the idea that the artist had any responsibility for the audience or was there to teach them anything. Instead, the work was "about what I am." *Ibid.* 16. Murray Favro would make comparable claims about his work and that it was not supposed to function as art so much as phenomena in the world. See Marie Fleming, *Murray Favro: A Retrospective* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983), 13.
- <sup>119</sup> Christopher Dewdney, "Oregionalism; Geocentrism and the notion of originality" [Draft], 4. Box 19-1 "Provincial Essays Part Two – 1984-1989," Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO. He suggests that Favro is largely uninfluenced by art and 'constructing ideal solids' while his 'dials all mysteriously rest on zero' ignoring the art world. *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>120</sup> Jean-Pierre Gilbert and Paul Smith, "Murray Favro: Art et mécanologie," *L'effritement des valeurs*, no. 7 (printemps 1989), 39.
- <sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.
- <sup>122</sup> Christopher Dewdney, "Murray Favro: The Paradigm of Invention; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, May 7 - July 3, 1983," *Vanguard*, September 1983, 6.
- <sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>124</sup> Jean-Pierre Gilbert and Paul Smith, "Murray Favro: Art et mécanologie," *L'effritement des valeurs*, no. 7 (printemps 1989), 40. Favro goes on to insist on the comic nature of his mechanological strategies.
- <sup>125</sup> Dewdney cites Wyndham Lewis' attack on the notion of the avant-garde in *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* (1954) to help explicate this claim.
- <sup>126</sup> Christopher Dewdney, "Oregionalism; Geocentrism and the notion of originality" [Draft], 3. Box 19-1 "Provincial Essays Part Two – 1984-1989," Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

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- <sup>127</sup> Ibid., 3-4. He cites Ron Benner, Jamelie Hassan, Robert Fones and Kerry Ferris as London artists who have all worked to accommodate this prior regionalism.
- <sup>128</sup> Greg Curnoe, Response to “Oregionalism; Geocentrism and the notion of originality” [Draft], 7. Box 19-1 “Provincial Essays Part Two – 1984-1989,” Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO. This rejection is rather striking given that Curnoe had, at one time, defined Regionalism in similar terms: Regionalism concerns “what so many painters, writers, and photographers have used – their own immediate environment – something we don’t do in Canada very much. This accounts for the interest in local primitive artists, the art of children, graffiti, old photographs from the district, local architecture, et cetera.” Greg Curnoe, “Region = Regionalism.” *The University of Western Ontario Gazette*, March 15, 1963, 9.
- <sup>129</sup> Greg Curnoe, Response to “Oregionalism; Geocentrism and the notion of originality” [Draft], 8. Box 19-1 “Provincial Essays Part Two – 1984-1989,” Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>130</sup> Ibid., 10.
- <sup>131</sup> Ibid., 7.
- <sup>132</sup> John Boyle and Barry Lord, *John Boyle: A Retrospective* (London: London Regional Art Gallery, 1991), 9.
- <sup>133</sup> John B. Boyle, “Building a Nihilist Universe” [Typescript], np. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>134</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>135</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>136</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>137</sup> Marie Fleming, *Murray Favro: A Retrospective* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983), 15.
- <sup>138</sup> John B. Boyle, “Building a Nihilist Universe” [Typescript], np. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>139</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>140</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>141</sup> In what follows I am not claiming that Curnoe and his colleagues made such claims for themselves, but that these are possibilities latent within their theories and productive for understanding them.
- <sup>142</sup> Peter Sloterdijk; trans. Wieland Hoban, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 135.
- <sup>143</sup> Ibid., 135.
- <sup>144</sup> Ibid., 141.
- <sup>145</sup> Ibid., 145.
- <sup>146</sup> Cholette’s article provides the most succinct summary but Curnoe’s Dada influence is a mainstay of the retrospective texts by Théberge and Milroy and of shorter works on him. See Katie Cholette, “Derision, Nonsense, and Carnival in the Work of Greg Curnoe,” *Revue d’art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* vol. 37, no. 1 (2012): 53-63. It is also worth pointing out that Curnoe’s estimation of Duchamp declined significantly. According to his personal rating book, *About Painters* (1965-1988), in which he persistently re-evaluated and awarded ‘stars’ to various artists, his estimation of Duchamp’s value fell steadily over the years.
- <sup>147</sup> Greg Curnoe, “Notes on Picabia,” *artscanada*, August/September 1971, 71.
- <sup>148</sup> For example, see his rejection of the label in Lenore Crawford, “Galleries like works of Londoner,” *The London Free Press*, September 30, 1964.
- <sup>149</sup> Mario Amaya, *Pop Art...and After* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), 29.
- <sup>150</sup> Ibid., 12.
- <sup>151</sup> Ibid., 11.
- <sup>152</sup> Ibid., 15.
- <sup>153</sup> Ibid., 28.
- <sup>154</sup> Many of these artists were also cast under the Realism label for a show in Kingston. See Margreet Kluyster-Cluysenaer, *Realism: Emulsion and Omissions* (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1972).
- <sup>155</sup> For examples, see Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting: Second Edition* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1988), 322; George Bowering, *Left Hook: A Sideways Look at Canadian Writing* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2005), 221; James King, *The Way It Is: The Life of Greg Curnoe* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2017), 117. See Curnoe’s statement in *Statements: 18 Statements by Canadian Artists*, Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery (1967), 41.

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- <sup>156</sup> Christopher Dewdney, *A Palaeozoic Geology of London, Ontario* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1973), np.
- <sup>157</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>158</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>159</sup> George Bowering, *The Mustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1993), 6. This ignores his curious relationship with Bucke and outsider art.
- <sup>160</sup> Ibid., 8.
- <sup>161</sup> Ibid., 4.
- <sup>162</sup> I am doing this in some detail only because Robbe-Grillet's description of his own work provides a more acute description of much of what was at stake in London Regionalism than most of what has been subsequently written about it. For a summation of the same theoretical themes in Michel Butor, see Mary Lydon, *Perpetuum Mobile: A study of the novels and aesthetics of Michel Butor* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1980), 1-17.
- <sup>163</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet; trans. Richard Howard, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 19.
- <sup>164</sup> Ibid., 19.
- <sup>165</sup> Ibid., 21.
- <sup>166</sup> Ibid., 22-23.
- <sup>167</sup> Ibid., 24.
- <sup>168</sup> Ibid., 31.
- <sup>169</sup> Ibid., 34. This was what pornography or erotic art are often criticized for. It is also why Robbe-Grillet's work, both his films and novels, is so often constructed using structure common to pornography.
- <sup>170</sup> Ibid., 43.
- <sup>171</sup> Ibid., 152.
- <sup>172</sup> Roland Barthes, "Objective Literature: Alain Robbe-Grillet," in Alain Robbe-Grillet; trans. Richard Howard, *Two Novels: Jealousy & In the Labyrinth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 13.
- <sup>173</sup> Ibid., 15.
- <sup>174</sup> Ibid., 18.
- <sup>175</sup> Ibid., 23.
- <sup>176</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet; trans. Richard Howard, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 155.

## Chapter Four: Erotic geography and pornographic history

The previous chapter sketched out two different directions in the aesthetic projects of John Boyle, Greg Curnoe and some of the London Regionalists. One was a negative nationalism that revelled in a satirical anti-politics and avowed a form of aesthetic terrorism without any positive social end. The other was a nihilistic regionalism that parodied traditionalism to further solidify it. Art and region were a means to construct the autochthonous through a process of fossilization. In both cases, they operate using processes of disarticulation that undermine meaning in favour of mechanical production and the creation of noise. As the close of the chapter indicated, this also meant the erasure of the psychological or social subject, superseded by a place of appearance and immediacy. In a sense, this is the reclamation of the heritage of Canadian eroticism that Scott Symons regarded as being destroyed by liberalism, and in this respect negative nationalism and regionalism are part of Tory surrealism.

The strategies and claims described in the previous chapter will be played out in a series of very different ways in the practices of Greg Curnoe and John Boyle. In Curnoe, this will involve the creation of a kind of erotic geography through the bricolage of regional materials that assembles the ephemeral, autobiographical, historical and durational on the same plane. And in Boyle through two very distinct tendencies: a formally pornographic way of constructing historical imagery in a jarring style, and a mythic way of imagining the Canadian artist as a *poète maudit* figured as an erotic adolescent boy, a gesture that also carries through to his performance as an artist and his exploitation of public space to perverse ends. If the last chapter was largely concerned with the programmatic aspect of their ways of constructing region and nation, this chapter

will examine its figuration and make evident how central erotic content was to it. It opens with an examination of how region and eroticism coalesced in the work of Curnoe.

#### **4.1. The Erotic Landscapes of Sou-west-o**

“Greg Curnoe’s face looked like an intermission in history.”<sup>1</sup>

“Indeed, in a computerized age, pornography may be humanity’s last stand.”<sup>2</sup>

In one of the first, of many, overviews of the 1960s art scene that developed in London, Rae Davis highlighted the work of Jack Chambers, Tony Urquhart and Greg Curnoe, underlining the themes of life and death within their art practices. Death was central for all of them, Davis contended, pointing to the cemeteries and ghostly aura that fill Chambers’ work or the embalmed presentation of nature in Urquhart. But things were different with Curnoe who was more colourful and direct.<sup>3</sup> Even though many of his paintings commemorate dead historical figures and function as records of the past, suggesting a sense of impermanence, this “momentary and fragmentary quality of life” is also a significant part of his frequently erotic imagery.<sup>4</sup>

In a profile of the same scene a little over a year later, Barry Lord sketched it by quoting York Hotel manager Eddie Assaf’s statement that, “London has always been a city of hindsight and beautiful graveyards.”<sup>5</sup> But as the decade neared its close, it had changed into something more like its swinging namesake. At that point, the York, where the Nihilist Spasm Band<sup>6</sup> would take up residence, had ‘Bordello-purple walls’<sup>7</sup> while the artist-run 20/20 Gallery had a jukebox and coke machine, gearing itself to teens and those in their 20s while the art buying public was mostly university professors. The city provided Lord with the means to imagine the growth of the nation’s art.<sup>8</sup>

But what kind of town was London, so saturated with death and potential growth? The aesthetics of London's decomposition were a central concern for Curnoe. Using the form of archaeological peeling back of time that would be essential to how he conceptualized so much of life, you can walk back through his personal writings to reveal how this was processed. It had its most open public display in an article published in the *London Free Press* on the controversies over urban renewal projects for the downtown core.<sup>9</sup> Curnoe blamed the plans to transform the city centre on the American auto companies and development firms that were the backbone of the city's branch-plant economy. The centre was composed of motley architectural styles from different periods and would be replaced by the sort of new International Style office buildings that had remade Montréal. He complained that, "A CITY THAT IS TOO BIG TO WALK AROUND IS INHUMAN" (ALL CITIES OVER 200,000 ARE 'UNDESIRABLE')."<sup>10</sup> But his loathing of an architecture devoted to reproducing conformity is not purely an aversion to generic internationalism. If downtown is to be renovated, he suggested they turn it into farmland.

This skepticism about progress was present in his journals for years and serves as a condensed introduction to the basic aesthetic tensions in Curnoe's thinking. Pondering the issue in 1967, he wrote "Progress = liberalism / Liberalism – tear down the centre of London, get rid of those old fashioned buildings./ Progress is believed to be religious but not evolution. / [...] Progress = distrust of cultural values. Culture is not the same as tradition? Is our culture nihilistic, the natural denial of our culture?"<sup>11</sup> And yet, at the beginning of the decade, he saw the transformation – the digging and decomposing of the city rather than its reconstruction – in more glowing terms: "The yellow signs with

blinkers and black stripes that Ken Reidy puts out when Carling street is dug up are so far past Harold Town or Franz Kline or Rembrandt. For instance, to be unselfconscious to be anonymous to be one with these legends.”<sup>12</sup>

The potential of technological change and its aesthetic re-working of the world were also part of one of his less frequently mentioned projects, a collaboration with the engineering department of the University of Western Ontario (UWO). Using one of their Bell computers, he typed his journal entries into their database. An entry dated to July 25, 1969 worried that the information he was inputting would be viewed by Bell, but this was also why he was doing it, so that the content entered may “CHANGE THE NATURE OF THE MACHINE AND OF BELL.”<sup>13</sup> He bought a typewriter and using it made him care less about spelling mistakes and more about speed. This became almost athletic as he timed himself typing. He dreamed of being out in the country with a portable phone and a computer he could take into the field. He pondered, “WOULDN’T IT BE GREAT TO HAVE A MACHINE LIKE THIS CONNECTED TO A TAPE RECORDER DURIN\S\G [SIC] A VERY PERSONAL MOMENT, NEAR YOU, LIKE WHEN YOU ARE FUCKING. WHAT EFFECT WOULD THIS HAVE ON THE MACHINE AND WHAT EFFECT WOULD IT HAVE ON SOMEONE WHO CAME ACROSS THIS INFORMATION IN THE CORE.”<sup>14</sup> As he typed about the ‘give’ of the keys and the sounds of the processing of information, the prose became a stream-of-consciousness about different typewriters, parties with his wife Sheila, colours and national identity: “WE MUSNT [SIC] LET CANADIANS BECOME SURE OF THEMSELVES OR POSITIVELY CRITICAL OF THINGS THAT SEEM WRONG. FECKLESSNESS MUST BE PRESERVED AS PART OF OUT NSTIONAL [SIC] HERITAGE.”<sup>15</sup>

Beyond Curnoe's fantasy presaging the era of webcams and internet porn, there are a few things to take note of here. The computing event summarizes the things that will be the most basic to his work: an erotic relationship to materials and processes, private life and 'national' life as materials to be processed, the erotic potentially changing the medium that it has been fed into, and the relationship with any potential audience being a matter of random encounter. It also points out that the 'heritage' to be preserved is that of uncertainty, negativity, irresponsibility and the paradoxical characteristic of having little character.

The above is encapsulated well in a public reading given at the 20/20 Gallery. In his public persona, Curnoe was sometimes like a computer. A description of him reading his *Blue Books* in the gallery stresses that he resembled "a slide projector showing pictures" with his "moderately-paced expressionless monotone. He sounded very much like a court stenographer impartially reading back a transcript, being careful not to colour the words by his manner of pronouncing them. His reading was not a performance in itself. The original stamping [of the text] was the performance, with Curnoe's voice merely the medium whereby the words were communicated to the audience."<sup>16</sup> The description stressed that Curnoe's writing was 'graphic' rather than literary. Its content involved him following a woman to watch the fabric of her dress move on her body. As was often the case, this performance was off-set by one from John Boyle, who read texts woven together from anecdotes to create a "climactic plateau of hilarity" levelled by 'sadness' and 'shocked identification' as he explained his brother's death and shared lengthy descriptions of his own 'childhood masturbation orgies'.<sup>17</sup> Almost all the elements common to Regionalism are crystallized here: fascination with machines,

sensual obsession with surfaces, discontinuity, autobiographical detail, jolting juxtapositions, humour, and shock.

London Regionalism however, had another significant intellectual aspect – the *mechanology* being developed at UWO and Zurich, Ontario. Rooted in the work of French engineer Jacques Lafitte and philosopher Gilbert Simondon, it was inspired by a critical aversion to cybernetics.<sup>18</sup> Cybernetics, openly embraced by the Trudeau government as a means to governance through passionate functionalism, aimed to be a ‘universal science’ and was primarily concerned with information and communications, no longer needing to distinguish the biological and technological.<sup>19</sup> Mechanology, however, regarded communications as an instrumental function; what was primary was ‘energy’ and it was more concerned with ‘moral engagement’ between humanity and machines rather than strict functionalism.<sup>20</sup>

Aside from geographic coincidence, mechanology provided useful rhetorical points for the Regionalists – marginality and a relevant artistic theory among them. One of Curnoe’s most insistent references in his writings is Lévi-Strauss’ idea of the *bricoleur*<sup>21</sup>, a notion that is also utilized, if transformed somewhat, by Simondon. Mechanologist John Hart’s introduction to Simondon’s “On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects,” while not using the term *bricoleur*, does highlight the artistic aspect of mechanology. According to him, each machine, in its technical quality, conserves a form of eternity when it is working.<sup>22</sup> In part, it is for this reason that the arts and crafts are so important as means of maintaining the continuity of knowledge and making it concrete.<sup>23</sup> According to Hart, the contemporary concern for the body is not the result of shaking off repressions but of becoming aware that the body was being replaced by

machines. The relationship between the body and machine is one of invention, understood not as the product of necessity, but as “manifestations of states of reverie and places of happiness” expressed through poetry or machines.<sup>24</sup> Curnoe’s computer-like poetry of his eroticized navigation of London streets, like his erotic inseminating of a computer network with the details of his life, are examples of this.

The unfolding of the fossilization process described above finds its most blatant and logically reductive expression in one of Curnoe’s last projects. Published after his death as *Deeds/Abstracts: The History of a London Lot* (1996), it was a hybrid journal and collage of the paper trail related to his home address. Stretching 500 years into the past, it attempted to highlight history as the accumulation of strata of material. His home was presented as part of the art project of a non-human bricoleur. This way of understanding Regionalism also coincides remarkably with how the mechanologists conceived creativity as “archaic technology.”<sup>25</sup>

While *Deeds* expresses the themes laid out very explicitly, much of this is applicable to Curnoe’s early work as well where he takes on the role of archaic technologist, unifying materials into surface. From the early to mid-1960s, Curnoe created two distinct forms of nudes that rendered concrete the eroto-environment of the London he knew. One of these involved collages made from his daily encounters with the image-world of the city, what Barry Lord called, “The strange shapes and the chance combinations of labels and wrappers make the collages a continuing record of his life – or, same thing, his art.”<sup>26</sup> This included stamped and dated bus tickets which condensed time and space into their usually torn perimeters, admission tickets, cut-outs from comic strips and cropped images from softcore pornography. These elements, predominantly

purple, pink, orange and soft blue, would then be juxtaposed by glue and pins in small grids. The collage *Goodbye/Cancel* (1961) [Fig. 51] featured bus passes set in two rows with a cropped photo of breasts appearing on one, separating the AM schedule from the PM. Stamped across one slip is what appears to be *Oregional*. The more sophisticated *Blonde* (1963) [Fig. 52] features a colour nude photo with the head and right arm cropped out. The body reclines on an orange sofa and running along the top of the image is a set of admission slips and 69 twice in pink. The sexual connotations here are clear, as is the jokey phallicness of the pin stuck into the image. These gridded compositions were also produced as he was creating his shaped collages, in which the collaged material was cut into vaguely biomorphic shapes and set against bright colour.

Other images from the time are more insistently sexual. *Open Slowly* (1962) [Fig. 53] features a woman's buttocks spreading with her legs splayed while *From Behind* (1962) [Fig. 54] highlights the curve of the backside with the knee bent in the cliched form of sexual excitement. At the same time, these brief, loosely painted and lusty works recall the kind of articulate, almost robotic poetry that we encountered him reading earlier. From those very *Blue Books*, the stamp work *Blue Book #2* (1964) [Fig. 55] reads, "THE VALLEY BETWEEN THE CHEEKS OF HER ASS BECAME SHADOW AT EACH 2<sup>ND</sup> STEP SHE TOOK."

The artist was very fond of maps and one of the most blatantly nationalistic works in his career was *Map of North America* (1972) [Fig. 56] the infamous presentation of the continent which joined Canada to Mexico, Greenland and central America and left the United States out. His maps are not topographical, give almost no indication of an interior beyond some bodies of water, and dramatically insist on the presence of borders which

are portrayed with a fluid and sensual line. The sensual concern with geography is a commonplace in his work. His famous obsession with bicycles as a means of movement, form of penetration and embodiment of an erotic landscape mixes with his use of the ephemeral consumable products of his region (used in the collages just discussed) to map the sensual engagement with the environment. His consistent use of transit passes is another way of graphically rendering geographic form and encoding time in space. Curnoe's work is flat, all image, devoted to the iconic.

The two-dimensionality is engrained in other aspects of his aesthetics as well, notably his frequent use of text. As he would later explain in an interview, "I was brought up on comic books and on children's books with captions. It was so natural for me to associate type and text with a picture. And I quickly learned there are things you can do with a text that you can't do with a picture."<sup>27</sup> He also speaks of the evolution of how a typeface such as Times New Roman becomes completely unobtrusive and invisible, so he deliberately used a stamp with sans serif font to make "text awkward to read. I discovered that a sans serif typeface isn't as legible as the more traditional serif faces. In other words, the letters stick out, they don't disappear. It makes you look and read at the same time."<sup>28</sup> Or to put it like Dewdney, it allows you to have two systems that disarticulate each other. This makes the language more foreign, even while Curnoe continues to insist on the legibility of content. Reading and voyeurism are united explicitly in these early works (and more subtly later) as the viewer is asked to read the texts that run up and down the body parts at the centre of the images. Usually offering little by way of semantic sense, the texts make the body something read while insisting on the physical aspects of sight.

These different formal experiments are fused in his major, large scale nudes of the period – *Spring on the Ridgeway* (1964) [Fig. 57], *Feeding Percy* (1965) [Fig. 58] and *Chaste Nude* (1964). [Fig. 59] In the latter and *Girdle* (1963) [Fig. 60] the body part works described above are expanded to include more of the body, save the extremities. Headless, so anonymous, the bodies are there to provide curved lines to intersect with the hard linearity that gives the space for the image.<sup>29</sup> Curnoe had a habit of painting in the perimeters of his pictures, making the frame and its cropping of an image from the world explicit. Sometimes he uses these frames to write his texts on, further playing up the supports of the image, its shape and supplements. In other words, texts frequently function much like lingerie. But for these two paintings, this is not the case. Instead, they help to echo the strong vertical lines and hard diagonals that situate the curves. The poses, clearly borrowed from porn magazines, exploit the decorative elements of the body – the girdle is all diagrammatic lines, the nipples and pubic hair are treated almost like the street signs Curnoe adored.

*Feeding Percy* takes Rubens' *The Three Graces* as an inspiration and creates three idealized female figures using his own wife as a model. But rather than an embrace of baroque style with modern accoutrements, Curnoe translates the subject matter into his own idiom. The poses, no longer graceful but a mixture of the banal, the 'allegorical' and kitsch. The bodies of the female figures are not broken up by lingerie to exaggerate the curves of the body and intensify desire, but through the abstraction created by the hard simplification of forms, the reduction of surface detail for the sake of a surface complexity created through the proliferation of curved and spherical shapes that echo and exaggerate the female body. Cumulatively, the image presents a kind of plenum of the

female form, saturating space through variation. A burlesque or theatrical quality is also gestured to by the inclusion of two flashing electric lights that crop out of the right and left side of the work, one flashing red and the other white, the light switch clearly visible. This flickering quality of the painting also suggests another reading of its content: the three figures as one in three stages of movement. The forms remain starkly cut out, collaged together like three frames from a comic strip. A quasi-cinematic quality is also suggested by the flickering of the lights, allowing the painting to be regarded as what Robbe-Grillet called the ‘abortive film’; an *almost* frozen film that crystallizes a moment of erotic intensity.<sup>30</sup> Literally in the periphery to this intensity, the texts that run along the bottom and top of the painting detail the boxing match in which Dick Tiger beat Joey Giardello. The implications of this could be allegorical or meaningless. Allegorically, Tiger was a Nigerian who had fought in their civil war and had beaten an American to become champion, or meaningless in its banality as simply a noisy detail overheard in Curnoe’s everyday life that he would insist was transparent and without connotation.

But the erotic could also take on a less ‘domestic’ scope. One of the most significant instances of this was in Curnoe’s *Art is the Complement of a Weak Mind* (1964-1965) [Fig. 61],<sup>31</sup> a painting referring to the activities of the Nihilist Party and the third part of the *Nihilist Party Trilogy*. Like the Party itself, the image is rife with parody. Cast in the Nihilist Party colours of red and black, the background is two triangles and the foreground made up of a female and two males. The woman is visible frontally and the men in silhouette.<sup>32</sup> One of the men congeals into the background, volts of electricity shooting from his bound throat. The men are rendered in the kind of diagrammatic simplicity common to medical textbooks and they each wear The Sanden Electric

Herculex No. 7 [Fig. 62], which is alluded to across the top to parody an ad for the contraption. The belt was a turn-of-the-century item, once advertised in the *Toronto Star* as the cure for the ‘terrible mental torture’ of men suffering from debilitating nervous disorders resulting in impotency. It promised to restore ‘every weak part’ of a man with the power of its electrical charges. These charges can be seen radiating from the belts strapping in each of them. One of the males has an erection and the other, being choked and sporting some kind of electrified cock-ring, does not. The other two images in the series display Curnoe interacting at the picnic with John Boyle (*Looking at Three Members of the Student Wing of the Nihilist Party Through Blue Glasses*, 1964-1965) [Fig. 63] and the London mystic, psychiatrist and theorist of cosmic consciousness, Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke (*The Vision of Dr. Bucke*, 1964) [Fig. 64], as mysticism, as well as student politics, are apparently ironized by being contextualized with sex gizmos.

*Art is the Complement of a Weak Mind* summarizes a lot of the themes in Curnoe’s work in the period. In an affront to the idea of art as therapy, the title seems to mock the appreciation of art or diagnostically suggest that its creation or consumption are either the product or cure for nervous disorder. Barbara Stevenson, attentive to the work’s place in a series, suggests that it could be a critique of the “commercial exploitation of the sexual impulse.”<sup>33</sup> It might also be the opposite, a utopian suggestion on the possibility of achieving a higher state of consciousness through artificial means, an idea entertained by Dr. Bucke with the proviso that revelation could only happen spontaneously. She concludes, “Thus the three protagonists of the painting would seem unable either to have a mutual satisfying sexual experience or to find spiritual and social harmony through artificial sex.”<sup>34</sup> Yet, her conclusion comes by way of avoiding the deep

technophilia that flows through Curnoe's work. This points to the paradox basic to the work of Curnoe and his associates. While insisting that the work was not allegorical and theoretical but transparent and meaningless, it was simultaneously this and everything it claimed not to be. The work effectively existed in this negativity that simultaneously posited, parodied and erased itself.

Although they share significant overlap aesthetically and programmatically, Curnoe's imaginary is largely geographic and this will provide a significant contrast to the historical imaginary that is foregrounded in the work of John Boyle. Like Curnoe, Boyle will take this in singular directions and that is the topic of the next two sections of this chapter.

#### **4.2. Pornographic History**

"You are the first man ever to have travelled into time, and returned," shouted the prime minister, excitedly.<sup>35</sup>

"You've got to be a hero."<sup>36</sup>

This section of the chapter examines the general stylistic and formal aspects involved in John Boyle's compositions and the centrality of the nude figure within them. It does this both through looking at his statements about process and the specific inflections of the History genre in Canada which his paintings appear in the shadow of. Additionally, Boyle's work functions as one of the more peculiar instances of Regionalism's attempt to define the nature of time and space. In fact, it is hard to make much sense of his work without seeing it within the lacework of the eccentric materialism discussed in the previous chapter that seemed so commonplace in the art world he was party to.

Otherwise, the disjointed ways his figures populate their semi-abstract backgrounds seem

largely decorative. Unlike Curnoe, for whom a cottage industry of writing exists, Boyle has received markedly little attention in the past 30 years or more. One of the more peculiar texts attempting to deal with his body of work was written by Barry Lord for Boyle's retrospective at Museum London in 1991. Lord stresses the importance of Boyle presenting historical figures "[i]n a country that had been unable to establish its own figures in its own landscape, in a country that still forgets or misconstrues its history in order not to embarrass its present owners..."<sup>37</sup> The embarrassments include the struggles of First Nations, the Québécois, the Métis, the Acadians, the miners, the failed revolutions and uprisings. Even with the irony and strange humour that saturates Boyle's work, Lord insists that it presents an 'idiosyncratic' sort of History art which celebrates heroism as a way of 'demystifying' the notion that Canadians have been little more than compliant imperialists.<sup>38</sup> Effectively, it would be in tune with the Robin Mathews variety of English Canadian nationalism discussed in Chapter Two.

Although reviews of Boyle's work tended to stress his interest in heroes, his own statements split it between heroes and villains, without much indication of how to distinguish between them. Sometimes he would insist the figures were not heroes at all, just "people who exist and I try to respond to them in my work."<sup>39</sup> These figures were primarily, but not always, Canadian. Some were politicians (Diefenbaker, Chief Big Bear, King Farouk, Jacques Rose, Chief Poundmaker, Nellie McClung), some entertainers (Woody Guthrie, Howlin' Wolf, Wilf Carter), some artists (Gustave Flaubert, Somerset Maugham, Arthur Lismer, Tom Thomson) or people he knew. Many of them are obscure. Some are international figures from the history of anarchism and socialism. His figures are almost always presented frontally, often in full or near full frontal, and

frequently nude. This is unusual in Canadian History painting, a genre to which, in his peculiar way, Boyle belongs.

The genre of History painting originated in the Renaissance and was subsequently refined in the Baroque, where it was frequently littered with nude figures in the Italian tradition.<sup>40</sup> Specifically within the anglophone world, the History genre began to go through important shifts in the eighteenth-century. The change from Classical or mythological to national themes coincided with a growth in the writing of national histories. [Figs. 65-66] Often heavily idealized, such imagery concentrated on how “[i]n heroic action and perfect physical form man could see his own ethical and corporeal potential.”<sup>41</sup> The heterogeneous formal qualities of History painting escalated as the century progressed. As Edgar Wind notes, History paintings and ‘pictorial news’ had become conjoined in the works of John Singleton Copley and were frequently exemplified in ‘conversation pieces’ that were sometimes half group portrait, half news item.<sup>42</sup> There was a significant heroic component to such paintings, both in terms of the presentation of the subject matter and of the painter’s social role.

This tradition of History painting was translated into Canadian terms most emblematically by Robert Harris and George Reid. [Figs. 67-68] Each of these artists combined a certain academic naturalism with documentary detail and a narrative sense of composition. C.W. Jefferys, a student of Reid, took the depiction of Canadian history in a decidedly different direction. The sometimes allegorical lens of his teacher gave way to something far closer to graphic journalism. Jefferys’ work is both humble and practical. This was married to what has been termed ‘naturalistic nationalism’, which, in pictorial terms, sought out the Nordic (brilliant colour) values of the country as a means to

displace the ‘zones of tone’ associated with middle Europe.<sup>43</sup> For Jefferys then, the truth value of depiction was to be gauged by its engagement with its ‘native atmosphere’ and its capacity to be adequately ‘characteristic’ of its place.<sup>44</sup> Jefferys’ three volume *The Picture Gallery of Canadian History* (1942-1950) thoroughly elaborates a detailed, naturalistic narrative of the country as the struggle of diverse and individuated peoples engaging with a harsh environment. The details of place became almost as important as the sweep of an event. “The history of a country is to be read not only in its written or printed records. These, while of the greatest value and importance, do not tell us all that we desire to know. Old buildings, early furniture, tools, vehicles, weapons and clothing, contemporary pictures of people, places and events must be examined to fill out the story,” writes Jefferys.<sup>45</sup> This insistence on a history concerned with both people and objects is best summed up in his statement, “A tangible object cannot lie or equivocate so successfully as a word.”<sup>46</sup>

Curnoe, with his obsessive detailing of regional materials, does something akin to Jefferys, where the sense of things consistently tends to overwhelm any sense of narrative. [Figs. 69-70]<sup>47</sup> But this bricoleur method of construction is not as present in Boyle. Instead, what he does comes closer to photomontage, one of the cherished techniques of the Dadaists and Surrealists, which often involved the jolting superimposition of disparate elements into the same space to create a visceral image that could be nonsensical, satirical or both. There is a clear sense of painting rooted in collage in Boyle who, wittingly or not, was compounding these diverse strategies – the heroic, the allegorical, the topical, the overwhelmingly objective (in the Robbe-Grillet sense), the surrealistically juxtaposed – into a unique renovation of the History genre. It was in the

middle of this genre that he insisted on the presence of the naked, usually erotic, human body.

There is a formal nakedness to Boyle's paintings that works as an accomplice to his often quite naked subjects. If they are not naked, they are at least stripped of their original context and very theatrically placed into the world, undressed again by their new context in a kind of burlesque of history. And it is not simply that Boyle would place these images into a new pictorial space on the canvas, but he would take this one step further. In the *Niagara Now '72* group show in St. Catharines, his painting *Ontario Street* (1971) (described below) was translated onto an outdoor billboard.<sup>48</sup> The show was paid for by advertisers which highlighted the disposable and outmoded quality of the billboard medium and its usual crass commercial purpose. This both suggested a passing relationship with the 'audience' who would drive by – quite different from that of attending a gallery – but also its value as something to waste, since it could not be purchased and would be destroyed: "This much more 'pure' form of art moves the painting back to a stage which is familiar to most artists but possibly new to viewers who may need to be reminded that death is the mother of beauty."<sup>49</sup> Boyle identified his work as an attempt to make monumental art in a country where there was not much. "And monumental – meaning, in my sense, scale: in tune with the city or the country or surroundings."<sup>50</sup> This public quality of the work was significant to him. "You can't write for 500 people, you have to speak to your nation," he once remarked.<sup>51</sup> This *making public* or spectacular could mean very different things, as will be seen later, but they are expressions of the 'joy' he experienced seeing Canadians triumph and the 'sadness and rage' experienced when they are crushed.<sup>52</sup> Making public also meant orienting the work

of art away from the art world or art community and to the region or nation more generally, even appearing as ads in magazines like *Maclean's* and *Saturday Night*. To Boyle, the artist should be “on parity with garbage men,” no more.<sup>53</sup> Curnoe’s remark, cited above, that nationalist content was avant-garde, that it was a functional way of limiting and undermining ready accessibility or communication, bears repeating since the status of historical imagery in Boyle will be so persistently confusing for his critics. Is it a functional means to make community meaningful, or is it a kind of garbage that displays history less as something memorialized than as industrialized waste?

Michael Greenwood praised Boyle for “giving new life and dignity” to the History genre without resorting to ‘chauvinism’. He writes of Boyle’s *Batoche* paintings which re-envisioned the Riel uprising in ‘mythologizing’ terms. Federalism is, according to Greenwood, clearly portrayed as villainous and a ‘mystic nationalism’ is celebrated through the figure of the hero, who unites ‘soil and people’.<sup>54</sup> Though he notes Boyle’s ‘tribalism’, he insists he avoids romantic ‘jingoism’ in his plastic language, which does not embrace the Romantic History painting of the nineteenth-century but one that seems much older, monumental, with little sense of gesture or movement in spite of its expressionistic use of colour.<sup>55</sup>

Boyle would also insist that he presented villains along with his heroes and provided no clear distinction between them.<sup>56</sup> His treatment of heroes tended to be mixed with significant sarcasm. Likewise, his notion of a hero had little to do with the sense of the term as a redeemer of the social. If anything, they were basically anti-heroes who lionized the anti-social. This is most evidently formulated in his interest in a trope that was quite popular at the time – the Canadian martyr. A cutting instance of this was the

*Canadian Martyr Box* he produced in 1974 for The Johnny Canuck Canadian Ego Exposition. [Figs. 71-73] The show itself consisted of 60 works, each measuring only 3x3 inches and placed in a plexiglass cube. His heroes were miniaturized and fabricated to resemble something like an affordable gewgaw or children's toy.<sup>57</sup>

Even with the ironized and deliberately cartoonish heroism in Boyle's figures, Paul Wilson registered "something oddly disturbing about John Boyle's paintings, populated by those silent, brooding figures staring at us out ... quietly insisting on their right to be alive."<sup>58</sup> Strangely, Wilson attached this aliveness with the viewer's unease and suggested it would dissipate if the public were more comfortable with Canadian history.<sup>59</sup> However, Wilson's reaction is also suggestive of the more general discomfort that Boyle's figures created in critics, their alien quality akin to Walter Redinger's biomorphic sculptures. If many of Boyle's figures are recognizable by name, few are by face, so their physical presence itself becomes strange and disorienting.<sup>60</sup> Kay Kritzwiser saw the relationship between the figure and the landscape as one between dream and reality.<sup>61</sup> A review by Liz Wiley of his 1978 retrospective in Montréal suggested that after 1969, his work became 'contrived' and that "Boyle has paged through history books for heroes to depict, but these images do not manage to reach the viewer in any real way."<sup>62</sup> Part of this, she claimed, was because most of the imagery in his work was unrecognizable to the public. Additionally, she suggested that his work had lost its original tight energy and became "slimy and amoeba-like" while his way of filling up space with patterns was meaningless, jarring and distracting from the power of the figure.<sup>63</sup>

While Boyle's refusal to engage in formal discussions concerning art can be interpreted as part of a polemical rejection of the norms of art discourse popularized in the United States, his equally frequent, if less absolute, refusal to discuss meaning and content distanced his work from having a functional sociological or political value, a value that was already low given the obscurity of his references. The awkwardness of the latter position is strategically intrinsic to his anarcho-nationalism, manifest either as noise or as a nonsensical stream-of-consciousness. "I've always been a stream-of-consciousness artist," Boyle insisted.<sup>64</sup> Nationalism, in other words, was expressed as the apprehension of what was in front of you – precisely in the sense that Robbe-Grillet described above – more than in the sense of any communal meaning, which tended to be deliberately minimized or subverted, even when it was put on public display, as with his use of billboards. Boyle "has often been heard to say that there is no hidden message behind his imagery. No particular meaning in the appearance of his baby daughter or London artist Jack Chambers as a young boy in a portrait of Will Donnelly... No special iconographic intent... the artist uses a technique he compares to stream-of-consciousness writing, bringing together unrelated images that happen to have impressed themselves on him."<sup>65</sup>

One critic was confused when his *Passion Over Reason* series (1976) [Fig. 74] – featuring portraits of Lawren Harris, Emily Carr, Joyce Wieland, E.J. Pratt and a child Justin Trudeau in frames shaped like pointed archways – was interrupted with an image of trees. The artist insisted that there was nothing he could say about these images and there was no clue to their meaning.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, one article explained that the series was obviously a satire on Pierre Trudeau's famous claim to put reason over passion and

the inclusion of his son, presumably the product of some sort of passion, was “Boyle’s subtle way of saying that passion does have a way of creeping into one’s life after all.”<sup>67</sup> Another review takes the series as a declaration of his ‘romantic nationalism’.<sup>68</sup> However, when queried about his methodology, Boyle explained, “Well, I start at one end and work to the other, including any people who happen to interest me.”<sup>69</sup> Two years later, he insisted that, “I don’t think symbolically when I work... I don’t try to preach through paintings. The images all have to do with me, not with one another. I am not trying to teach history. I simply am using images I’m getting to know.”<sup>70</sup> The figures in a composition have no logical connection to each other beyond entering his mind and even the colours of the composition are not planned in advance.<sup>71</sup>

Boyle loosely articulated this method in, “The art of pornography” (1966). His text opens with Boyle sitting on his deck naked, looking out at the street and rapidly turns into a weave of anecdotal details strung together, leaping between the shifting street scene in front of him and what is going on in his memory. Like much of his writing, it is a jolting amalgam of recollections of his boyhood and the Lakeside Amusement Park [Fig. 75], discussions of lacrosse, names of obscure historical figures as well as his friends, and scorn thrown on painting, before culminating in the conclusion, “That’s what pornography is.”<sup>72</sup> *Pornography* is this barely sorted accumulation where, as Robbe-Grillet put it, “space destroys time, and time sabotages space. Description makes no headway, contradicts itself, turns in circles. Moment denies continuity.”<sup>73</sup> The brightly coloured *Ontario Street* (1971) [Fig. 76] offers the same kind of carnival of historical figures as sports heroes and writers dot the space, Gabriel Dumont, a rifle balanced against his arm. Balancing on the shaft of the weapon is a nude, pink women, shiny and

inflated like a balloon, a cigarette in one hand and anarchist heroine Emma Goldman's head on her shoulders. So, once again, he treats his heroes with irony, as something like paper dolls and pin-ups for the kind of pornotopia we saw outlined by Steven Marcus in the first chapter.

There is a blockiness to Boyle's work in two senses: the theatricalized sense of blocking movement, gridding gestures out in a highly artificial space; and in the highly gridded form of composition that he employs and allows to show through like the skeletons of his characters. This is particularly evident in *Yankee Go Home - Elsinore* (1974) [Fig. 77], a broad horizontal oil painting with a naked adolescent boy at its centre. To his side, in profile view, is a Vietnamese child soldier. [Fig. 78] To the other side is a fur trader and his Native wife. Their collaged quality is exaggerated by his being cut into pieces, different parts of his body allowed to float. This is all displayed before a painting of Boyle's isolated home in Elsinore, Ontario, Boyle and his wife can be glimpsed in their car in the background. The intense cloisonné of the figures and their vibrant colour exaggerates their separation from one another. Additionally, they are broken up by a series of squares in rainbow like colour gradients that make explicit the underlying grid form of the work and the way he transfers the found imagery into the painting. "The overlaid squares are a literal echo of the way I work," Boyle pointed out, before adding deflatingly, "And then again, I probably did it to keep myself awake. I don't think much in terms of esthetic theories or anything."<sup>74</sup> Given this consistently maintained position, Boyle was likely surprised when Lenore Crawford compared his squares to those of Josef Albers and praised them for their 'mastery'.<sup>75</sup>

Boyle's abrasive use of colour was also criticized for overwhelming the content of his imagery, turning his heroes into 'sugarplum revolutionaries'.<sup>76</sup> A review by Kay Woods stressed the lack of lyricism in his intensely subjective colour palette and how much this disassociates it from realism.<sup>77</sup> Woods claimed his "lack of coherent organization, rhythm and harmony, turns off many viewers" something which seems particularly evident in his use of coloured squares without any unified relationship other than the "obvious materiality of the paint itself."<sup>78</sup> All the elements that she treated negatively, of course, were completely in line with the aesthetics of Regionalism detailed above. Of his frequently mentioned heavy impasto, Boyle stated, "I like people to have flesh."<sup>79</sup> The fleshiness of his painted figures also made them more projective, more sculptural, the lines of their faces and clothes suggesting their fossilization.

With its garish and intense colouring, and almost cloisonné treatment of the body, *Yankee Go Home - Elsinore* highlights the apparently deliberate awkwardness coupled with an aggressive sexual statement that is common to Boyle's work. There is something performatively adolescent about this, a quality that is also suggested in another nude from the period: *De Cew Cathedral* (1971). [Fig. 79] Here, an adolescent boy in a jockstrap, his penis hanging out, stands and smiles with an awkward woodenness. To his side is superimposed a landscape and running over the two images and protruding beneath them is a wooden railing with a lamp attached to it, the lamp capable of illuminating the boy's already unconcealed penis. Michael Greenwood romantically interprets the painting as that of "the risen Adonis – a proletarian god here – turns his back on the old Canada asleep in bondage, her vines cut down, and faces smilingly into the sun."<sup>80</sup>

Boyle's nude figures often possess what Lord called the "matter-of-fact absence of clothing that one observes in a nudist club, where nudity is similarly public and neutral."<sup>81</sup> The source material for many of Boyle's images came from pornography. Lord suggested, "Like our heroes, these suppressed images require 're-mythification' as objective reality in order to demystify them."<sup>82</sup> He equated the suppressed or forgotten events of Canadian history with this situation. So, history, stripped from memory and so rendered mystical, requires mythification to return to reality. While there is something to this formulation's awkward dialectical process it is complicated substantially by the other rhetorical traits that Lord frequently cites in Boyle's work – the irony, the odd humour, the deliberate meaninglessness, the figures presented as interruptions of continuity and their usual lack of much other than a spatial relationship, the fact that his work far from being naturalist, stresses a rigid, almost mechanical geometrical formalism that is basically, as critics pointed out, anti-lyrical. This, along with the way that his work was often received – and the remarkable extent to which the presence of nudity in his work was avoided by critics including Lord – suggests that the discourse redeeming the possible social significance of the work was a way of neutralizing its nudity.<sup>83</sup> And this is where Lord's argument seems to go seriously wrong since it occludes the (at least symbolic) role of transgression intrinsic to Boyle's practice and discussed in the following section. This also complicates the symbolic significance that Greenwood insisted Boyle's work had, namely the programmatic attempt "to be nothing less than a crusade for the spiritual and cultural redemption of Canada."<sup>84</sup> As the following section will suggest, Boyle's work, and its figuring of nationalism through erotic boys, symbolic

of the transitional phase that Nietzsche had identified with nihilism, stresses less redemption than damnation and brings him into the ambit of the decadent.

### 4.3. Illuminations of the *poète maudit*

“‘Whenever the lover of boys –,’ suggests Aristophanes, “or any other person for that matter – has the good fortune to encounter his own actual other half, affection and kinship and love combined inspire in him an emotion which is quite overwhelming, and such a pair practically refuse ever to be separated even for a moment.” In light of this, it cannot be denied, then, that Plato too was a Nihilist.”<sup>85</sup>

“But the heroes must come or we shall have only a community of beavers, not a nation.”<sup>86</sup>

We have just established an outline for the peculiar way in which Boyle has constructed a reinvention of the History genre, one which is both at odd with and partakes of the various traditions of the genre that have evolved in Canada. The most sophisticated cycle of historical paintings that Boyle produced in this period was called *Yankee Go Home* (1973-1974). It consisted of *The Rape of St. Catharine* [Fig. 80], *Stompin’ Tom on St. Paul St.*, *Reclining Beaver* [Fig. 81] and *Elsinore*. [Fig. 77] While nude young boys and teenagers populate many of Boyle’s paintings in the 1970s (they subsequently become rare and clothed), this is probably no more explicitly the case than in two of the large canvases that make up the *Yankee Go Home* series. These four paintings mix an iconography of landscapes from Boyle’s life in Ontario, publicity images of famous Canadians and more obscure archival images from Canadian history. When selling this painting, Boyle stated that, “The Yankee Go Home series reflected the ongoing loss of sovereignty by Canada to the United States in our quest for greater access to American markets, and in their quest for greater access to our resources and territory.”<sup>87</sup> These figures are all dislocated from the contexts that Boyle found them in and superimposed

on his landscapes, but by far the most dominant figures in this series are the nude males. Boyle himself appears in one with the sort of quotidian nakedness that he usually accords the female body, but two boys in their early teens dwarf all other figures and confront the viewer. These figures are overt in their sexuality and what they suggest is something far more ambiguous than the narrative of redemption that Greenwood suggested above. The semi-erect penis of the giant boy in *Elsinore* dominates the image while the boy in *Reclining Beaver* lounges in a deliberately inviting fashion, as if offering himself to the viewer. These paintings united both Boyle's renovation of the History genre, but also highlighted the central importance of the figure of the erotic child in his work. Such a child had multiple symbolic meanings, and, at least as importantly, no meaning. As such, the child both posits and erases itself, retaining a force of basic and complex negativity. It tied Boyle, wittingly or not, to a way of treating sex and the nation in Canada spanning back a century and, quite deliberately, to the tradition of the French *poète maudit* and the Decadent.<sup>88</sup> It is the latter that I will examine first.

This symbolic overlap is accented by Boyle's longstanding interest in the work of French child-poet Arthur Rimbaud. The poet appears in the early painting *Arthur at the Lacrosse Game* (1965) [Fig. 82] and is quoted in some of the painter's writings as well as re-appearing in the *Chromatic Aberrations* (1988) alongside a self-portrait of the painter and a portrait of the young Québécois *poète maudit* Émile Nelligan. [Fig. 83] According to Gerald Macklin, in Rimbaud's work the child is privileged for an ability to concentrate on a singular image and raise it above all else. Inevitably orphaned, the child lives on the borders of society. They embrace a language that muddies myth-making with the vernacular and takes joy in sex and scatology. This finds a clear echo in Boyle's

expressed desire “to defile myself in public.”<sup>89</sup> The *poète maudit* rejoices in their weakness and their stench, taking this as a sign that they are closer to the wilderness than the world of adults. This orphan is “witness and participant in moments of fulfilment, but equally the disinherited mourner at times of relapse and disenchantment.”<sup>90</sup> The shadow of Rimbaud’s figure is also present in much of Boyle’s discussion of making art, spanning from his early career as a public school teacher to the chaotic noise work of the Nihilist Spasm Band. Boyle writes that, “We have a lot to learn from kids. Perhaps more than we have to teach them. Unrestrained egocentric vision, the nature of affection, energy, awareness, perversion...”<sup>91</sup>

Certainly, in his younger years, and modified later, Curnoe shared comparable feelings. [Fig. 84] In an essay that he wrote before being expelled from OCA,<sup>92</sup> Curnoe insisted on the importance of the *poète maudit*, linking them to Jean Genet and the Beats.<sup>93</sup> He thought that coming to this material out of the “vacuum of Canadian education” was likely a good thing. He wondered at the closeness of spirit of artists in disparate media during the Symbolist era and pointed out that Mallarmé was writing in the age of Wyatt Earp, the same kind of juxtaposition that appears as frequently in his paintings and Boyle’s.<sup>94</sup>

As we have seen, part of taking on the role of a nihilistic anti-politician and anti-musician, an early aspect of Boyle’s public performance as an artist was the use of his body to intrude on the public sphere. This was done in ways that would humiliate himself and others and the controversy that he and his cohort created deliberately exploited the spectre of his body to splinter the local art scene.<sup>95</sup> His artist statement for the *Heart of London* exhibition reads, “The day I can truly defile myself in public I will have

accomplished everything and will no longer have a need to paint.”<sup>96</sup> This seems to be an extension of the artistic practice that he established when he began painting, which consisted of him drawing his own penis, often while masturbating.<sup>97</sup> Boyle’s *Seated Nude* [Figs. 85-86] was perhaps the most aggressive instance of him placing his body in such an exhibitionistic position. The piece turns the idea of painting on its head and then takes the head off the artist. Flat on the horizontal plane are two portraits of historical figures (blues musicians). Sitting astride them is a chair with the silhouette of Boyle’s buttocks, testicles and the tip of his penis on its seat while the soles of his feet step on the portraits beneath. While the image can be read as the tactile leftover from the artist’s body on the object, the way it has been rendered is more complex. In fact, it has the quality of reversibility. The painter could be seated nude and facing the viewer or be captured with his back turned, as if on his knees and offering his backside up.<sup>98</sup> What is present in either case is his simultaneous and literalized rendering of his body as an imprinting device and its signature as an object in a way that mocks the figure of the artist while leaving him both exposed and absent. As a gesture, it is less painterly than photographic with the indexical moment of contact put on display. This adds to the sensual tactility of the work while (again with literalness) transferring the body to not just an object but furniture. Arguably, Boyle’s chair (perhaps unconsciously) plays into the surrealist tradition for doing such things (such as the sculptures of Dorothea Tanning). Certainly, in terms more contemporaneous with it, it is an interesting precedent to Allen Jones’ fiberglass women as furniture sculptures (such as *Chair*, 1969) that came several years later. Yet what Boyle is suggesting about sex and its function is quite different from

Jones, whose sexuality falls in line with (an eccentric) consumer fetishism where Boyle's falls in line with the black mysticism of the *poète maudit*.

Boyle persisted in trying to include explicit material in his shows. He told one journalist that this was art of his "rejection of social taboos, 'The way the whole sexuality thing is dealt with in this country is so immature.'"<sup>99</sup> But this embrace of the socially abject was also, according to Boyle, part of the basic identity of the artist in Canada. As he would claim, artists "are the poorest element of society on the whole... They have no power at all and are laughed at by the people."<sup>100</sup>

This brings us back to the *Yankee Go Home* series, which was one of the most explicit fusions of Boyle's embrace of the *poète maudit* figure and his anti-politics. *Reclining Beaver*, like *Elsinore* in the same series, is a broad horizontal oil painting with a naked adolescent boy at its centre. His body lays, legs spread, on a quilted surface. The image is woven with a coloured grid that echoes the pattern of the quilt the boy is on. The lines of the grid help to intensify the high contrast that make up the body, insisting again on the construction of the image as a surface that projects toward the viewer, or, as Boyle stated above, as a kind of skin. To the figure's side is a beaver gnawing on a piece of wood, an image that would become an integral part of Boyle's own signature, gracing his personal statements. The beaver is not broken up by the grid. The boy's arm rests on the animal. His hand and feet are both exaggerated in size, presumably thanks to the skewed perspective of the source photo. The images of the boys in the series were taken from a magazine found in the alley behind his studio in St. Catharines.<sup>101</sup> He had to transfer the photo onto a canvas using the grid method, a relatively tedious process. But why are grids so basic to Boyle's work in this period, something noted by frequently baffled or largely

indifferent critics at the time? Part of this is that it insists on the relationship between painting and mapping. Like Curnoe's work discussed above, the treatment of the body as a way of mapping the space of the region or nation is clearly part of how the images are constructed. The rigidity of the grid also points not simply to the construction of the image, but to the almost Ron Martin-like insistence on the mechanical laboriousness of it.

The image suggests a typically evocative statement from the painter: "American ownership of the key sectors of the Canadian economy overtook and suspended that of Britain during the 1920's and 1930's. Canada was virtually stripped of all protections and laid naked and open legged for total exploitation by the American capitalist empire..."<sup>102</sup> Such statements invite an allegorical reading of the work. The subtitle of the painting is an unsubtle pun on the 'beaver' shot common to porn magazines, though graphically re-gendered. The presence of the beaver does not simply turn this into a joke.<sup>103</sup> The beaver is there as a double of the boy, who assumes the role of sexual object much as Boyle had done with his own body. But while Boyle had dehumanized and transformed himself into a piece of erotic furniture, the boy is dehumanized very differently as he is transformed into an erotically exploitable landscape. Taken from a magazine of child pornography, the model is reclining to offer himself sexually to the viewer, his body doubling symbolically as the Canadian natural resources alluded to by the beaver. Yet, with his exaggerated hands and feet and his outward stare, there is nothing vulnerable about him. Like another work in the series – *The Rape of St. Catharine* (1973) – this image *can* be read as picturing the violation of the country by American exploitation.<sup>104</sup> But, as already indicated more broadly, something quite different also seems to be in play.

The status of youth as a symbol or sign of status is also complicated by the Rimbaudian theme Boyle associates it with, one which helps to explain the sexual potency of the child figure. In fact, probably no figures in Boyle's work are as adamantly imposing on the viewer as his erotic pubescents. An article on the artist in the *London Free Press* shows him standing beside *Elsinore* and is shot from an angle that occludes the blatantly semi-erect penis of the child at the centre of the painting in favour of the topical (and morally recuperable) child-soldier at the edge.<sup>105</sup> Boyle's iconography can also be interpreted as taking on the heritage of a very particular slice of the history of the Canadian nude, playing with and against it, de facto identifying himself with national art history. This extends back perhaps the most blatantly to the work of fellow Londoner Paul Peel, whose nudes of children were suffused with the aesthetics of the Paris Salon of the Decadent era. Peel's *La Jeunesse* (1891) [Fig. 88], with its nymphet children spread out on what appear to be polar bear carpets while feeding birds was, even for its time, an "erotic depiction of youth" and their 'apparent innocence',<sup>106</sup> although some of John Lyman's portrayals of lounging nude adolescents fall even more directly in line. [Fig. 89] Leaping ahead, Goodridge Roberts' nude painting, *Adolescent* (1942) [Fig. 90], travelled in the United States as part of the Contemporary Painting in Canada show. In a review, Walter Abell interpreted it as, "Equivalent to their (Group of Seven) interpretation of a young country is the inquiring sensitivity which makes Roberts' Boy seem symbolic of young humanity."<sup>107</sup> It also ties quite readily to the figuring of nationalism, either Canadian or Québécois, in terms of pederasty that is detectable in Scott Symons and Pierre Maheu.<sup>108</sup>

The erotic child was not Boyle's province alone. Several of his contemporaries devoted a considerable portion of their careers to it, but their work is strikingly different from his. John Newman (better known as a long-time instructor at OCA) and Tom LaPierre invested themselves in mythologizing the erotic lives of pubescent and pre-pubescent girls. In Newman [Fig. 91], these thin lined and lithe figures populate a sphere of perpetual adolescence, symbolic of "the interplay of nature and society" and the 'miraculous physical changes' active in that period, much as one finds in the work of the English photographer David Hamilton or the painter Balthus.<sup>109</sup> LaPierre's work [Fig. 92] bears more hallmarks of his teacher Frederick Hagan, evincing a frequent sense of the carnivalesque and the grotesque sustained within his narratives. The Balthus-like image of erotic youth was also central to some of the work of Fred Ross, notably those works banned in the *Eros* '65 scandal, though reports mentioning the work avoid addressing this. What Boyle does is starkly different from these idealized uses of ephebophilic fantasy.<sup>110</sup> The female gaze on a young naked boy also was present in a set of very different photographs by Judith Eglinton, who presented young boys, cropped without heads, their penises protruding against stark, vibrant monochromatic backgrounds. [Figs. 93-94] Such imagery would be complicated later in her book of mystical photos, *Earth Visions* (1973), which placed these young nude children into a mythic narrative of archetypes and spiritual metamorphoses. What Boyle seemingly shares with these different bodies of work is the notion of the child or youth and their erotic life as a sort of midway in human being, one which he maps onto the history of Canada, all while treating it as masturbatory reverie as much or more than as political allegory. This is

implied in his depiction of himself as a child halfway between the birth places of David Milne and Tom Thomson in *Toward Paisley* (1976).<sup>111</sup>

To return to Boyle's *Elsinore*, the child brings to the fore the problem of mythification that Lord raised. To the side is the image of the child soldier, a figure that can be readily redeemed in socio-political terms both as a figure of liberation and a figure to be liberated. The other child, however, the nude boy who is simultaneously the naked body of Canada and the naked body of *the artist* (in the symbolic sense of an abject social outcast) is far more ambiguous in its desires. And it is this sort of ambiguousness that destabilizes the image's meaning. One of the other ironies of Lord's attempt to insist that Boyle is seeking to liberate the viewer by making history mythic is that the myths that persist the most consistently in Boyle are precisely those that celebrate the abandonment of the social, political and meaning more generally. As stated earlier, most of the heroes in Boyle's work were criminals, terrorists, poets and painters, although sometimes he would feature athletes, musicians and politicians. The figure of the child, the outcast and the wilderness overlap as zones of potential at the margin of being human. This frontier territory is not an Edenic space outside of history but rather, what the historian Michael S. Cross identified at the time as the space where law collapses and the normative claims of liberal ideology do not hold, where, effectively, the space of historical progress is abandoned for excess.<sup>112</sup> This is, after all, the most plausible reason why a substantial percentage of Boyle's heroes are criminals and terrorists and why his own art functioned as a performative form of artistic terrorism. It is also here that the value of the figure as an excess of meaning, rather than its symbolic crystallization, seems to be most forceful.

Over the course of this chapter we have seen how the claims for negative nationalism and nihilistic regionalism have functioned on the figurative level in some of the work of Greg Curnoe and John Boyle. In Curnoe, this involved concocting an erotic geography that mixed an array of regional materials in an almost machinic manner, fossilizing time, the erotic existing within the crystallization of form. Meanwhile, with Boyle we saw two distinct tendencies: a reinvention of the History genre through his own eccentric understanding of pornography as the meaningless assemblage of immediate materials-to-hand; and a mythic way of imagining the Canadian artist as a *poète maudit*. The latter either through his role as an artist or as figured with images of erotic adolescent boys functioning both as an allegorical sign for the exploitation of Canada (the redemptive reading), and as the potential *jouissance* of abjection and abandonment of the social (the decadent reading) and its figuration. In this, he retains the anti-synthesizing model of disarticulation favored by his fellow Regionalists.

The mythologization of Canada will be a central aspect of the work of Joyce Wieland over the course of the following chapters, cast in a rather different set of forms and strategies. Unlike Boyle and Curnoe, who consistently aborted the development of narrative and lyricism, and so retained a generally frozen or stuttering mode of image production, Wieland's work is more fluid, more hyperbolic, and even more extreme in insisting on understanding nationalism through both a form of objectification and the cultivation of a peculiar variety of idiocy.

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<sup>1</sup> George Bowering, *The Mustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1993), 77.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Braithwaite, "Seeing humanity in a body-rub parlor," *Toronto Star*, August 8, 1974, B6.

<sup>3</sup> Rae Davis, "Chambers—Curnoe—Urquhart: The Life of Death in London, Ontario," *Canadian Art*, July 1966, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *On the Bed*, *Chaste Nude*, *Marriage Manual* and *Art is the Complement of a Weak Mind* are cited as examples and are discussed below.

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- <sup>5</sup> Barry Lord, "Swinging London (Ontario)," *The Star Weekly Magazine*, January 13, 1968, 19.
- <sup>6</sup> The Nihilist Spasm Band featured Boyle, Hugh McIntyre, John Clement, Bill Exley, Murray Favro, Archie Leitch, Art Pratten, and Greg Curnoe and was originally founded in 1965 as a joke. It was discussed in the previous chapter.
- <sup>7</sup> Barry Lord, "Swinging London (Ontario)," *The Star Weekly Magazine*, January 13, 1968, 19.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>9</sup> Greg Curnoe, "Curnoe on London." *London Free Press*, October 17, 1970. John Boyle would write a similar protest in St. Catherine's. See his letter to the editor in the *St. Catherine's Standard*, August 17, 1971.
- <sup>10</sup> Greg Curnoe, "Progress and Urban Renewal," np. Box 1-15, "Journals 1970 (Part One)," Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>11</sup> Greg Curnoe, "Connections," 1-2. Box 1-11, "Writings 1967," Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>12</sup> Greg Curnoe, "Writing 1961," np. dated December 7, 1961. Box 1-5, Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>13</sup> Greg Curnoe, "Computer Journals, (1969-1972)," dated July 25, 1969, np. Box 1-14, Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> Robert C. McKenzie, "'Beaver Kosmos': A Narrowminded Review," *20 Cents Magazine*, April 1967, np.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> Thibault Ghislain and Mark Hayward, "Understanding Machines: A History of Canadian Mechanology." *Canadian Journal of Communication* vol. 42, no. 3 (2017), 450. Hart was a computer scientist and Le Moyne a theologian.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 458. "Whereas the central notion of cybernetics was system, the comparable concept in mechanology is soma. It is the human body with its balance, its rapport, and its emanations which gives to mechanology a degree of universality which put it into legitimate comparison with the broad extension of science." Gilbert Simondon; trans. Ninian Mellamphy with a preface by John Hart. "On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects" (London: University of Western Ontario, 1980), vii. For Hart, scientific and technological models of the body cannot adequately come to terms with this soma. *Ibid.*, xviii
- <sup>21</sup> The collaboration culminated in the exhibition, *Inventions and Perpetual Motion Machines* at 20/20 Gallery. Curnoe wrote the catalogue essay for it. He notes the show "affirms the depth of the culture that exists in Ontario. I also believe that this exhibition indicates a similar tendency in this area to that which Claude Levi-Strauss has written about in 'The Savage Mind.' Bricolage... the activity of a personal who repairs or makes things using objects and parts that he has found or saved e.g. using baby buggy wheels to make a wagon." He goes on to quote Lévi-Strauss, "Further, the 'bricoleur' also, and indeed principally, derives his poetry from the fact that he does not confine himself to accomplishment and execution: he 'speaks' not only with things... but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities." Curnoe notes that there is a significant difference between how engineers make things and how bricoleurs do. Greg Curnoe, "Inventions and Perpetual Motion Machines." Catalogue essay for 20/20 closing show June 2-21, 1970, np.
- <sup>22</sup> Gilbert Simondon; trans. Ninian Mellamphy with a preface by John Hart, "On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects" (London: University of Western Ontario, 1980), i-ii.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.
- <sup>25</sup> Simondon, Gilbert; trans. Ninian Mellamphy with a preface by John Hart. "On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects" (London: University of Western Ontario, 1980), xx.
- <sup>26</sup> Barry Lord, "Swinging London (Ontario)," *The Star Weekly Magazine*, January 13, 1968, 24.
- <sup>27</sup> Fred Gayser, "Greg Curnoe," *Artviews*, Winter 1987/1988, 26.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.
- <sup>29</sup> *Chaste Nude* complicates this. The head could be, quite performatively, effaced, or the 'blurred' paint in its vicinity could be illustrating hair in movement, the arms raised over the face and distorted, as the penis (if that's what it is) at the extremity of the painting is about to penetrate.

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<sup>30</sup> The overt artifice, theatricality, erotic content and deliberate incoherence also maps directly onto the aesthetics of the films that Robbe-Grillet made.

<sup>31</sup> His sketches suggest that the image of a woman and a man with the belt had been planned since at least 1963.

<sup>32</sup> In a letter from 1964, Curnoe explains, "When I wish to put a likeness of someone I know on a painting, I get then[sic] to sit in front of a lamp and then I trace their projected shadow on apiece[sic] of paper." Greg Curnoe, Box 5, "Correspondence 1964" - "To prof Groome," 2. Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1987), 110.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 111. Yet, in one of his archived notes, Curnoe asks, "Will the constant and more rapid addition of facts and connection to our cultures lead to Dr. Bucke's 'cosmic consciousness' and the impossibility of all explanations of things except for the natural synthesis of individuals. [no?]" This was altered and published as "Will the constant and accelerating addition of facts and connections to our cultures lead to Dr. Bucke's 'Cosmic Consciousness'?" Greg Curnoe quoted in Dennis Reid, *Greg Curnoe Canada. X Bienal Sao Paulo* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969), 67.

<sup>35</sup> John Boyle, Box 18-3 [Manuscripts for the unpublished novel] *The Gergovnians* (ca. 1950s), 132. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Chartier quoted in Jack Cahill, "'He was so nice,' landlady weeps," *Toronto Daily Star*, May 19, 1966, 8.

<sup>37</sup> John Boyle and Barry Lord, *John Boyle: A Retrospective* (London: London Regional Art Gallery, 1991), 22.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 23-25.

<sup>39</sup> Roger Bainbridge, "The heroes of John Boyle: Painter who's learning art of survival," *Kingston Whig Standard*, Friday January 14, 1977, A1.

<sup>40</sup> Exemplified by early examples such as Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* (1556-1559).

<sup>41</sup> Roy C. Strong, *And When Did You Last See Your Father?: The Victorian Painter and British History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 16.

<sup>42</sup> Edgar Wind, "The Revolution of History Painting," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* vol. 2, no. 2 (October 1938), 121. Liam Lenihan, in his commentary on British History painting, notes the substantial tension in the genre between metaphor and metonymy as both allegorical nuance and material accuracy of depiction threatened to fragment the whole of the picture and reduce it to a chaos of particularities. See Lenihan, *The Writings of James Barry and the Genre of History Painting, 1775-1809* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 64-68.

<sup>43</sup> R. H. Stacey, *C.W. Jefferys* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1985), 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>45</sup> Charles W. Jefferys, *The Picture Gallery of Canadian History: Illustrations Drawn & Collected by C.W. Jefferys; Assisted by T.W. McLean*. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1942-1950), v.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> It is unclear how much they were aware of Jefferys' work.

<sup>48</sup> The show, running from April 28-May 21, 1972, featured 14 artists who displayed their original works in a gallery while copies were created by professional billboard painters to display around the city. Boyle noted that because the painting had a nude in it, "if I had asked anybody if I could put it up, they would have said no. We put it up anyway and there was only one complaint and there were about 60,000 people who saw the show." Joan Murray, "Joan Murray Interviews John Boyle," *The Canadian Forum*, March 1973, 37.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Johns, "The St. Catharines billboard show," *artscanada*, October/November 1972, 53.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 35. This, he explains on the next page, was in part because of his hostility to the gallery and dealer system of art practice, which he derided as 'phoney' and 'perhaps unintentionally, corrupt'. Ibid., 36.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Boyle contrasts this starkly with public and propaganda art in Eastern Europe which he claims the people hate. John Boyle, Written response of Barry Lord, [Typescript], 12. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>53</sup> D. Webb, "John B. Boyle: Welcome Home," *Imprint*, January/February 1978, 7. An irony of this is that an early performance by the Spasm band was attacked as garbage and Boyle took offense to it, or at least made a public show of being so.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>56</sup> Artist statement in the brochure for *The Artspace Exchange Exhibition* at the Art Gallery of Memorial University, St John's Newfoundland. February 13- 23, 1986, np. The same statement is used for his "Artists with their Work" profile by the AGO.

<sup>57</sup> The plans for them clearly place them in the genre of cheap, disposable toys that one would find to purchase at the back of comic books at the time.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Wilson, Typescript for exhibition essay "John Boyle: Paintings and Graphics; Feb. 6 - March 11, 1979 at The Gallery, Stratford," 1. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>60</sup> In some of his handwritten notes, Boyle quotes Cesare Lombroso on the physiognomy of criminals and the connection between the structure of the face and anarchist tendencies, before ironically concluding that without such a facial structure, one is left only to pray for liberation and dream of assassination. John Boyle, "Notes on nihilism," [Manuscript] John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>61</sup> Kay Kritzwiser, "At the galleries," *The Globe and Mail*, January 22, 1972, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Liz Wylie, "John Boyle plays off 'Pop' with polemic," *The Georgian*, March 7, 1978, 17.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>64</sup> Sandra Coulson, "Celebrating Canada," *The London Free Press*, Sunday May 9, 1999, D2.

<sup>65</sup> Kate Taylor, "Relevance versus reverence," *The Globe and Mail*, September 21, 1991, C13. A painting of the Black Donnellys features a random nude woman, he would insist, for no reason other than she popped into his head. A Donnelly also spills into a portrait of Jack Chambers because they happened to live in the same region. See Susanne Tausig, "Artist John Boyle 'a patriot's dream'," *The London Free Press*, November 25, 1975, B8.

<sup>66</sup> Liz Wylie, "John Boyle plays off 'Pop' with polemic," *The Georgian*, March 7, 1978, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Susanne Tausig, "Artist John Boyle 'a patriot's dream'," *The London Free Press*, November 25, 1975, B8.

<sup>68</sup> Gary Michael Dault, "Romantic nationalism permeates painting," *Toronto Star*, May 14, 1976, E10.

<sup>69</sup> Merike Weiler, "Exciting young artists has his first major show," *Toronto Star*, January 21, 1972.

<sup>70</sup> Lenore Crawford, "John Boyle's one-man show significant artistic event," *London Free Press*, March 13, 1974, 67.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> John Boyle, "The Art of Pornography," *20 Cents Magazine*, October 1966, np.

<sup>73</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet; trans. Richard Howard, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 155.

<sup>74</sup> Gary Michael Dault, "Romantic nationalism permeates painting," *Toronto Star*, May 14, 1976, E10.

<sup>75</sup> Lenore Crawford, "John Boyle's one-man show significant artistic event," *London Free Press*, March 13, 1974, 67.

<sup>76</sup> Wayne Edmonstone, "Artist John Boyle preoccupied with the aging man of action," *Toronto Star*, February 9, 1973, 28.

<sup>77</sup> Tausig also stresses his subjectivity. Susanne Tausig, "Artist John Boyle 'a patriot's dream'," *The London Free Press*, November 25, 1975, B8.

<sup>78</sup> Kay Woods, "John Boyle," *artsacanada*, March/April 1977, 57.

<sup>79</sup> Joan Murray, "Joan Murray Interviews John Boyle," *The Canadian Forum*, March 1973, 35.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Greenwood, "John Boyle," *artsacanada*, February/March 1972, 18.

<sup>81</sup> John Boyle and Barry Lord, *John Boyle: A Retrospective* (London: London Regional Art Gallery, 1991), 25.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>83</sup> In his review of Lord's history of Canadian painting, Boyle chastises him for only having three nudes in the book, "one of Indians and two of negroes. Is Lord a racist? Of course not. But this is the kind of Logic he has used over and over to tar and dismiss painter after painter. And why aren't there any nudes? [...] Are we to have some asinine prohibition against nudity imposed on the people by the new oppressors as we have had by the old? Paintings of mine showing Norman Bethune, Emma Goldman and Gabriel Dumont are poo-pooed because nudes are included and Lord associates nudity with derision in his special iconography." John Boyle, Written response of Barry Lord, [Typescript], 13. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

- <sup>84</sup> Michael Greenwood, "John Boyle," *artscanada*, February/March 1972, 24.
- <sup>85</sup> John Boyle, "Notes on nihilism," [Manuscript], 2. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>86</sup> George Munro Grant cited in Robert Stuart Grant, "Negative nationalism and the poetry of Dennis Lee" (MA thesis, University of Windsor, 1971), 19.
- <sup>87</sup> John B. Boyle, "History Note," Michael Gibson Gallery, 1999, np.
- <sup>88</sup> The importance of aspects of the *poète maudit* tradition to the decolonising imagination has also been noted by Elie Kedourie, see his introduction to *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1970), 108-110.
- <sup>89</sup> National Gallery of Canada, *Heart of London [le coeur de London]* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1968), np.
- <sup>90</sup> Gerald M. Macklin, "The Disinherited Child in the Poetry of Arthur Rimbaud," *Romance Studies* vol. 14, no. 2 (1996), 52.
- <sup>91</sup> John B. Boyle, "Why I Hate Acid Rock," *artscanada*, October/November 1968, 18.
- <sup>92</sup> Greg Curnoe, Untitled essay for OCA (1958-60?), 1. Box 1-3 Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>93</sup> An image of Rimbaud appears in Curnoe's drawing *The Old Boat Broke* (1970).
- <sup>94</sup> Greg Curnoe, Untitled essay for OCA (1958-60?), 4. Box 1-3 Greg Curnoe fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO
- <sup>95</sup> This is particularly evident in a scheme that he hatched to ruin the reputation and career of local curator Clare Bice, deliberately exploiting controversy over the artwork and institutional procedures to do so. For an account, see N. G. Poole, *The Art of London, 1830-1980* (London: Blackpool Press, 1984), 169, 185-190 and Catherine Ford, "Protesting artists thwarted in bid to withdraw paintings," *The London Free Press*, May 7, 1966; anon., "Bice backed, 3 artists quit show," *The London Free Press*, May 11, 1966; and Anon., "Three artists intend to withdraw exhibits in gallery dispute," *The London Free Press*, May 10, 1966.
- <sup>96</sup> National Gallery of Canada, *Heart of London [le coeur de London]* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1968), np.
- <sup>97</sup> This is an often-told anecdote within the London art scene and his early sketchbooks, housed at the AGO, suggest that this may be the case, or this may be deliberate ornamentation on his persona.
- <sup>98</sup> The second reading is made more explicit in his recycling of the image for a print he created for Arts Against Repression in 1982. [Fig. 87]
- <sup>99</sup> Susanne Tausig, "Artist John Boyle 'a patriot's dream'," *The London Free Press*, November 25, 1975, B8.
- <sup>100</sup> John Boyle, Written response of Barry Lord, [Typescript], 12. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>101</sup> John B. Boyle, "History Note," Michael Gibson Gallery, 1999, np.
- <sup>102</sup> John B. Boyle, "Canada as Colony," [Manuscript], 3. John Boyle fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.
- <sup>103</sup> The nude child with a beaver may also refer to the image of the nude, infantilized Trudeau stitching a beaver together that was discussed earlier.
- <sup>104</sup> *The Rape of St. Catharine* features the landscape of St. Catharines along the bottom of the canvas with five figures along the upper half: the face of Boyle's wife, Janet, a female nude, a nude self-portrait, Chief Poundmaker, and a moose.
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>106</sup> Victoria A. Baker, *Paul Peel: A Retrospective, 1860-1892 / Paul Peel: Rétrospective, 1860-1892* (London: London Regional Art Gallery, 1986), 57. In this genealogy of the erotic Canadian child we can turn to the imagery of Laura Muntz, who also trades on the nude, though in different terms. These can be delineated both within the shift in style from the Orientalizing tendencies of Peel's work to the more lightly impressionist – there's a distinct Renoir quality to her work, though more solid and somber – haunted by a 'maternal gaze'. For an account of the significance of the child in Muntz, particularly in regard to matriarchal feminism and the family romance connected to it, see Elizabeth Mulley's "Women and Children in Context: Laura Muntz and the Representation of Maternity" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2000).
- <sup>107</sup> Sandra Paikowsky, *Goodridge Roberts, 1904-1974* (Kleinburg: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1998), 75. Paikowsky does her best to insist there is no erotic or political content to the image.
- <sup>108</sup> Scott Symons, *Combat Journal for Place d'Armes* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 141; Pierre Maheu, *Un parti pris révolutionnaire* (Montréal: Parti pris, 1983), 143-145.

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<sup>109</sup> Robert Freeman and Kay Kritzwiser, *John Newman: Rites of Passage* (Stratford: The Gallery/Stratford, 1994), 8.

<sup>110</sup> The reclining nude in Boyle also has a double in Shayna Laing's adolescent nude *The Traveler*. There, the nude is similarly placed against a semi-abstract backdrop, presented with little context and open to an ephibophilic's gaze. Unlike in Boyle, her presentation of the erotic boy is considerably more voyeuristic, presented as though glimpsed unaware, sunning himself, in a kind of preparation for modelling himself. The erotic boy is also central to the film *Montreal Main* (Frank Vitale, 1974). In Thomas Waugh and Jason Garrison's book on the film, they cast it as an "orphan of film history" stranded in 'frontier territory', abandoned by film history generally, and gay and queer film history more deliberately. They situate it both within the Child Liberation movement and the various battles over the sexuality of minors being waged between some factions of the politicized gay community and the unified front of the far right with radical lesbians and feminists. Under the gaze of the latter triffecta, Johnny, would be transformed from a figure of ambivalent desire into the "perfect figure of a victim" to be protected by a paternalistic state against the potential perversity of gays. See Thomas Waugh and Jason Garrison, *Montreal Main* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010), particularly 31-36, 141-144.

<sup>111</sup> One of the more curious instances of erotic child fantasies comes in the form of a small book by Murray Markowitz. Drawing by a Jewish boy who loves a German girl, was published by Coach House in 1971. Compact, but too awkward to fit in a pocket, and stapled together, the 32-page book is made up of drawings printed in blue on blue. It's unclear what the book is, an archived sketchbook from the then 28-year-old Markowitz, or an experiment done in a deliberately Outsider Art style conveyed in the prominent frontal depiction of figures, the flattened background and the irrational use of space and lines to examine his real or fictional childhood sex memories. The genitalia themselves are multiplied, often hermaphroditic. One image is captioned by admitting, "sometimes I get mixed up" while another casts this sexual mixing as a "LOV SCENE GIRL IS BOY BOY IS GIRL."

<sup>112</sup> Michael S. Cross, "The Shiners' War: Social Violence and the Ottawa Valley in the 1830s," *The Canadian Historical Review* vol. liv, no. 1 (March 1973), 12.

## Chapter Five: Camp Canada

The final three chapters of this dissertation examine the work of Joyce Wieland. More specifically, they look at Wieland's retrospective exhibition *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* (1971) at the National Gallery; the short film *Pierre Vallières* (1972); and her only feature film, *The Far Shore* (1976). Consecutively, that is a phantasmagoria on the post-Centennial theme of Canada; a romantic examination of Québécois separatism by an anglophone; and a tragicomic softcore porn meditation on the death of Canada.

Although there is a significant body of scholarly work on Wieland, it has scarcely skimmed the surface of the themes just listed, nor has it dealt with her work in its most directly relevant context, namely that which the rest of this dissertation consists of. My synthetic reading of Wieland will work through what she claimed to be her primary concerns, "Canadian independence, northern mysticism, organic farming, sex."<sup>1</sup>

The exhibition I discuss was advertised as a retrospective on her career. Aside from providing an avenue for looking at how her work was received, it also provides a preliminary survey of many of the formal directions that her work had taken up to that point. Unpacking the formal and metaphysical implications of the choices involved in the production of the work will be the primary focus of Chapter Five. The two chapters that follow it will track ways that many of these elements are reimagined in her subsequent work. The film that finally became *The Far Shore* was already envisaged in the original exhibition, even being mentioned in its catalogue and intended to carry the same title. While this may give the works discussed a certain sense of cohesiveness, it would be a mistake to overstress this. Although there is a strong continuity within Wieland's general

cosmology, the execution of individual works, while undoubtedly in conversation with one another, nonetheless retain their own share of contradictions.

### 5.1. True Patriot Love; Beavering among the mandarins

“Miss Wieland’s understanding of love, whether between humans or between human and native land, is warm, sensual and, on the face of it, passionate. It is given to few to correlate logically her paradoxical actions and artistry, to know when she has tongue in cheek.”<sup>2</sup>

“...she recognized that politics amuses and bites differently for different audiences. Like irony, it cuts more than one way.”<sup>3</sup>

“At this moment, there is a resurgence of nationalism and it is our own brand and no one else’s.”<sup>4</sup>

I am going to examine the context, content, and reception of Joyce Wieland’s retrospective exhibition, *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* in this chapter. While this landmark event has often been alluded to in discussions of her work, the general hostility that it received – both for its aesthetics and its nationalism – has not been described in detail, nor has the often ironic and carnivalesque atmosphere that it was part of. The description of the exhibition introduces Wieland’s aesthetics and also highlights how acrimonious the theme of Canadian nationalism often was, particularly within the arts. This provides a quite remarkable distinction from the first exhibition mentioned in this dissertation, Francine Larivée’s *La Chambre nuptiale*, which successfully functioned as part of the Liberal state’s “démocratisation de la culture.” From there, this chapter will introduce Wieland’s work through the lens of two artistic traditions that she is rarely associated with but which I think are crucial to understanding her work, Tantra and Camp.

In 1969, curator Pierre Théberge invited Wieland to put on a retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada. This would be the first exhibition by a living female Canadian artist at the Gallery. Théberge's choice had been inspired by her quilt *Raison avant la passion* (1968) [Figs. 96] and Wieland's public endorsement of Pierre Elliott Trudeau.<sup>5</sup> Two years after the initial invitation, *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* would open. Wieland's show was avowedly exhibitionistic, dedicated to the creation of a participatory environment and about the environment of the nation. The *Toronto Telegram* saw it as a tale of her romance with Canada, and more particularly with Trudeauvian Canada, alluding to the artist's confirmation of the 'quality of life' the prime minister represented and the quilting bees she held in his honour while she was living and working in New York City.<sup>6</sup> The exhibit would feature "everything from films to quilts and Sweet Beaver perfume to convince people that Canada has its own separate identity."<sup>7</sup>

As Gallery director Jean Sutherland Boggs would later explain, "It was planned when the gallery was asked to participate in Festival Canada as a genuinely patriotic exhibition to open on Canada Day itself."<sup>8</sup> The festival brought together sports and culture to attract tourists. It was part of a rebranding of Ottawa's 'stagnant image' with a sophisticated cosmopolitanism consisting of car races, ethnic dancing, strongman and lumberjack competitions, canoe-a-thons, sitar music by Ravi Shankar, a production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, a ballet version of George Ryga's play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1967), vintage car shows, and folk music.

With the promise that it would be "part of a mammoth exercise in participatory art"<sup>9</sup> launched by the Gallery, the exhibition opened at 6:00 PM on Dominion Day, July

1, and ran until August 8, 1971. The Gallery had been experimenting with more participatory work for some time already. Coincidentally, one of the major instances of this also involved the superimposition of nationalism and the erotic. The Centennial celebrations of 1967 saw the *sculpture '67* exhibition commissioned by the Gallery and curated by Dorothy Cameron, who was still awaiting a verdict from the Supreme Court over the *Eros '65* debacle. The open-air exhibition laid out in Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square often called for viewer participation. In practice, this required a skyrocketing security budget and culminated in a premature ending to the show as the artworks began to suffer from being excessively groped by the public. The sensual aspect of the show was likely even further impressed on the public imagination by the raucous opening party featuring a topless dancer that accompanied it.<sup>10</sup>

*True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* appeared in Ottawa during Trudeau's attempts at reforming the city's civil servant class. The 'New Ottawa Persons', as Sandra Gwyn described them in *Saturday Night*, were technocrats fond of fashioning themselves as up-to-date sophisticates, reading a medley of John K. Galbraith and Herbert Marcuse. The revamped civil service lounged at sidewalk cafés along the canal during their extended lunch breaks as bureaucratic haunts began to look like "Fantasyland overtaken by Tomorrowland."<sup>11</sup> The men sported bushy mustaches and wore gold chains around their exposed necks while the women had re-fashioned themselves in pantsuits.<sup>12</sup> They fixed up old houses, erected massive steel buildings, and obsessed over the coming cybernetic revolution. As Richard Gwyn observes, "Ottawa, 1968-72, was also a city devoid of irony and with only a precarious hold on common sense."<sup>13</sup> Or, as McLuhan

said of the class of new mandarins, whether in state or business, their desire to be ‘turned on’ was a Pavlovian reflex engendered by the environment.<sup>14</sup>

The New Ottawa Persons were also part of a shifting form of government and governmental style that Wieland had become skeptical of. Between the initial quilt made for Trudeau and the exhibition itself, the October Crisis had occurred and altered Wieland’s general attitude.<sup>15</sup> The Trudeau government’s style, already alluded to in an earlier chapter, was reflected not only in its military reaction to Québec’s transgressive nationalism, but also to how it was organizing its cultural institutions. With the National Museums Act, which came into force in 1968, the Gallery became one of the four components of the National Museums of Canada. The only one of the museums that had previously been incorporated, the Gallery had to be assimilated to a ‘highly bureaucratic organization’.<sup>16</sup> Douglas Ord has pointed to the irony that, as the repository for national identity, the Gallery was placed under the influence of the American urban planner Frederick Gutheim, commissioned by the Pearson government for a plan to consolidate their museums, reconfiguring their institutions in a “transnational style of management” that ignored local history or culture, effectively perpetuating a homogenizing bureaucracy.<sup>17</sup> This seemed to legitimate “George Grant’s warnings about ‘a continental ruling class’ as purveyors of ‘technique’ and a ‘common culture.’”<sup>18</sup> Wieland would later denigrate this bureaucratization of art and culture as fascist.<sup>19</sup>

Ottawa was struck by brutal humidity when *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* opened on July 1.<sup>20</sup> Members of Canadian Artists’ Representation (CAR) were present outside of the Gallery, distributing leaflets in protest of the Canada Council providing grants to American and expatriate Canadian artists. Since Wieland and her

husband Michael Snow were the latter, they were clearly targeted. The protest was soon overwhelmed by the first of Wieland's initiated rituals. [Fig. 97] Approximately one hundred members of the drum and bugle corps of the LaSalle Cadets played music on the terrace outside of the Gallery, including "The Maple Leaf Forever."<sup>21</sup> At the time, the Gallery was housed on the ground floor of the Lorne Building at the intersection of Elgin and Albert streets, a cement office block in downtown Ottawa with large horizontal banners proclaiming the title of the exhibition. [Fig. 98] The other floors of the Gallery contained a travelling exhibition from the Museum of Modern Art in New York featuring works by Picasso and Juan Gris, playing Wieland overtly against an early Modernist context. One review of the show points this out, rather unfavorably for her.<sup>22</sup>

Wieland's installation in the Gallery [Figs. 99-102] featured films as well as a wide assortment of textiles, drawings and installation pieces, spread across the first floor so anyone attending any show at the Gallery would need to walk through the space.<sup>23</sup> Its 35 works were sparsely distributed, punctuated by stubby potted trees, and usually suspended behind plexiglas or barrier ropes.<sup>24</sup> The English and French language versions of her *Reason Over Passion* quilts were on display. There were four embroidered and knit versions of the Canadian flag created in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia by Valerie McMillin. In Halifax, Joan McGregor had embroidered Wieland's lips mouthing *O Canada*. Texts from the final letters of Wolfe and Montcalm were also embroidered there in red on linen. Women from Cheticamp, Cape Breton hooked the words of an Inuit and Wieland's sister, Joan Stewart, embroidered the elaborate *Water Quilt* inspired by James Laxer's *The Energy Poker Game: The Politics of the Continental Resources Deal* (1970). The even larger *Arctic Day* quilt featured 163 pastel crayon drawings of various plant and

animal life forms from the Arctic appliquéd to the fabric of the cushions stitched together to make its 12-foot diameter. Two white cotton quilts, one proclaiming in fat yellow stuffed letters *I love Canada* and the other translating it in French were chained together. The quilted *109 Views* featured images that she had taken while creating the film *Reason Over Passion*. There were five drawings, a lithographic print, and four paintings. The *Arctic Passion Cake* sat by the front entrance to greet visitors. Her two “small erotic bronzes [*Bear and Spirit of Canada* (1970), *The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers* (1970)] ... attracted considerable attention.”<sup>25</sup> There was also a barnyard enclosed by plexiglas and featuring 24 ducklings and four ducks swimming in a blue plastic kiddie pool. [Fig. 103] There were originally 26 ducklings but two did not last. And the exhibit famously smelled of livestock and the perfume that Wieland had concocted for the occasion – *Sweet Beaver/Le Castor Doux* [Fig. 104] – to be sold in bottled form. The entire event was set up to “evoke a bazaar or country fair atmosphere.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite the suggested fanfare, *The Telegram*'s Elizabeth Dingman noted that Ottawa was otherwise quiet when the show opened and only a “couple of hundred Canadian intellectual patriots and passerby” attended.<sup>27</sup> The rest of the city was ‘dead’. Although he had been the fêted guest at her patriotic parties in New York City, Trudeau was conspicuously absent, leaving only Minister of National Defence Donald Macdonald to attend.<sup>28</sup> Dingman observes, “The absence of officialdom, from the Governor General to the lowliest MP, at this earthy explosion of patriotism from mother Wieland probably revealed the Great Canadian Sense of Embarrassment. Even Secretary of State (cultural affairs) Gerard Pelletier was absent....”<sup>29</sup> Those who did attend came in varieties of

patriotic clothing, including film director Don Owen, Wieland's dealer Av Isaacs, *Chatelaine* editor Fernande Saint-Martin, writers Hugo McPherson and Robert Fulford, artists Vera Frenkel, William Ronald and Guido Molinari, and many of the craftswomen whose labour had helped create much of the work in the show. A dinner was prepared for 170 guests, featuring Ontario cider, cold cucumber soup, foie gras, potato and various other salads, multigrain and milk breads, fresh fruit, beer and Québec lamb with maple sugar as the attendees made "lip shapes at each other" in the gallery.<sup>30</sup> The *Arctic Passion Cake* was not edible so petit fours inspired by it were provided. The photos documenting the opening show a spare and broken up crowd that was a fragment of what it had been outside. One review stressed that 'nobody laughed' during the event, leaving its viewers "like the little boys wondering if you should tell them all about the emperor's clothes."<sup>31</sup> The photo record shows most of the guests, child and adult alike, clumping up around the makeshift farm. According to the *Montreal Star's* reporter, many of the guests treated the craftwork of the commissioned pieces with "almost primary importance, inspecting the quality of the handiwork before, satisfied with its excellence, contemplating the subject matter."<sup>32</sup>

"As political statement it is subtle, maternal and angry. It is a very strange mishmash," Elizabeth Dingman wrote, while applauding Wieland's "busting earthiness and sensuality" and regarding her as a "back-to-the-land nationalist."<sup>33</sup> *The Globe and Mail's* Kay Kritzwiser went further in her praise, exclaiming that the country needs Wieland. Her quilts are banners for pilgrims while the ducks are part of the 'gospel' that the artist preaches for all the 'helpless creatures'. Kritzwiser lauded what she took to be Wieland's lack of sophistication, painting her as "a little girl dressed up in her mother's

clothes”<sup>34</sup> before tangentially mentioning the show included a design for a woman’s bulletproof vest.<sup>35</sup> Such positive evaluations of Wieland’s exhibition would be limited largely to the Toronto art crowd.<sup>36</sup>

Writing in *artscanada*, Hugo McPherson claimed that the exhibition was an ‘international’ event and tied it to Harold Rosenberg’s claim for the dissolution of painting into mass media in the era of Warhol. However, he was at pains to contrast her to a ‘confidence man’ like Warhol, insisting that it was thanks to her “intuition and passion ... she somehow *breaks through the surface of things* and comes out on the other side with a vision that is warm, humane, comic and highly personal yet universal.”<sup>37</sup> He praised her ‘metaphysical wit’ according her the role of “an oracle to the activist generation.”<sup>38</sup> Her oracular gift to the world was a mythical Canada that could become a reality, but, “Can we dig the epiphany of North before time runs out?”<sup>39</sup> This epiphany was conveyed in the collapse of high and low culture as she synthesized medium and message into one.<sup>40</sup>

A review by Robert Fulford in the *Toronto Daily Star* also stressed Wieland’s role as a mythmaker. He tied this to her consciousness about being a Canadian artist, noting that Wieland’s frequent references to Tom Thomson were anomalous in a generation of Canadian artists who grew up despising Canadian art history. Tired of elitist art that seemed totally irrelevant to the public, she could only break out of the art ghetto by attaching her work to social importance: “‘I’m an activist who feels which way the wind is blowing,’ Joyce Wieland has said. [...] She was doing nationalistic Canadian art pieces when most of her fellow artists still thought the whole notion of Canadian nationalism was pretty comic.”<sup>41</sup>

*La Presse*'s review was more ambivalent. Although it saw a great diversity of expression in its more than 30 propositions on nationalism, including some courageous and political remarks about being an artist in Canada. "Entre deux pôles donc: entre le drapeau canadien et l'ours arctique, voilà que se développera une exposition," but one which is not easy to analyse.<sup>42</sup> Nationalism is less affirmed than difference from the U.S. is defended with the use of symbols that are largely unconvincing, especially for the Québécois.

Outside of the restricted art world, her reception was less favourable. Political commentator Anthony Westell chided the exhibition's "easy style of Canadian nationalism."<sup>43</sup> In Westell's estimation Wieland's symbolism was mostly vapid or ill-defined. The recently New York-based artist was interpreted as an alienated American liberal, reactively assuming Canadian values must be morally superior to those of America without knowing what they are. Instead of probing this, she has 'geese' clucking in an improvised pen in a show that is mostly a "depressing reminder of all that is least attractive about Canadian nationalism; hatred of U.S. values rather than any statement of Canadian purpose, cheap patriotic claptrap expressed in indifferent workmanship, and falsity on several levels."<sup>44</sup>

Public dislike of Wieland's exhibition was such that National Gallery director Boggs felt compelled to write a letter to the *Ottawa Journal*. Boggs' letter was triggered by an editorial in the paper that attacked Wieland's show for being Pop art applied to Canadian mythology resulting in "a fake, a great put-on... Joyce Wieland's exercise in personal therapy now embarrassing the Gallery's first floor."<sup>45</sup> But it was not simply the hint of charlatanry that offended the critic, it was that the show lacked beauty. Without

that, it was not art, just reality. Boggs defended the show by contextualizing it within the history of anti-art, refusing any suggestion that Wieland's art was subversive by pointing out that everyone from the Group of Seven to Marcel Duchamp eventually became the establishment. Boggs assured the public that "Joyce Wieland does laugh at art. But she does not laugh at Canada. Or if she does it is nostalgically, gently, even sentimentally."<sup>46</sup> Other responses to Wieland, and to Boggs' awkward and milquetoast defence of her, registered the show as excessive in its capacity to bore,<sup>47</sup> or as part of a 'cult of the ugly', praising attacks on the show as 'refreshing' and claiming, "I, for one, am fed up with the appalling 'stuff' Miss Boggs and her friends foist on the general public."<sup>48</sup> Yet another letter writer attacked the politics involved, stating, "I applaud patriotism, I regard nationalism with suspicion, and I deplore the use of a public, tax-supported art gallery as a platform for the socio-political propaganda of a select group of artsy-craftsy radicals."<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the harshest reactions to the exhibition came from the Left. An article by Ashley Blackman in the counterculture paper *A Usually Reliable Source* was scathing in its interpretation of the exhibition's symbolism. Insisting that it demanded to be read in ideological terms, Blackman suggested that Wieland's ideal for Canada would be a wildlife sanctuary. Not only was the nation's population reduced to little more than maple syrup consumers, they were also absent as anything more than the clichés of kitsch memorabilia.<sup>50</sup> At the centre of the show was a cake covered in 'trivial' symbols. This triviality extended to her text works which functioned as meaningless slogans that provided no 'affirmation of existence' and said nothing of the lives of real people and the machinations of power that oppressed them.<sup>51</sup> Although the satirical cartoons provided a lively contrast since they involved (something like) people, they also suggested doing

away with machinery and so the population of the country that relies upon them. Tipping up the already high hyperbole, she jibed “maybe this Joyce Wieland is really a fifth columnist really attempting to undermine the human race on the behalf of the animal kingdom.”<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, an anonymous ‘Canadian art-worker’, reviewing the exhibition in the Maoist paper *New Canada*, cited it as a sophisticated instance of ‘cultural imperialism’. The National Gallery was decried as a purveyor of U.S. ideology while Trudeau was a ‘liberal-fascist’ and bilingualism an attempt to quash anti-imperialism. Wieland was cast as a bogus nationalist loyal to New York and “the Americanized *avant-garde*” who are “totally dependent on the dole” and who work as imperialist propagandists subsidized by the Federal government in tacit support of ‘Anglo jingoism’.<sup>53</sup> She was “a parasite who panders to a bored and exhausted elite, fond of trivialities and ‘kinky’ entertainment.”<sup>54</sup> She used the language of the put-on as she ridicules what she pretends to promote and reduces Canada to a sexy bunny about to be raped by a mechanical monster.

The reaction to Wieland was eclectic, running from passionate enthusiasm to mocking derision. She was regarded as genuine or a fraud, as a nationalist or an imperialist, whose work offered either deep allegory or superficial kitsch. Wieland’s most thorough statement about the exhibition was produced in the form of an interview with Théberge that was included as a separate document in the exhibition’s untraditional catalogue/art book.<sup>55</sup> According to the transcript, Théberge spoke in French, Wieland in English and Snow served as their translator. This embodied the biculturalism theme basic to her work and highlighted the gross awkwardness and distortions inherent in it as the curator and artist attempt to relay messages to one another. The text reveals her struggle

with what her work is about and doing. She states, “I’m fighting... what’s happening in these works for the exhibition that I don’t want them to be a requiem, but I’m working very hard for something positive... [...] Maybe I’m just a fool to hope that it’s a celebration...”<sup>56</sup> Yet, “I can’t see any solution although I’m a hopeless optimist...” Note *hopeless optimist* and the double-meaning here as well as the overstated morbidity of the celebration; it is a kind of wake. She adds, “Maybe it is the end of Canada, but I won’t stop this work because in my next film, *True Patriot Love* [to be renamed *The Far Shore*], there are many important things that have to be said for the history’s sake of Canada...”<sup>57</sup> This has required a change of attitude. She claims that “I don’t think there’s that much irony in my work now as there was in the past. [...] Because irony’s no good at this time... too frivolous... Because we have to get to the essential thing now, the land, and how we feel about it.”<sup>58</sup>

The exhibition had mixed Wieland’s ironic and satirical side with one that had attempted to move away from the ‘frivolous’. Ambiguous results followed, although it would be difficult for irony not to win in that situation. Seriousness is fragile, irony is already cracked. Irony, as John O’Brian has pointed out, cuts both ways.<sup>59</sup> This has been no small issue for the reception of Wieland’s work, either in the 1970s or now, particularly since interpretations rest on imputing fairly specific intentions to her. These intentions are then taken as a key while their inevitable ironic contradiction tends to be ignored. The mixed reception that the exhibition received suggests several things. What seemed to impress people was the show’s humour, innovation and patriotism. What offended them was the show’s humour and nationalism, or as Boggs put it, there was “a reluctance to accept the idea of humor in a public art museum and a resistance to the

symbolization of any affection for our country in the visual arts.”<sup>60</sup> Arguably, even more important was the material quality of the show and the extent to which is ironized the allegorical significance it seemed to have on a symbolic level. People took offense not so much due to her blurring the categories of craft and fine art, but because the crudely marketed perfume stank, because the ducks were real ducks producing real excrement, because the craftwork was weak. As one attack published in the *Ottawa Journal* explained, all of this eliminated beauty by putting the work too close to reality: “‘Life too near paralyses art.’ ...Life is too near in the Wieland exhibition. The Gallery is boring us stiff... boredom is just as deadly as irrelevance.”<sup>61</sup>

One can re-position this attack another way. It is not simply that life threatens art with paralysis, but that art threatens life. This can be seen in how the use of stereotypes and clichés of Canada grind against the good taste of ‘authentic experience’ and beauty, insisting on the object or abject quality of the artwork. And these aspects are what is also offered by the distinct material quality of the exhibition that consistently highlighted its artificiality at the same time as it insisted on its uncomfortable realism and literalness. It was not simply the presentation of Canada as a barnyard or craft fair, but one behind plexiglass and so removed from tactility while invading visual and olfactory senses.<sup>62</sup> Isolated in space, a fake barnyard in the middle of the country’s capital city, it rendered the entire question of Canada more alien.

In her discussion of Wieland’s work and its relationship to nationalism, Johanne Sloan has argued that its ‘material heterogeneity’ sets “in motion a process by which the attributes of nationhood could be continually unmade and remade.”<sup>63</sup> The plasticity this accords to the construction of the nation is something that was fed by Wieland’s

participation in New York's avant-garde. Sloan argues "her exposure to American pop-culture nourished her art practice, allowing her to reimagine Canadian art. From the border, Joyce Wieland showed how the nation could remain always on the verge of being invented."<sup>64</sup> The indetermination employed by this formulation of 'border' art also keeps the work open to readings that are decidedly opposed to the type of New Left interpretation that Sloan offers for them, a reading, Sloan acknowledges, largely undermined by how the New Left actually regarded Wieland.<sup>65</sup> However, the claim for New York influence misinterprets the degree to which Wieland's engagement with American culture was a *putting on* of it, the value of which seemed to be minimal since she largely abandoned these strategies after returning to Canada, already starting with her retrospective. Paul Arthur has demonstrated the extent to which Wieland's art practice in New York involved the cultivation of an alien status and her return to Canada was at least partially informed by her resentment toward the New York scene.<sup>66</sup> The startling change in her work between *True Patriot Love* and what followed suggests that any such 'border' position for art was untenable, or rather that the border, much like John Boyle's often fort-like three-dimensional works, was not so much porous as a wall to be built.<sup>67</sup> This is particularly striking given that Sloan's monograph on *The Far Shore* never substantially acknowledges the clear split between Wieland's work in New York and what she did once she returned to Canada, a point that Wieland insisted on above. This is not to suggest that there was not a productive negativity in regard to American art in her work, but that rather than this suggesting "the nation could remain always on the verge of being invented" it suggests something else. More accurately, and as will be explained in greater

detail in Chapter Seven, this ‘invention’ was in practice an embrace of a very different tradition than such a border art.

Wieland’s embrace of the outmoded – whether in craft, nationalism, or rococo aesthetics – like her embrace of the idiotic (perfume) and the essentialist (northern mysticism/madness) positions her against the continental avant-garde to explicitly cultivate a more radically nationalist avant-gardism. Wieland’s themes remain consistent but deepen while her appropriation of the rococo only intensifies from its subtle traces in her early works to its explicit place in her aesthetic into the early 1990s. Along with the rococo, which will be the theme of the following section, a crucial and always overlooked aspect of her work was the tantric, which will return in each of the following chapters in modified form.

Wieland’s work ties back specifically to the tantric tradition in Canada, expressed in its fullest form in the work of fellow Torontonians, Dennis Burton. As you may recall, Burton created elaborate allegorical paintings that fused abstraction with stereotypical imagery derived from softcore pornography. It relied heavily on a propositional approach with a deliberately jarring set of styles and techniques that recapitulated the history of painting while the content merged multiple temporal dimensions onto one plane.

Wieland will also pursue this strange temporal dimension along with the crucial use of stereotypes. The aggressive stereotyping that was basic to Wieland’s work, and which was either castigated as socially degrading or interpreted as tongue-in-cheek, was essential to both its erotic and mystical dimension. Both negative interpretations underestimate its value. The stereotype, especially when hackneyed and unbelievable, is more real than any subjective meaning or experience that can be associated with it. Its

blatant artificiality, one which is part of a clear historical-materialistic process, along with its impersonality, is not simply the sign for a reality beyond *maya* but its material embodiment.<sup>68</sup> As we will see repeatedly, this is only made more blatant by the literalness of so much of her work, detaching it from easy allegorical interpretation by insisting on its artificiality even in nondiscursive formulations such as perfume. As such it asserts the visceral and material reality of the artifice. For the sake of brevity, I am limiting my discussion to two presentations of Tantra, those of Ajit Mookerjee and Philip Rawson, whose writings were circulating in Canada at the time.

According to Mookerjee, “[t]he scope of art is limited if it does not emancipate us from surface perception,” by which he means sensory perceptions.<sup>69</sup> These must be subordinated to a form of inner sight, achieved through ritual and contemplation, wherein arise the various image forms and patterns that become the basis for most of tantric art. Moving beyond phenomenality, Tantra seeks a reality that synthesizes the inner reality of the seeker with the reality of the cosmos. The two are assumed to have an isomorphic continuity that only needs to be cultivated. Such cultivation often comes through art. Mookerjee cites Italian artist Lucio Fontana<sup>70</sup> as a contemporary instance of this, and quotes the artist stating that, “I do not want to make a painting. I want to open up space, create a new dimension for art, be one with the cosmos as it endlessly expands beyond the confine of the picture.”<sup>71</sup>

The other Brahmin systems of India (Hindu and Buddhist) reject the lived world as an illusion. The existential life of the body is that of a ‘husk’, and people are no more than “transient bags of phlegm, shit and putrefying offal.”<sup>72</sup> Tantra does not reject this vision of life, but it suggests means other than detachment to reach enlightenment. It

posits that there is “no need for such a desperate upstream struggle to *reach the shore*.”<sup>73</sup> Instead, the world and its pleasures can be harnessed for their energy. Even though people and their fragmentary experiences are without intrinsic value, they can be used to other ends. Love needs objects to be expressed and the human psychic and physical body provide a vehicle.<sup>74</sup>

Since sexual energy, spreading through vibration rather than orgasm, is identical to the creative energy of the cosmos, the practice of sexuality readily functions as a form of art.<sup>75</sup> This could take the form of debauchery, particularly with ‘lower order’ people like prostitutes,<sup>76</sup> or through solitary meditation since the forms of tantric discipline seem ready to treat the symbolic and the practical as equivalent.<sup>77</sup> What counts in either case is a way of capturing and circulating this energy to the point that, according to some folklore, the ascetic is said to ‘bleed’ semen rather than blood.<sup>78</sup> In fact, the successful disciplining of energy through Tantra results in a diminution of reliance on any external stimuli, starting with other bodies.<sup>79</sup>

The human body becomes identical to the cosmos through Tantra, which maps the energetic flows of the cosmos, its texts providing the “detailed instructions for working the mechanism.”<sup>80</sup> One of the principle pictorial means to reach the higher stages of consciousness is the mandala. The designs of mandala describe the movements of energy as it passes through forms. Tantra is not based in contemplation but in the imperative to repeat rituals and assume postures. Art plays a useful role in this as “Tantra was never concerned with imitating an external world, and so its figures are all to some degree stereotypes, puppets stimulating by their visual inadequacy a vigorous reinterpretation in the imagination of the mediator.”<sup>81</sup> According to Mookerjee “the female principle is

considered to be essentially the kinetic aspect of consciousness” and it is from this aspect that all polarities and differences can arise.<sup>82</sup>

In these types of representation which are abstract as opposed to imitative, universal as against individualistic, cognitive as opposed to emotional, the tantric artist's vision of reality is deeply conditioned by tradition and inheritance, subjugating his purely personal subjective expression to a generic one. [...] [Tantric forms] function as signs which pre-exist and are conditioned by pre-established codes similar to mathematical formulae. They are, therefore, not subject to constant metamorphosis.<sup>83</sup>

Metamorphosis, multiplicity and diversity are antithetical to ecstasy. This is an “ecstasy in which a concern with infinite multiplicity, individuality and unrepeatability change like that which plays such an important role in Chinese and European theology and metaphysics has no place.”<sup>84</sup>

If Wieland were insisting, as Sloan seems to suggest, on the ever-changing nature of nationhood, her politics would be largely arbitrary. In fact, it would tie her quite closely to the derisive but pragmatic treatment of nationhood we saw with Trudeau, where nationalism was necessarily subservient to the contingencies of human life and ultimately something to be discarded in the flux of history. While flux exists in Wieland, it is not arbitrary, but an ephemeral aspect of a mystical non-human order rooted in the land that exists prior to whichever population happens to live on it.<sup>85</sup> And this order – manifested in heritage, stereotype, and tradition, like that of the ‘bio-region’ that the Regionalists insisted on cultivating as a fossilization process – is not a repressive force, but the necessary means for the circulation of erotic energy. If, as many of her commentators pointed out above, her work was unconvincing (because of its stereotypicality) or meaningless (because of its material literalness), perhaps it is not in the production of meaning, at least not in a subjective or social sense, that her nationalism

lies. As with her colleagues discussed above, perhaps it was in a rigorous kind of materiality, one that, in her work fused the mechanical and mystical together, that her nationalism is to be found.

The discussion up to now results in a strange set of formal questions, such as: was the quacking of the ducks a text work much like the quilts she hung? Was it a musical score, an aleatoric requiem mass? Were the ducks an answer to the alien beeps that haunt the soundtrack of *Reason Over Passion* (1969), which one commenter has compared to flatulence?<sup>86</sup> If the ducks were, as one annoyed reviewer claimed, the only real art in the show,<sup>87</sup> what does their territorial activity – splashing their water, shedding their feathers and defecating in the Gallery – tell us about how the exhibition functioned and what the reality of shit, also dear to the Regionalists, implied about true patriot love? If we treat Wieland’s nationalism and use of advertising with irony, is she really being any less ironic about the environment or feminism? If she is sending up Trudeau with cotton baton, is the *Water Quilt* sending up Laxer’s environmental worries less with the same materials or with the styrofoam she uses to sculpt the Canadian environment? Is she sending up the resurgence of craft art any less by putting it beside duck shit? The following section and chapter will try to answer some of these questions.

## 5.2. Cosmetic Nationalism and the Rococo

“Typical of Diderot’s critiques of Boucher is his mordantly amusing declaration in 1758 that Boucher ‘no longer has but two colors: white and red; and he does not paint a single nude woman without her bottom being as made up as her face.’”<sup>88</sup>

“Art is the only serious thing in the world. And the artist is the only person who is never serious.”<sup>89</sup>

“Beauty will be edible or it will no longer be.”<sup>90</sup>

We have seen how varied the response of Wieland's work was. *If*, other than the tantric, there is a sensibility that Wieland's work fits into without excessive nips and tucks, it is Camp. In Wieland's oeuvre, Camp is expressed in what I term her *cosmetic nationalism*, constructed through a self-conscious appropriation of the rococo, which allowed her to formalize her nationalism in terms that stressed its artificiality and its eroticism. This section of the chapter will examine different ways in which she appropriated and performed the role of rococo artist and how her Camp aesthetics determined the form that *Canada* takes in much of her work. These aesthetic issues are crucial for understanding the allegorical function of nationalism in Wieland's work and the place of eroticism and mysticism within it. These are all issues that have been marginal in the scholarly literature on her.

Foregrounded in these aspects of Wieland's aesthetics is both her celebration of artificiality and her ambiguous stance toward the contemporary. This is something she would progressively work through over the coming years, turning away from the cosmopolitan art that she had created under the influence of New York to become what she would call a 'hick' artist. This shift is alluded to, though in different terms and to different ends, in Barry Lord's critique of her in his Maoist history of Canadian painting. Like Anthony Westell earlier, Lord identified Wieland's early work up to and including the *True Patriot Love* show as a fantasia of Canada inflected by delusional American New Leftism and New York aesthetic fashion. He claimed that, ironic or not, Wieland's vision of Canada was basically Trudeauvian and evinced no real understanding of the country's politics. This was 'cynically exploited' by the National Gallery with "such insults to both nations as a bronze statuette entitled *The Spirit of Canada Suckles the*

*French and English Beavers*, showing a mother with two beavers at her breasts.”<sup>91</sup> Like other self-identified Leftist critics, he attacked her for trivializing *Canada* (in his sense delimiting a disparate exploited class) through ‘burlesque’, and so relying on tourist symbolism that reduced culture to the level of commodity. This extended to her appropriation of traditionally female objects and traditions. Wieland practiced both a ‘cosmetic feminism’ and, by implication, cosmetic nationalism.<sup>92</sup> While Lord’s interpretation was not exactly wrong, it was polemical and so both ungenerous and lacking nuance. It was also politically and aesthetically simplistic in its underlying claim – also held by most of Wieland’s admirers – for the socially-redeeming value and significance of art. Camp complicates all of this in various ways and in so small part due to its insistence on being utterly sincere when most seemingly absurd.

To map this out, first let us delimit what Camp consists of for this argument. Susan Sontag’s *Notes on Camp* (1964) stresses that Camp is a sort of *sophistication* but *not quite*. A sensibility rather than an idea, it nonetheless has an essence, which is the “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration.”<sup>93</sup> Esoteric, exclusionary and secretive,<sup>94</sup> sensibilities are not simply personal, subjective preferences but the ‘ineffable’ logics of ‘fugitive sensibility’.<sup>95</sup> She locates its origins in the eighteenth-century with caricature and the picturesque gardens of the French; in the rococo and maybe drawing back a little to Jacopo da Pontormo and Georges de La Tour. As an aesthetic, Camp is not concerned with beauty so much as style and artificiality, neutralizing content (especially socio-political content) in its shadow. Instead, it emphasizes décor, texture and the sensuality of surface.<sup>96</sup> While nothing in nature is Camp, Camp is to a large degree an ‘urban pastoral’, either in its fantasies of the rural, or its appreciation for its own

interiors.<sup>97</sup> It is mannerist and androgynous but only to the extent that it exaggerates all gender clichés. “Camp sees *everything* in quotation marks,” as performance.<sup>98</sup> It divorces itself from life because life has no style. It also divorces itself from meaning to concentrate on “the thing as pure artifice.”<sup>99</sup>

Sontag distinguishes between a Pure Camp, which is naïve, full of irrepressible passion, earnest and ‘dead serious’ to the point of failing at its massive ambitions, and *camping*, which knows its own ludicrousness. Seriousness is not the same as sincerity. Any twit can be sincere. Camp has to complicate sincerity with something even more extreme than irony. So, “One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious.”<sup>100</sup> Camp signified the victory of irony over tragedy – more or less the goal of Robbe-Grillet’s *nouveau roman* and the acknowledgement made by George Grant about the essence of Canada’s impossibility.

Camp has a serious relationship to the outmoded precisely because it allows one to be detached (and I would stress *detached*, not dispassionate). It detaches itself from the contemporary and invests the banality of the past with the fantastic.<sup>101</sup> Because of this sense of animation, Camp is nothing without things and this democratization of culture puts people on the level of things, equal to china and doorknobs. Though it shares something with Pop, it possesses a tenderness and enthusiasm that Pop lacks. Sontag notes, “Pop Art is more flat and more dry, more serious, more detached, ultimately nihilistic.”<sup>102</sup> If Wieland avoids ultimate nihilism, it is because her nationalism is *so* Camp and not at all the kind of self-aware ‘subversive’ feminism that critics have accorded to her. Her highly mannered, identification of the nation with the ‘female’ is often taken for granted, but the significance of the term for her is peculiar.<sup>103</sup>

To start with, what is the female for Wieland? This is something that we will return to, but a preliminary sketch would include the following: when asked what a female art would look like, she infamously called the work of Nazi propagandist Leni Riefenstahl up as a positive point of reference on the grounds that Riefenstahl was both one of the few successful female filmmakers and her work demonstrated what a uniquely female aesthetic was. Wieland explained:

I really think there is a female aesthetic. [...] It feels different to be a woman, so, naturally the films are going to be different. In Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* [1935], for example, there were several things that stuck in my mind; the flags, all of those banners, waving, in a way it was through a female filter of some kind; shooting the back of Hitler's head but he isn't any more important than other elements of the film.<sup>104</sup>

She goes on to link this to her own short film *Water Sark* and to a Proustian shift to a 'shut-in' world made of things.<sup>105</sup> While she notes that this turn to the domestic put her outside the dominant 'expanded field' of experimental film that was largely regionalized to New York City, this outside also means 'shut-in' and a world of things rather than faces. This is precisely the kind of 'female' vision we see encounter in *Reason Over Passion*, where Trudeau's face becomes a thing sandwiched at the centre of a landscape film, or in the cropped and depersonalized face of Pierre Vallières in her film about him, or in the crowded theatricality of her *True Patriot Love* opening which treated the nation as a picturesque garden where its history and landscape were rendered as garden follies rather than, as critics protested, a testaments to its people.

The other telling moment of explanation occurred in a 1967 interview with Barrie Hale. Wieland explained, "I agree with Louise Nevelson. There are two kinds of art, Man art and Woman art. They are two different kinds of people, so the art comes out differently. Anyway, if the art is good you can't tell the difference... can't tell if it's a

woman or a man.”<sup>106</sup> *Good*, here is being used ironically. To diagram this out: there is *Man* art and *Woman* art and there is also *bad* art and *good* art. *Man* art and *Woman* art are both bad art because they display difference rather than exchangeability or universality. Bad art is the kind of art she insisted on producing. Bad art, of course, is not the ‘anti-art’ that had become popular in New York with Neo-Dada and was denounced by Boyle, Breeze or Barry Lord as vapid American imperialist art, but quite the opposite. If she is not nihilistic like Pop and Dada, those two great paternal terms for anti-art which were both internationalist and anti-traditional, she is, like the Regionalists, weirdly and productively reactionary in a way that her supporters often try to downplay and which it is hard for the tendencies of Camp to avoid. In her embrace of folk arts and mythology, Wieland was a traditionalist, albeit a Camp one. If she mocked art, as Boggs suggested above, it was contemporary art (the good or international) that she mocked. In place of international, or what is sometimes called Contemporary Art, she advanced what she calls *hick* art.

For Wieland, what hick art reveals is precisely the survival of a Canadian sensibility or potential tradition. This is partially revealed to her by humour. “Humour is the hardest thing for Canadians to accept,” she once explained, something we have already witnessed in this chapter.<sup>107</sup> Claiming that humour composed half of her personality (she does not relate what the rest of it is), she realized she would have a hard time in a country where that was not a ‘national characteristic’.<sup>108</sup> Playing this out, she explained that although the content of the CBC – as cultural arbitrator of positive national characteristics – tries to be humorous, they fail, because their ‘glass asshole’, as she terms their bureaucracy, destroys humour by trying to transform it into something with a

welcoming international style ('Howard Johnsons'). But humour is not welcoming or easy. There is something 'mad' about it and it has a way of creeping out, like the "Canadian spirit surviving through the grandiose influence of American Abstract Expressionism."<sup>109</sup> Humour is regional and usually rural, so it does not even travel well within the nation's borders. It creates fissures as it pits official urban against rural Canada. Her own work consistently used humour as it fumbled toward a new form of expression, but this seems to her to be common to much of English Canada's cultural production. As she observed "there is a terrific corny quality in some of the English Canadian films. What the hell is the word for it – terribly awkward and clumsy; a kind of northern madness, or ineptitude of the spirit."<sup>110</sup> Humour, like madness, are not characters that can be defined, but spiritual essences in excess. A general dizziness has come about from the colonization of the country by sophisticated Americans that does not allow you to be your own person. Thus, "[t]his is the Canadian aesthetic right now. It is like a hillbilly trying to get it right, but he can't and produces 'hick art'. I really believe in the idea that we're hicks and we ought to stick with it, cultivate it."<sup>111</sup> Nationalistic art is the failure to make international art, to be backward. This is, of course, quite in keeping with Boyle and Curnoe's praise of Canadians as inept losers.

The 'madness' and "ineptitude of the spirit" that Wieland regards as peculiarly Canadian are the two pillars of hick art, which is a bad art, just as Woman art (and Man art) is bad art. *Good* art, then, is that which fails to be bound by a body's attributes, its nation or its region.<sup>112</sup> When critics frequently alluded to her transforming of the National Gallery into a barnyard, they were half-realizing that a true patriot's art is a hick's art. Good art transcends and travels. Bad art is more regional, it stays at home and

homesteads. This is a strange kind of home, in much the same way that the Group of Seven understood the Canadian landscape as a place of the spirit and of the *weird*; it is a home that always remains alien.<sup>113</sup>

As indicated by Sontag above, one of the principal referents for bad art in Camp is the rococo. This aesthetic order is also identified with a specific historical instance – the eighteenth-century in France before the advent of the revolution. Wieland’s fascination with the rococo persisted for years and inflected much of her work in a more or less direct manner, both in terms of aesthetic and strategy.<sup>114</sup> The latter is readily explained by her references to Louis XV’s royal mistress Mme. de Pompadour stretching into the 1980s as she planned a film project that would bring together Wolfe, Montcalm and Pompadour for “a saga on France and the St. Lawrence River.”<sup>115</sup> Though her references to the rococo, however loosely defined, are consistent in decades of interviews, one of the more telling instances occurred in an interview in 1986 when she cited Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and Jean-Honoré Fragonard as major influences. In particular, it is Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin she privileges, claiming his work presents, “The mystery of a still life and that all things are equal. He has a respect for inanimate objects.”<sup>116</sup>

Wieland’s appropriation of an old French style, which would be essential to the reimagining of the Conquest in her proposed film, does not damage her nationalist claims but buttresses them. It is precisely her failure to be good at rococo that makes her more essentially Canadian. For Wieland the affinity was thorough and formal. Elements of the style that recur in her work are her use of allegory (both of the nation and her own life), her cartoons which reinvent the tapestry cartoons that would hang in the halls of châteaux, the use of letters as rhetorical and structural devices, deliberate *dishabille*, the

general theatricality of her exhibition style, the use of pastels, and the exploitation of bad or ‘common’ (*canaille*) taste.<sup>117</sup>

Wieland’s nationalism is a boudoir nationalism, a nationalism of the *toilette*, much as rococo landscapes were an art of the toilette with imaginary pastures created from the sundries at the dressing table. For the rococo, cosmetics are painting, and painting is cosmetics; a means of ‘illumination’, rather than enlightenment, which is simultaneously tied to pure deception.<sup>118</sup> As the most elitist of art forms, the toilette was a ritual of marking one’s social capital. Makeup was a way of *making appear*, it was a form of self-portraiture that collapsed the distinctions between politics and art, the interior and exterior, flattening everything onto the curves of a cosmetic surface, all of which will be brought to the fore in Wieland’s own self-portrait, *Water Sark* (discussed below). The place of the female, in terms not only of her class position, but her metaphysical (cosmic) place was theoretically and etymologically bound up in the matter of the cosmetic. Since such an identity was declared through artifice, it also created anxiety, particularly among many male critics, that it could be a “vehicle for feminine deceit.”<sup>119</sup> And since this vehicle was increasingly available to different social classes, it enlarged the means to abuse social codes. The cosmetic allows those who embrace it to “become ciphers for the instability of social identity, their cosmetics a medium of artifices, false charms, and pretenses rather than a means of confirming a social reality.”<sup>120</sup>

Next to this potentially destructive function was a constructive one. The place of the mistress and her use of the salon was largely disciplinary, a sculpting of the fashionable exterior. Like de Pompadour, Wieland came from humble beginnings and often performed the rôle of a mistress of the salon, both in Toronto and New York, for

the various art soirées she and Michael Snow held. Wieland consistently displayed a fascination for the women in the lives of powerful men like Napoleon. Her well-publicized quilting bees and general appropriation of the history of women's arts and crafts could be interpreted both as a veiled reference to the Arts and Crafts movement,<sup>121</sup> an appropriation of American civil rights activism<sup>122</sup> and, with very different implications, to Queen Marie Antoinette's appropriation of peasant culture. Fittingly, many of the attacks that we saw leveled against Wieland bear a passing resemblance to those made against de Pompadour and Antoinette's roles in promoting the 'corrosive *luxe*' of the ruling class, transforming its history into *objets d'art*.<sup>123</sup>

Both *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique*, and the later *Bloom of Matter* exhibition (1981),<sup>124</sup> theatrically situated themselves within an artificial rural space that calls to mind the georgic fantasy treasured by the aristocracy with their penchants for picturesque landscapes and architectural follies. Marie Antoinette's ornamental farm, *Le Hameau de la Reine* (1783-1786) [Fig. 105], at Versailles provides one useful point of reference for this setting. Created as a theatrical re-imagining of peasant life, *Le Hameau* denied the strict utility of the farm, replacing it with "a site of sterile representation rather than true (re)reproduction" that would be symbolically connected in pre-revolutionary propaganda to the Queen's alleged sexual deviancy.<sup>125</sup> The blurring of the natural and artificial, like the appropriation of class symbols, suggested the "utility could also be harnessed to pleasure."<sup>126</sup> If agriculture stood for improvement through cultivation, this also potentially stood for its sterilization through excessive cultivation, one which naturalizes the sterile monsters that seem to be created

from it.<sup>127</sup> Wieland's re-imagining of Canada in environmental terms falls directly into this theatrical frame.

As a Torontonion trying to be a hick doing rococo doing peasant art, a certain material raggedness is to be expected from Wieland's work, one that allows the nakedness of the works' mechanical quality to be apparent, letting the 'northern madness' shine through. Perhaps the best example of this is the *Arctic Passion Cake*. [Figs. 106-107] Although her *Water Quilt* has been esteemed as a work of environmental protest, *Arctic Passion* does something very different and – in the general scheme of her work and imagination – more significant.<sup>128</sup> The work was sculpted out of styrofoam by Wieland with Théberge's assistance. John van Dierandonck, the executive chef at the restaurant for the House of Commons, was recruited to cover it in icing. At least 150 pounds of icing sugar went into the mixture that would coat the structure she had created. It measured six feet in length and was three feet high. At the peak of it was a dead polar bear made of sugar whose blood trickled south to the provinces. The path of the blood would decide the fated locale of his union with the Spirit of Canada, a "Diana-like figure, daring, exciting, a sort of earth mother. She suckles two beavers, one English-speaking, one French speaking."<sup>129</sup> The sugar sculpture of the Spirit and bear in copulation is based on the bronze situated on a plinth elsewhere in the exhibition. A few inches away on the cake, another bronze-based figure appears, this time showing the Spirit nursing the twin beavers of biculturalism. Since the same moulds could not be used for bronze and sugar, Wieland had suggested creating the doubles of the bronzes in almond paste but van Dierandonck insisted on using a sugar paste that would not rot.<sup>130</sup>

The *Passion Cake* is probably the best summation of Wieland's body of work. More than *Reason Over Passion* or *The Far Shore*, it deftly weaves her thematic concerns with her formal concerns into a massive, Campy thing. It is also one of the purest expressions of her rococo re-imagining of Canadian nature, taking part in the genre of the *pièce montées*. [Figs. 108-109] This form of pâtisserie was made famous by the French pâtissier Antonin Carême. His elaborate works for politicians, imperial officials and royalty would display an arrangement of harps, lyres, terrestrial globes, huts, helmets, hermitages, ruins and columns.<sup>131</sup> Though transpiring after the Revolution, it turned back to everything that had immediately preceded it, recasting the French variant of the picturesque in spun sugar and paste for a class of people who could at least play at being the *ancien régime*. The *pâtissier pittoresque* that he was most renowned for mirrored the kind of pittoresque gardening that we saw with Antoinette. Here "the visual aspect of the *pièce montées* very often surpasses the gastronomic value of the dish itself, however antithetical this might seem regarded the gustatory goals of cooking."<sup>132</sup> Pâtisserie here, as in Wieland, separates itself from the utility of consumption and is sublimated to a kind of artificial eternity, precisely the space that she reserves for Canadian nature.

There is a logical graduation from Wieland handing out mass produced chocolate hearts at her early openings to what is happening here.<sup>133</sup> The earlier gesture, while affectionate, is ironic since it simultaneously insists on the pre-packaged and industrialized nature of the affect, an affect she tends to mock in her early assemblage works.<sup>134</sup> The latter gesture changes things significantly. The limited petit fours available were part of the party, a sign of great luxury and indulgence. In addition, they were an

extension of the taste of the state in the most literal of ways due to van Dierendonck's role in their creation. The audience was not only treated, but they were treated to the luxury enjoyed by the government at their expense as taxpayers. So, the Arctic is presented in two ways: as an energy that is consumed and wasted and as something that is inedible. The Arctic possesses the sterile quality that Trudeau associated with nationalism and that French revolutionaries associated with the monarchy. It also points to the scatological, the biological product of consumption, but also one of the prime symbols of sterility and the territorial markings of art and nation. The inedible does not have to remain symbolic, it can become even more abstract as well as visceral and invasive.

*True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* was not the first instance of live animals in a Canadian museum. Michael Morris and Glenn Lewis' installation *Did You Ever Milk a Cow* [Fig. 110] had been exhibited as part of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' *Realism* (1970) and was re-created at the Art Gallery of Toronto in 1971.<sup>135</sup> Morris and Lewis' work featured a living cow surrounded by paintings from the museum's collections featuring cattle. The animal and her accompanying paintings were set up behind a fence at the top of the MMFA stairs. Clearly borrowing from the Conceptualism of people like Joseph Kosuth and the stark literalness of Janis Kounellis' *Untitled (12 Horses)* [1969] [Fig. 111], this work foregrounded the question of representation, panning out beyond image to sound and smell.

To return to a theme in the previous section: the stench of the ducks with their excrement and the invasive material quality that they present is an introduction of the aggressively organic (though simultaneously nakedly artificial) into the seemingly inorganic world of the Gallery. Yet, another olfactory attack was co-extensive with this.

The *Sweet Beaver* perfume that Wieland introduced and marketed through both the National Gallery and Av Issacs, was largely renowned for its generally unpalatable reek. It was also an instance of the hyper-artificial. Lauren Rabinovitz interprets the perfume as an ironic statement about the exhibition itself, expressing “the artist’s nostalgic longing for a Canadian wilderness past, while it calls up pornographic connotations of women as sensual but passive vaginal objects. Wieland views such an image of women as analogous to Canada’s reputation: Canada’s history as land raped and colonized by England and then by the United States parallels women’s history of oppression.”<sup>136</sup>

Rabinovitz’s symbolic interpretation of the perfume highlights the intersection of the erotic and nationalist but this interpretation is further complicated by the extent to which Wieland overtly misrepresented the perfume, foregrounding the unreliability of both herself and of an artwork’s claim to be made up from the real (the land) or to testify to the plausibility of the historical narrative Rabinovitz suggests.<sup>137</sup> What is more, the very artificiality of the product, and its presentation as an incorporeal and all-penetrating avatar of nature, pushes it away from such easy legibility and into the nondiscursive realm.<sup>138</sup> Wieland penetrated and polluted her audience with the work, violating their bodies and making attendees nauseous in the act as her perfume floated, invisible and suspended, mingling with the stench created by the ducks. Beside this performative invasion and territorialisation of bodies, the use of perfume also positions her close to the fashioning of erogenous zones unique to Regionalist practice. As perfume historian Luca Turin has pointed out, what is special about scent is precisely how little it has to do with the vagueries of personal or social memory. Rather, smell is “idiotic in the proper sense of the word, namely unique.”<sup>139</sup> Nothing can properly equivocate with a smell. As such,

perfume, perhaps the ultimate form of artistic essentialism, even when presented symbolically and performatively, also exists as a material and abstract excess. The perversity of this accents the degree to which it distorts the nature vs. technology dichotomy that her work often seems to suggest, and which will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter.

Over the course of this chapter, we have introduced several of the major themes and forms that will be basic to Wieland's work. This has included the importance of a tantric understanding of art as a means to circulate erotic energy, filtered largely through the exploitation of stereotypes and other deliberately artificial modes of figuration which both insist on their essentialism and mock their social signification. Essential to this was also a concern with morbidity, something that is viscerally present in Wieland's work through her use of the "toilet seat of realism"<sup>140</sup> to discomfort the audience and attack their bodies. It is also present in her reliance on the outmoded. In reference to the latter, we have detected her penchant for appropriating dead styles that she could fail at reproducing, providing for a tragicomic encounter between artistic modes that would allow 'madness' to be unleashed. This madness was associated with the unique or idiotic aspect of Canada, its Northern madness. Almost all these tendencies will persist in different forms in the two chapters that follow, gaining greater nuance and complexity.

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<sup>1</sup> Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright, "Interviews with Canadian Artists: Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright interview Joyce Wieland," *The Canadian Forum*, May/June 1974, 61. Organic farming largely falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Dingman, "True Patriot Love: Artist Joyce Wieland's tribute to Canada," *The Toronto Telegram*, February 29, 1971.

<sup>3</sup> John O'Brian, "Anthem Lip-Synch," *The Journal of Canadian Art History* vol. 21, nos. 1-2 (2000), 147.

<sup>4</sup> Wieland quoted by Shirley Raphael, "An artists' plan for Canada," *Montreal Gazette*, July 10, 1971, 38.

<sup>5</sup> "At the time everyone but Joyce thought it was a great lark. But the quilt meant more than that and has since been exhibited as a vital and moving piece of art." Bernadette Andrews, "Wieland honors Canada in display at National Gallery," *Toronto Telegram*, July 2, 1971.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>7</sup> CP, "She honors the flag with patriotic soup," *The Globe and Mail*, June 24, 1971, 66.
- <sup>8</sup> Quoted in Iris Nowell, *Joyce Wieland: A Life in Art* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2001), 307.
- <sup>9</sup> W.Q. Ketchum, "True Patriot Love: Unusual birthday party at the National Gallery," *Ottawa Journal*, June 26, 1971, 53.
- <sup>10</sup> Douglas Ord, *The National Gallery of Canada: Ideas, Art, Architecture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 229.
- <sup>11</sup> Sandra Gwyn, "Ottawa's incredible bureaucratic explosion," *Saturday Night*, July/August 1975, 28.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.
- <sup>13</sup> Richard Gwyn, *The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980), 96.
- <sup>14</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 73.
- <sup>15</sup> In a 1986 interview, Wieland noted that the exhibition happened soon after the October Crisis, but she did not incorporate anything about it. She suggests that Trudeau's action during the events in Québec created a huge scar in the country and 'partly' drove her to become more radical. Yet, she remained ambivalent about him, citing a diplomatic *faux pas* when he said something 'horrible' to the U.S. president. "I like someone who's so insane like that. No, he did some great things," she comments. Wieland goes on to say that his slogan, 'reason over passion', is 'psychopathic' and Trudeau has a 'terrible imbalance'. Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1987), 164.
- <sup>16</sup> Douglas Ord, *The National Gallery of Canada: Ideas, Art, Architecture* (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 235.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.
- <sup>19</sup> Wieland stated, "they're a bunch of fascists. This democratization policy is fascist..." Quoted in Kathleen Walker, "The artist as patriot," *The Ottawa Citizen*, October 23, 1976, 30. Wieland did not extrapolate on exactly what this meant or, at least, the journalist did not represent her as doing so.
- <sup>20</sup> Anon, "Le Canada, c'est du folklore." *La Presse*, July 10, 1971, C12.
- <sup>21</sup> According to the writer from *La Presse*, the show was inaugurated as the cadets marched in geometric formation to the door performing *Éloïse*, a song recently made famous by Québécois softcore porn star Donald Lautrec. This lengthy baroque-pop song, originally written by Paul Ryan in 1968, features the pleas of a desperate man to his beloved to stay with him.
- <sup>22</sup> Tom Rossiter's review of her show explicitly opposes her to Picasso. He suggested that Wieland was part of the 'ultimate absurdity' of Canadian nationalism and notes, patronizingly, that most of the press for her show came from the women's pages of newspapers rather than the art press. Stressing the 'suburban' housewife quality of the work, he suggests that she is the "Gallop of Dada" and accents the emptiness of the show with its "toilet seat of realism." See Tom Rossiter, "Patriotism's absurdities lose to art," *Ottawa Citizen*, August 7, 1971, 6.
- <sup>23</sup> *Water Sark* (1964-65), *Sailboat* (1965-68), *Hand Tinting* (1967-68), *1933* (1967-68), *Catfood* (1968), *Dripping Water* (co-directed with Michael Snow [1969]), *Rat Life and Diet in North America* (1968), and *Reason Over Passion* (1967-69).
- <sup>24</sup> In an installation video, Théberge states that they used about 3 acres of plexiglass to cover work in the show and create the farm space. (NGC EX 1420)
- <sup>25</sup> W.Q. Ketchum, "Joyce Wieland Exhibit Unusual, Diversified," *Ottawa Journal*, July 2, 1971, 17.
- <sup>26</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, "Issues of Feminist Aesthetic: Judy Chicago and Joyce Wieland," *Woman's Art Journal* (1982), 40. This point is also made in a review that claimed, "To portray [themes of show] she frequently steps outside the borders of fine art, using techniques more familiar to visitors at a country fair than the National Gallery." Terry Kirkman, "Patriot show at National Gallery," *Montreal Star*, July 2, 1971.
- <sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Dingman, "Moment of history when Canada's capital was dead as a doornail," *Toronto Telegram*, July 3, 1971.
- <sup>28</sup> Ironically, in the coming decade Macdonald would chair the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada and recommend a free trade agreement with the United States.
- <sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Dingman, "Moment of history when Canada's capital was dead as a doornail," *Toronto Telegram*, July 3, 1971.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> Tom Rossiter, "Patriotism's absurdities lose to art," *Ottawa Citizen*, August 7, 1971, 6.

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- <sup>32</sup> Terry Kirkman, "Patriot show at National Gallery," *Montreal Star*, July 2, 1971.
- <sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Dingman, "Moment of history when Canada's capital was dead as a doornail," *Toronto Telegram*, July 3, 1971.
- <sup>34</sup> Kay Kritzwiser, "Wieland: ardent art for unity's sake," *The Globe and Mail*, July 3, 1971, 24.
- <sup>35</sup> The vest was designed by Sheila Gladstone, who also designed the dress Wieland wore to the opening. Shirley Raphael, "An artists' plan for Canada," *Montreal Gazette*, July 10, 1971, 38.
- <sup>36</sup> Malcolmson nominates her as the poet laureate of Canadian nationalism, which he claims is of the "Yankee Imperialistic Go Home variety." Harry Malcolmson, "True patriot love – Joyce Wieland's new show," *The Canadian Forum*, June 1971, 18. This level of affection was in keeping with earlier Malcolmson reviews of her work, such as one occasion when he praised a painting as "a waif in all that Ottawa impersonality, but it was by far the most human act in the exhibition, and I could have hugged it." Harry Malcolmson, [Untitled], *Toronto Telegram*, March 25, 1967, 16.
- <sup>37</sup> Hugo McPherson, "Wieland: An Epiphany of North," *artscanada*, August/September 1971, 17. [My emphasis.]
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 18.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 19.
- <sup>41</sup> Robert Fulford, "Giving us a sense of ourselves," *Toronto Daily Star*, July 10, 1971, 55.
- <sup>42</sup> Anon., "Le Canada, c'est du folklore." *La Presse*, July 10, 1971, C12.
- <sup>43</sup> Anthony Westell, "Canada's nationalists are taking a big risk in being anti-American," *Toronto Daily Star*, July 10, 1971, 12. Westell's article seems largely inspired by Malcolmson's review in *The Canadian Forum*.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Anon., "The Put-On at the National Gallery," *Ottawa Journal*, July 10, 1971, 6.
- <sup>46</sup> "The public may change its mind." Jean Sutherland Boggs, editorial letter, *Ottawa Journal*, July 10, 1971, 6.
- <sup>47</sup> "Boredom surpassed," *Ottawa Journal*, July 14, 1971, 6.
- <sup>48</sup> "Cult of the ugly," *Ottawa Journal*, July 15, 1971, 6.
- <sup>49</sup> "Artsy propaganda," *Ottawa Journal*, July 15, 1971, 6. See also, Douglas E. Schoenherr, "Citizen Forum," *Victoria Times*, July 15, 1971.
- <sup>50</sup> Ashley Blackman, "Jingoism for animals," *A Usually Reliable Source*, July 29, 1971, 16.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., 17.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., 17.
- <sup>53</sup> Anon. [A Canadian art-worker], "Canadian culture as folklore." *New Canada*, September 1971, 1.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Rather than the customary catalogue featuring images of the works in the exhibition introduced by scholarly and curatorial essays, the catalogue involved Wieland placing drawings, photographs, fragmentary texts, dead flowers, Group of Seven reproductions, Inuit texts, etc. into a government publication ("Bulletin No.146, Illustrated Flora of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago") about the flora and fauna of the north.
- <sup>56</sup> Pierre Th  berge, "Interview with Joyce Wieland." In *True Patriot Love/V  ritable amour patriotique*. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1971, np.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> John O'Brian, "Anthem Lip-Synch," *The Journal of Canadian Art History* vol. 21, no. 1-2 (2000), 147.
- <sup>60</sup> "Reader's Views." *Ottawa Citizen*, July 30, 1971, 7.
- <sup>61</sup> Anon., "The Put-On at the National Gallery," *Ottawa Journal*, July 10, 1971, np.
- <sup>62</sup> This may recall the same carnival quality that attended John Russell's controversial exhibition at the Jubilee. See chapter five of Jane Nicholas, *The Modern Girl: Feminine Modernities, the Body, and Commodities in the 1920s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).
- <sup>63</sup> Johanne Sloan, *Joyce Wieland's The Far Shore* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 81.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 11.
- <sup>65</sup> See above. Kristy Arlene Holmes' dissertation "Negotiating the Nation: The Work of Joyce Wieland 1968-1976" (PhD diss., Queens University, 2008) substantially expands on Sloan's claims for Wieland's New Leftism and her place in the international avant-garde.

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<sup>66</sup> See Paul Arthur, "Different/Same/Both/Neither: The Polycentric Cinema of Joyce Wieland" in *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*, ed. Robin Blaetz (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007), 44-66.

<sup>67</sup> Conceiving the border as a wall, and as we will see, by extension, a body, was thematized by Wieland as a Proustian shift to a 'shut-in' world made of things. Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright, "Interviews with Canadian Artists: Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright interview Joyce Wieland," *The Canadian Forum*, May/June 1974, 62. This is part of why the wall-body is portrayed as being raped by American interlopers in her work. The Proustianism can also be tied to what Leo Bersani has called "the spatialization of time in Proust's world, the discontinuity among different points in space (and time), and the attempt to remedy this discontinuity by spatial juxtapositions." Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and of Art* [Second Edition] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>68</sup> Dennis Lee would also cite this as a crucial feature of the relationship between Pop art, nationalism and eroticism in the work of Leonard Cohen. He detects the holy hovering within kitsch as pop music, advertisements etc., which serve as zones for worship and libidinal investment. The almost omnipresent quality of the quasi-sacramental reality for *Beautiful Losers*' protagonists is a means for Cohen to insist on the immanence of the holy within the profane world and the doubleness of things. Dennis Lee Collection – Savage Fields (Cohen) "Beautiful Losers Typescript," Box 49:11, 86. MS Coll 00271 Dennis Lee Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

<sup>69</sup> Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna, *The Tantric Way: Art, Science, Ritual* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 42.

<sup>70</sup> Fontana did this with a series of works starting in 1949 under the header *Concetto spaziale* that spread through both painting and sculpture and featured a prominent slit at their centre, either in the form of a cut through the canvas or a biomorphic form reminiscent of a clam in sculpture. These also clearly approximate the form and stated goal of Arthur Handy's *Aphrodite Yawns* (1967), a 1,000-pound fibreglass sculpture, ten foot in diameter, and unmistakably referring to a vagina. See Dorothy Cameron, *Sculpture '67: An Open-Air Exhibition of Canadian sculpture = une exposition en plein air de sculptures canadiennes* (Ottawa: Musée des beaux-arts du Canada/National Gallery of Canada, 1968), 100.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>72</sup> Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra* [Rev. ed.] (London: Thames, 1978), 10.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 [stress mine].

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 and Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna, *The Tantric Way: Art, Science, Ritual* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 21.

<sup>75</sup> Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra* [Rev. ed.] (London: Thames, 1978), 31-32.

<sup>76</sup> Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna, *The Tantric Way: Art, Science, Ritual* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 27.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* Also Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra* [Rev. ed.] (London: Thames, 1978), 77-78 where the act and image of sex are treated as identical.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. Burton would explain this as "GATHER THE OUTER WORLD INTO A SINGLE CONTEMPLATIVE ACT OR THOUGHT DEVOID OF DUALITY & PREFERENCES (OBJECTIVE DISINTEREST). THE POSSIBLE UNIVERSE EACH MAN KNOWS IS A FLAT 'CIRCLE' RADIATING FROM A MAN'S OWN AXIAL CENTRE --> COSMOS & BODY ARE SEEN IN TANTRA AS FUNCTIONAL VARIANTS OF THE SAME ENERGY PATTERN." Dennis Burton, "Notebook 40," np. *Dennis Burton fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>81</sup> Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna, *The Tantric Way: Art, Science, Ritual* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 16.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 44. This also points to the perhaps surprising implication of tantric eroticism, namely that the most transgressive and anti-social as well as the most rigidly socially conservative sexual practices are interchangeable so long as they are both practiced as forms of impersonality.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>85</sup> This point will be demonstrated at length subsequently.

<sup>86</sup> George Lellis, "La raison avant la passion," in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 57.

<sup>87</sup> Douglas E. Schoenherr, "Citizen Forum," *Victoria Times*, July 15, 1971, np.

- <sup>88</sup> Melissa Hyde, "The 'Makeup' of the Marquise: Boucher's Portrait of Pompadour at Her Toilette," *The Art Bulletin* vol. 82, no. 3 (2000), 456.
- <sup>89</sup> Oscar Wilde, *I Can Resist Everything Except Temptation: And Other Quotations from Oscar Wilde*, ed. Karl E. Beckson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 17.
- <sup>90</sup> Salvador Dali quoted in Allen S. Weiss, *Feast and Folly: Cuisine, Intoxication, and the Poetics of the Sublime*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), v.
- <sup>91</sup> Barry Lord, *The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art* (Toronto: NC Press, 1974), 214.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.
- <sup>93</sup> Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 275. I am aware that there is a vast literature debating Camp at this point, but I am limiting my use of the term to that hatched by Sontag since it is the most relevant to my meaning. Sontag's interpretation of Camp also highlights the place of New York filmmaker and multimedia artist Jack Smith. Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963) was cited by Wieland as a major influence in the formation of her sensibility. She told Barrie Hale, that he "opened the door for me. My God, it *allowed* me to do this kind of thing. This guy was making very personal, very painful statements about his private life. I could express anything I wanted to express." Barrie Hale, "The Vanguard of vision: notes on Snow and Wieland," *Saturday Night*, June 1974, 22.
- <sup>94</sup> In Wieland's case this would be sexual mysticism, eccentric nationalism, secretive rhetoric and hidden messages.
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.
- <sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 280. [My emphasis]
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.
- <sup>103</sup> Wieland's most succinct, if not particularly informative, variation of this was, "I think of Canada as female. All the art I've been doing or will be doing is about Canada. I may tend to overly identify with Canada." Kay Armatage, "Kay Armatage interviews Joyce Wieland," *Take One*, November/December 1971, 24.
- <sup>104</sup> Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright, "Interviews with Canadian Artists: Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright interview Joyce Wieland," *The Canadian Forum*, May/June 1974, 62.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>106</sup> Barrie Hale, "Joyce Wieland: Artist, Canadian, Soft, Tough, Woman!" *The Telegram*, Toronto, March 11, 1967, 21. This statement has often been cited in literature on Wieland, though the second half of what she said is usually left out, considerably distorting her claim.
- <sup>107</sup> Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright, "Interviews with Canadian Artists: Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright interview Joyce Wieland," *The Canadian Forum*, May/June 1974, 63.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* This is also a way of marginalizing herself by sensibility.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>112</sup> In this respect 'Good' art, whether understood as international or transnational, is effectively equivalent to the 'Good' universal homogeneous state that Canadian nationalism was often pitted against.
- <sup>113</sup> Lawren Harris stressed the unpleasant *weirdness* of the Group of Seven's paintings. Ann Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting, 1920-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 166. This was also present in negative reviews. One suggested, what could have been a description of Wieland's *Arctic Passion Cake*, that they created "rough, splashy, meaningless blatant plastering and massing of unpleasant sculptures in weird landscapes." Quoted in Charles C. Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), 25. August Bridle would also deride Harris' 'dehumanized landscapes' as being more like stage set designs than actual landscapes. *Ibid.*, 198.
- <sup>114</sup> Harry Malcolmson noted that both Wieland and NE Thing Co. had moved beyond what was generically assumed to be the proper purview of artists into other fields of thing production, adding "'In the 17th century, in the period of Watteau and Fragonard [sic], the artists did provide their audience with a range of art product beyond oil paintings, and that kind of expansion of function may occur again.'" Harry

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Malcolmson [Untitled], *The Telegram*, March 25, 1967, 16. Wieland also cited Pompadour, Mme. Roland and the salonists among her chief sources of inspiration in an interview with Kay Armatage. See "Kay Armatage interviews Joyce Wieland," *Take One*, November-December 1971, 24.

<sup>115</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, "An Interview with Joyce Wieland," *Afterimage*, May 1981, 10.

<sup>116</sup> Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1987), 176.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas E. Kaiser, "Madame de Pompadour and the Theaters of Power" *French Historical Studies* vol. 19, no. 4 (1996), 1034.

<sup>118</sup> For a rich and concise recounting of the economic and aesthetic rivalry between the baroque/rococo and the enlightenment, see Remy G. Saisselin's *The Enlightenment Against the Baroque: Economics and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>119</sup> Melissa Hyde, "The 'Makeup' of the Marquise: Boucher's Portrait of Pompadour at Her Toilette," *The Art Bulletin* vol. 82, no. 3 (2000), 458.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.

<sup>121</sup> As well as the Group of Seven's desire to foster an 'unacademic' sphere or production that would create uniquely Canadian art and other products for all levels of society. Charles C. Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), 87.

<sup>122</sup> For example, see Nancy Callahan, *The Freedom Quilting Bee* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1987.)

<sup>123</sup> Thomas E. Kaiser, "Madame de Pompadour and the Theaters of Power," *French Historical Studies* vol. 19, no. 4 (1996), 1031-1039. Such corrosive forces were boredom, decadence, sensual amusement, perversity and the arbitrariness and despotism thought to accompany them etc.

<sup>124</sup> *Bloom of Matter* was held at the Issacs Gallery in Toronto in March 1981. Filled with theatrical gestures, the entrance was trellised and covered in garlands of flowers. These were matched by the often florid, rococo style of the more than thirty allegorical coloured pencil drawings featuring mystical themes and interspecies sexual unions as well as allusions to Mozart and Vivaldi. The lavish opening included Wieland dressed in an eighteenth-century inspired gown. Iris Nowell, *Joyce Wieland: A Life in Art* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2001), 385-388.

<sup>125</sup> Jill H. Casid, "Queer(y)ing Georgic: Utility, Pleasure, and Marie-Antoinette's Ornamented Farm," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* vol. 30, no. 3 (1997), 305-306.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 311-313.

<sup>128</sup> With the exception of the McPherson article quoted above, extended examination of this work has been practically non-existent. Though the majority of Wieland literature concentrates on her use of traditionally female crafts and the avant-garde innovation against tradition, the most radical gestures of her career – the ducks, perfume and the cake – have been exiled from these discussions, in no small part it seems because they more forcefully transgress the norms for art objects than the works (her films and paintings) that receive the primary attention.

<sup>129</sup> Sheila McCook, "O Canada: Our home sweet home under 150 pounds of icing," *Ottawa Citizen*, June 23, 1971, 41.

<sup>130</sup> Dierandonck, Théberge and Wieland discuss this at some length in a video recording made pre-installation. (NGC EX 1420).

<sup>131</sup> Wieland's other major piece of picturesque landscape work was *The Venus of Scarborough* (1982).

<sup>132</sup> Allen S. Weiss, *Feast and Folly: Cuisine, Intoxication, and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 107-108.

<sup>133</sup> McPherson notes that she handed out heart shaped candies at openings past. See Hugo McPherson, "Wieland: An Epiphany of North," *artscanada*, August/September 1971, 19.

<sup>134</sup> Such as *Young Woman's Blues* (1963) or *N.U.C.* (1966). In his notebooks, Dennis Burton says that these 'plastic things' look like industrial food. See "Notebook #10," 158. *Dennis Burton fonds*, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, AGO.

<sup>135</sup> *Survey 70, Realisms* ran from May 8, 1970 - September 6, 1970 at the MMFA before moving to the Art Gallery of Ontario. It also featured Wieland, Boyle, Burton, Curnoe, Eyre, Leonard, Prent and others.

<sup>136</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, "Issues of Feminist Aesthetic: Judy Chicago and Joyce Wieland," *Woman's Art Journal* (1982), 40. Rabinovitz does not stress that not only is this symbolic gesture made, but Wieland and the Gallery have at the same time actively commodified the history she is referring to for financial gain,

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effectively getting a second return on the rape of the land/women. Connoisseurs of Camp will be able to appreciate how in bad taste this is.

<sup>137</sup> Wieland told Kay Kritzwisser that the perfume was made from “new-mown hay, Siberian moss and real civet.” Kay Kritzwisser, “Wieland: ardent art for unity’s sake,” *The Globe and Mail*, July 3, 1971, 24. The \$10 bottles of perfume were actually made by “cooking up a batch of cheap cologne in her kitchen, to which she added flowers, oils and pine needles...” Iris Nowell, *Joyce Wieland: A Life in Art* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2001), 303.

<sup>138</sup> It is also worth noting that it is the non-visual – the olfactory and auditory – that is here symbolically equated with rape.

<sup>139</sup> Luca Turin, *The Secret of Scent: Adventures in Perfume and the Science of Smell* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 14. The implications raised by these and other formal strategies she employs, severely complicate the more straightforward interpretation of ‘feminist appropriation’ in her work advanced by Janine Marchessault, who argues, “Wieland reclaims this history to constitute a new history of film - not as auratic high art or as mass product but as craft which embodies at once individual idiosyncrasy and a history of shared meaning. In this sense, her project bears none of the nihilistic undertones of American Pop Art but derives from it a disregard for the boundaries of high and low art. Although her work encompasses an implicit critique of modernism’s evolutionary telos, her aesthetic framework is reconstructive rather than deconstructive. Unquestionably, her approach can be seen to inaugurate the radical notions of authorship implicit in feminist appropriation strategies of the last decade. The notion of feminist authorship provides an alternative to the Great Author of bourgeois individualism, without relinquishing the rebellious subjectivity and political agency that Barthes’ dead Author rescinds.” Janine Marchessault, “Feminist Avant-Garde Cinema: From Introspection to Retrospection” in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women’s Cinema*, ed. Kay Armatage (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 140. Such an argument necessarily ignores the erotic and mystical aspects that are central to Wieland’s work, and that stress its essentialism, its auratic value, and the complex sexual dynamics involved in her appropriation of materials and her treatment of them. It also ignores the degree to which Wieland’s work is in tune with the occult factor of modernism outlined in the introduction and how overtly her satirical strategies complicate if not undermine the feminist reading of her work.

<sup>140</sup> Tom Rossiter, “Patriotism’s absurdities lose to art,” *Ottawa Citizen*, August 7, 1971, 6.

## Chapter Six: Romantic materials

The previous chapter articulated some of the broader outlines of Wieland's practice in terms of both the polarizing reaction that her work received and the claims that she made for defining her work. It also re-situated her practice within Camp, introduced the model of the tantric, and began to suggest a relationship between her own peculiar form of artistic materialism, her mysticism and the association between these and her understandings of eroticism and nationalism. These themes are now traced out in different directions as we follow how Wieland constructed unique variations for them.

The first section will map out the gendered cosmology that Wieland constructs, one which inverts the hierarchical claims commonly relied upon by feminist readings of her work, to insist on the feminine as the source of order and spirit, relegating the masculine to the material. Within this bifurcation, there is also a model for women's art as assemblage, whether in quilting or in filmmaking as she negotiated between a highly allegorical way of figuring Canadian nationalism through erotic tales, and what were effectively fetish films using her breasts, the Canadian landscape and the face of Trudeau.

The second section examines how this cosmology and its materialism play out in a set of different ways. To start, I look at her lip works and their relationship to tantric art to offer a re-reading of them as a form of erotic art intimately bound to nationalism. Then, I look at the way that the system of erotic energy management that she established is deployed in a very different manner. In her film on the failed revolutionary Pierre Vallières, she appropriates his mouth to act out an explicitly Romantic fantasy that relies both on the fetishistic tendencies she has already established and a return to the re-

imagined rococo. The film also provides one of the most ambiguous instances of her conflation of the Canadian state with the feminine.

### 6.1. Spirit, beast and scatology

“Sex isn’t everything[.] It only makes up 1/8 of man[’s] existence [sic][.] [T]he rest is measured out carefully into other useless activities.”<sup>1</sup>

Of Wieland’s ducks, an otherwise favorable review of *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* in the *Montreal Gazette* reported that, “The stench is terrific, and why they need them is a mystery.”<sup>2</sup> A letter to the editor of the *Ottawa Citizen* also highlighted the intrusive reality of the ducks. After attacking the faddishness of the show, E.M. Nicolson closed with “I must admit, though, the duckies are kind of cool – creating their own little piles of art all over the gallery floor.”<sup>3</sup> Another visitor, Brian R. Brooks, went further, suggesting that modern Canada would be even better reflected by an open tank of the Ottawa River’s polluted water and “a rancid heap of damp animal skin remnants and other parts” from a tannery, or an assemblage of dead fish washed up from a lake.<sup>4</sup>

The dead polar bear splayed on the peak of the *Arctic Passion Cake* was the central figure of *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* and provided the basic legend for interpreting the work in the show. In this sense, it had an organizing function. The blood of the beast points to the movement of Arctic energy while the bear’s impregnation of the Spirit of Canada accorded both physical attributes and the vital energy needed for their offspring’s protean existence. I think that bestiality points to something more fundamental in both her imagery and her allegorical way of figuring the nation. The beast and its eroticism exist as allegorical figuration and as literal and

visceral material confrontation. This will be the case whether in dealing with environmental themes, English and French relations or eroticism (which runs through both). Bestiality, whether expressed in the erotic, scatology or an impersonal physicality, insists upon the territorial aspects of eroticism and art, and the association of nation with wilderness. This recurs in several forms in Wieland's work, placing her in a broader Canadian tradition and providing a useful contrast to the more abstract way she imagines femininity, which is, as noted above, symbolically and structurally identified by her with Canada. Although Wieland stated that it was not until the mid-late 1970s that she "began this whole other thing with humans uniting with nature, inter-species relationships... all about union with the consciousness of nature," she clearly began years before.<sup>5</sup>

While *Rat Life and Diet in North America* (1968), with its gerbils impersonating rats fleeing to Canada, provided an ironized tale of the border war between the United States and Canada, her other animal fables from the period are quite different. In *Aqui Nada* (1970) [Figs. 112-115], using a comic strip form, Wieland tells the story of "Lapin du Nord and Tuk[t]u the handsome caribou... in love. They spend their time doing natural things, watching the moon and flowers and making love."<sup>6</sup> The caribou has a notably erect penis while the arctic hare has human breasts, pubic hair and wears a skirt. Her father is the ruler of their land. He has been in a trance for years and sleeps under a protective quilt, telepathically communicating to the public. Shithead Von Whorehead, a "tool of the U.S. Military Industrial Complex," arrives on the scene. Of indeterminate gender, s/he has no eyes or mouth, just a gas mask and a hole instead of genitalia, a dollar sign on their coat. S/he pressures Lapin to sell her oil. When she has no resources left, Whorehead pops a 'drilldo' from his/her crotch and penetrates the bunny. After this

comical rape, she is limp and Shithead wonders, “What’s wrong with her? Have I got body odour or is she bored with my drilldo [?]”<sup>7</sup> When she revives, s/he straps her up and prepares to drill into her northern regions (her head) when Lapin sends a telepathic message to Tuktu, who sees her in his dream and comes running.<sup>8</sup> Tuktu is temporarily gassed by Shithead but then attacks him/her, stomping the hybrid into pieces and freeing his beloved bunny. They make love and promise her ‘pere’ [sic] an heir and go on a trip to Bagotville. The final image is a tombstone marked “Here lies von Whorehead’s parts. The machine is dead. Love live nature.”<sup>9</sup>

There is a clear allegory to the comic. Its title references one of the first alleged names of Canada – Cape Nothing/Nothing Here<sup>10</sup> – while Bagotville was a district of Canada East abolished with Confederation. This *nothing* of the erased pre-history of the nation is exaggerated by the lack of any borders between the frames of the story. Aside from props, only void provides a visual context for the characters. Situated within this deliberately folkloric version of the country, the two loving creatures are francophones and, as usual, overtly gendered as the two sides of a cosmic yin and yang in stark contrast to the hybrid and androgynous technological creature. Although machine, it is also waste (shitting) and the redemption of waste for profit (whoring). Double-headed, the monster is the shit of whores and their redemption (American imperialism). Technological sex is opposed to natural sex, though Wieland’s lovers cross species boundaries. The final section of the comic superimposes the grave with another of Wieland’s treasured icons – water. Although the relation between these two images is something we will return to in greater detail later, what counts here is that the surface of the water forms a bar that

serves as the route of passage, one made possible by the destruction of technology. This visual equation will later be central to *The Far Shore*.

Wieland's allegorizing of Canada is not eccentric but part of a minor tradition. Most clearly bracketing her way of imaging the gendered and sexual dimensions of the nation is the silent film *Back to God's Country* (David Hartford, 1919)<sup>11</sup> and Marian Engel's novel *Bear* (1975). *God's Country* starred one of Canada's earliest female stars, Nell Shipman. It follows the adventures of Dolores LeBeau (played by Shipman). She lives in the woods with her father and has a uniquely harmonious and loving relationship with wildlife. Her luck increases when she falls in love with Peter (Wheeler Oakman). Unfortunately, the film's villain, Ryder (Wellington Playter), dressed in the uniform of a Mountie he murdered and accompanied by a 'half-breed', leer at her while she is nakedly cavorting with woodland creatures. After they attempt her rape, they kill her father and she escapes by water. Once she has reunited with Peter, they marry and sail to the north on a whaling schooner, only to be confronted by Ryder, now the ship's captain. After a brutal dog sled race, she is finally rescued by Wapi the dog, with whom she has a special psycho-spiritual link. Dolores and her beau then return to the natural splendour she came from.

Kay Armatage situates the film's location as the 'outside' of America, a 'wilderness paradise' of "forests and lakes, ice and snow [where] [a]nimals and humankind co-existed... in bucolic harmony, and villainy was always quelled either by the red-coated Mounties, who always got their man, or by the solitary hero enlisting the local animals for his or her assistance."<sup>12</sup> Shipman's film celebrates all of the most generic identifications of the female with nature, pushing this to symbolic and narrative

extremity.<sup>13</sup> This is figured in a way that clearly presages the recasting of national mythology by Wieland as “Dolores (played by Shipman) lolls about in erotic play with Brownie the bear [Fig. 116], nuzzling her snout and tweaking her ears, as skunks, squirrels, raccoons, and baby foxes cavort about her. This is the epitome of life in God’s country, representing a paradisiacal vision of interspecies love and harmony.”<sup>14</sup>

Shipman’s famous nude scene [Fig. 117], among the earliest in film history and a key to its box office sales, symbolically captures this relationship in its transgression of social mores about the body and its display in “robust and artless physical informality.”<sup>15</sup> The eroticism of this informality cuts across species lines and the boundaries of their bodies. This is made particularly evident in the relationship that Wapi the dog has with Dolores. “The dog, then, in the expression of its desire, must be seen as the representation of the excessive desire of femininity, a transgressive desire that exceeds the capacity for satisfaction through relations with the woman’s human lover/husband,” Armatage explains.<sup>16</sup> Most of these themes are clearly recapitulated in Wieland, in particular, the oscillation between an informal eroticism and a formal allegory.

Marian Engel’s infamous novel *Bear* wanders much the same ground as Wieland’s work, albeit in more bitterly ironic form – the interest in the ‘wilderness’ of northern Ontario, the sarcastic attitude toward the archival impulse, a romantic Victorian streak, hungover Primitivism and a high sense of the erotic, played out in a mannered softcore pornography.<sup>17</sup> In Engel’s novel, Lou, a middle-aged librarian and bibliographer, leaves her stomping grounds at a Toronto ‘Institute’, where she regularly has sex with her boss on a map, to catalogue the contents of a colonial library on an island in the north of the province. The library is in the house of a family that’s now run to the end of its line.

The only remaining resident is a century old, allegedly Native woman on the other end of the island, and a bear chained up in the original cabin. There has always been a bear. He's a sort of eternal figure of indefinite age.<sup>18</sup> The old lady encourages her to bond with the creature by defecating with him. Lou makes her morning offering to the bear each day before bathing him and exploring his body with her feet.

As she attempts to dig into the past, her relationship changes to the foreign rural space, her body and the bear. The mushrooms outside are 'strange decayed phalluses'<sup>19</sup> while the bear is "solid as a sofa, domestic, a rug of a bear."<sup>20</sup> She enjoys watching him shit for her and fantasizes about him turning into a prince. Yet, she frequently discovers that searching for emotion or depth in him comes up empty.<sup>21</sup> The bear sleeps by the fireplace as she works and drinks. One night, as she masturbates, he begins licking her. "And like no human being she had ever known it persevered in her pleasure. When she came, she whimpered, and the bear licked away her tears."<sup>22</sup> Slightly horrified, she starts unearthing what's in the basement – which turns out to be little more than formerly fashionable clothes and curtains. She covers herself in honey to solicit the bear's oral advances "but once the honey was gone he wandered off, farting and too soon satisfied."<sup>23</sup> As much as she probes for the bear's body, she only discovers more fur. She tries to get him hard so she can mount him but has no luck; he remains indifferent. As the summer weather has 'its own orgasms'<sup>24</sup> all around her, she decides she loves the bear, for "[s]he felt him to be wise and accepting. She felt sometimes that he was God."<sup>25</sup> Though she frequently unchained him, his loyalty was only guaranteed by her continual offerings of excrement. Her desire intensifies with a vision right out of Wieland: "She lay naked, panting, wanting to be near her lover, wanting to offer him her two breasts and her

womb, almost believing that he could impregnate her with the twin heroes that would save her tribe.”<sup>26</sup> Stinking of bestiality and feeling empty, she goes off and has sex with the local gas station attendant before returning to her furry lover, who, after months of her begging him to rip her head off, slices into her back with his claws. She kicks him out and, seeing how young her body looks now, nurses her wound until it heals her guilt. Finally, she packs up and returns to the city.

Lou is imperfectly doubled in the book: by the bear whose body is a shadow of hers and by the old woman who was her implied erotic antecedent. She continually seeks for depth and finds none. The basement of the cabin, that great psychoanalytic cliché, yields practically nothing but fading fashions. She tries to hallucinate emotional or psychological depth for the bear but keeps coming up empty, no matter how much she loves him. His only momentary flash of erotic interest in her comes when he sees her blood, but it fades fast. As she thinks back over her life, projecting depth and pathos onto people has been a mainstay and cause of her misery. She’s consistently found there is less to people than one imagines. She leaves the island and its house that had no secrets to reveal. What she discovered was that the symbolism she attempted to cloak the house in, like the claims for documenting socio-historical significance by which the Institute justifies its existence, was nothing. In the end, the house, like the bear, was just ‘an entity’.<sup>27</sup> This pessimism about meaning extends to the novel in general. There is none of the wilderness of Torontonion fantasy; it had all been settled in the nineteenth-century. There are only flocks of tourists on the lake. And there really are no psychological relationships either; there is just shit and masturbation, alone or using other bodies. Although the ending is ambiguous and could suggest re-birth, it could as easily suggest

total stagnation – the protagonist learned nothing. Like an earlier sexual adventure in her life, it was ultimately an abortion.

Engel's bestial phantasm seems to be almost antithetical to those of Shipman and Wieland, bent as it is on evacuating the kind of mythologizing that is basic to their works, though even this distinction highlights the realization that meaning is primarily a mythical sheen projected over the otherwise vacuous.<sup>28</sup> And yet, there is a consistency between them that is not only in their divergent ways of reconstructing Canadian tropes in the seductive trappings of allegory. Part of this seduction is scatological. Lou's flirtation with the bear using feces and honey bears a resemblance to Wieland using duck feces and petit fours to seduce the public or the state. Wieland's gesture is as caustic as it is caring. She may allegorically ameliorate it, but there is a materiality to her beasts that persists in their dumb literalness (ducks) or excessive literariness (bears). It is the matter of the bestial that seems most basic to her work, not simply symbolically but in the extent to which it questions recuperation into significance while its figuration provides an overdetermined meaning.

The origin myth of a pure Canada rooted in bestial eroticism that Shipman's film embraces and Engel's work ironizes, are clearly present in Wieland's sculptures *Bear and Spirit of Canada* [Fig. 120] and *The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers* [Fig. 121], both in their bronze and sugar renditions. As with the *Sweet Beaver* perfume, there is a mytho-poetic and a non-allegorical function of the bestial. Materially, the bestial is more difficult to speak about, it crosses into a nondiscursive visceral value, and this is an important component of it. Rather than mythical, it is insistent on its disruption of the abstraction of thought but through insisting on an *even more abstract*

matter.<sup>29</sup> Some of her commentators have registered this as a form of structural excess, interpreted as a feminist protest against phallogocentrism but this does not come to terms with how Wieland is imaging the world.<sup>30</sup> Problematic for such a feminist reading is that Wieland has sometimes clearly inverted the traditional order of logos that would accord masculine reason the power of form over informal feminine matter that makes such arguments viable.<sup>31</sup> At times, Wieland's work suggests that Woman (Canada) is Spirit and the material world is a bestial male, though the distinction between these terms is often unstable. Likewise, inverting the myth of Romulus and Remus and their founding of Rome, it is the human figure in her mythology that births and nurses the animal, here recast as twin beavers. Like the Roman myth, the twins are part of a rural idyll, one that is ultimately disrupted by the founding of cities. The ancient birth of the urban (the polis) results in fratricide, a fratricide in some ways recast by Wieland in her appropriation of the figures of Wolfe and Montcalm [Fig. 122], who were present both in the *True Patriot Love* exhibition and her proposed film. According to the artist, the Spirit of Canada is a Diana figure, a goddess of the hunt, capable of communicating with animals.<sup>32</sup> A favoured subject for rococo painting, particularly of François Boucher, Diana becomes a goddess of the hicks for Wieland in a gesture that pushes the mythologization of the erotic and spiritual bond between woman and nature even further than *God's Country* had. The celebration of the rural, both in terms of crafts, images, and local economies, is of a piece with the anti-urban rhetoric that both she and Regionalists flirted with.

The logic at play in some of Wieland's work introduces a different *ménage-a-trois* than that of Trudeau. There is the spirit (the female), matter (the male) and the machine. Eroticism runs through all three as a unifying force, sometimes destructive and

other times creative, that blurs the distinctions between them. Amid the confusion are her various dominant figurations: the beast, the environment and the various traditions she identifies herself with from the Group of Seven to quilting or the rococo. One of the central tensions in her work is precisely the ambiguous difference between the spirit and the machine. For example, with their material lightness, softness and suggestions of domestic comfort, sex and femininity, quilts are simultaneously formally defined by coldness, discipline, traditionalism and the reterritorialization of diffuse materials within an abstract and rigidly gridded system. After all, are the villains of her work – whether Shithead von Whorehead or Ross Turner – really anything other than sewing machines reconstituting found material in new grids? Even the body in her work is assembled or stitched together of materials.

Kay Armatage has argued that *Water Sark* marked Wieland's discovery of the female body after years of showing a persistent interest in phallic pleasure. The film features Wieland in her domestic space, bathing and looking at her body through different mirrors and glasses, distorting and superimposing it as shots of her breasts and face are intercut with the objects that make up the space. For Armatage the film is an animated still life that finally privileges the artist's breast to displace the phallus, breaking the psychic mirror in which man would be traditionally reflected in woman. So, "the mirror has been transformed into a dangerous, jagged shard, nevertheless she wields it in transgressive, joyful play" as the woman substitutes her own reflection in place of a reflection of the man and speaks *from* her body.<sup>33</sup> The result: "Wieland's examination of her own breast is at once distant, almost scientific in the equanimity of its contemplation,

while at the same time the highly saturated colours, blurring of focus, and unconventional framing suggest an eroticism curiously without narcissism.”<sup>34</sup>

However, it is not clear that what Wieland is doing is about her breast so much as the creation of a topological body of which the breast is a part. Wieland insisted that *Water Sark* [Figs. 123-125] was a ‘drawing film’ and was an extension of the drawings that she had done earlier in her career, like *Woman amusing herself*. [Fig. 126]<sup>35</sup>

However, between these early drawings and her films there is a clear shift from the body as isolated puppet (its generic tantric function) to the body as object in a *nature morte*. Wieland creates a body not simply out of discovering it through media, but by aggregating different things that detach her from her organic body. Through the camera and various distorting glasses, she abstracts and alters her anatomy, assembling it as a topological image made of ‘extensions’ as she would put it, echoing McLuhan’s language. It should be noted that this involves a de-privileging of the organic integrity of the body and its value as primary referent. This is important not only because it stresses the artificiality of the body, but the artificiality of the organic as well. According to Gilles Deleuze, “Our sexual body is a Harlequin’s cloak. Each erogenous zone is inseparable from or several points, from a serial development articulated around the singularity and from a drive investing this territory.”<sup>36</sup> The body is a projection on the territory. This image is fabricated from the elements that make up the human body, the cinematic apparatus and the body of water, with the three interjecting into one another to manufacture a picturesque of flesh, fluid and light. Wieland characterized the film as “very much to do with acid and light and an innocent rediscovery of water” and insisted that it was primarily the product of experiments with psychedelic narcotics.<sup>37</sup> The result

is very much as Armatage suggests – the body is an animated still life made of heterogeneous materials. But this can be expanded beyond Wieland’s autoerotic delineation of her body and clearly is not about the ‘transgression’ of phallic order but mechanized rationality of the feminine.

In a series of text portraits of friends and acquaintances from the early 1960s, Wieland depicts the body in terms of math and mechanics. She writes of a woman’s “light extensions [;] she is a solid mass (kind) but nothing comes from the body and nothing goes in. [H]er face is blank her hands serviceable. [...] no happiness about having two breasts (sad little extensions).”<sup>38</sup> She is described with an amalgam of fish and poultry references, her body parts anachronistically distinguished by their relative heat, before Wieland explains that her eyes “held in stare [keeps] sex from creeping into brain.”<sup>39</sup> A man has “a soft extension which can get hard” while his brains circulate through his body. He’s “all brain man muscle bone” this “[m]echanical boy mildly moist.”<sup>40</sup> Others are made of ‘segments’ and filled with air; formed of stones and fabrics, their bodies are ‘pastures’ and their postures leave them gaping and exposing their ‘grime’.<sup>41</sup> An uninhabited body is ‘dry’ while there are also those with “a live spirit (electrical)” though this spirit may not animate the body but only the outlines of its movement, this “rough outline of energy spirit.”<sup>42</sup> In constant movement, such a spirit never really inhabits a space for long but constantly moves over the curves of the topological surface, just as her camera later will in *Reason Over Passion*. Much like Curnoe’s erotic geography, Wieland does not so much create portraits but profiles, external lines and bodies as mechanisms that need balancing. As she explained in one

interview, “It’s very female to put things into other things like boxes – in a way, you could say it’s female to limit things.”<sup>43</sup>

One can contrast the way that Wieland deals with her body in *Water Sark* with the way that she deals with either Trudeau or the Canadian landscape in *Reason Over Passion*. Wieland takes more time manipulating Trudeau’s body and projecting it than she does her own. [Fig. 128] The footage of his face goes through a series of inversions, stops, starts, stutters, and distortions as he is projected onto a wall or bedsheet and re-photographed, much like the ‘pervert’ subject of *Larry’s Recent Behaviour*. [Fig. 129] While her body is edited integrally into the fabric of *Water Sark*, acting as an aspect rather than as its primary material, Trudeau’s body seems consistently isolated, teased and dissected.<sup>44</sup> Materially, he is not only captured but literally projected, becoming both light and surface to an extent that her body does not achieve. The prime minister appears in approximately the middle of the film, ‘sandwiched’ between footage of the Canadian landscape through the four seasons.<sup>45</sup> She claimed that her treatment of Trudeau was “similar in a way to male artists always having had their odalisque, throughout the history of art and in their films, as stars.”<sup>46</sup> However, she would claim, she had not objectified Trudeau in the way women are often objectified in films. Rather, she *puts him on*, treating his slogan as propaganda and mutating it into a new language. Yet, this does not sidestep an erotic relation to Trudeau but defines it as part of the film. Putting *him on* or making a quilt she could put *on him*, does not change that but suggests its character as playful, intimate and ironic. It may be rare that irony is so intimate, but here it points to the malleability she accords to Trudeau as she manipulates him like the anatomically implausible body of an odalisque.

In his analysis of the film, George Lellis suggest that she is “as ironic about Trudeau as Godard is... about his leftists in *La Chinoise*...”<sup>47</sup> In Wieland, this irony comes halfway between treating him as a ‘wind-up doll’ and “fondling him, co-enjoying his convention appearance, scrutinizing his every feature.”<sup>48</sup> Though the landscape is treated as a torrent of movement where no static image of the country can be established and an alien view is perpetuated as a result, Trudeau’s image gains a claustrophobic intimacy when it is spread out at as the centerfold for her topological mapping of Canada. Even more than in the capturing and multiplication of the visual plasticity of her breast’s image in *Water Sark*, Trudeau’s face is treated as a masturbatory item. Wieland spoke of the film as a portrait of her camera, and it is, as it caresses and exposes its mechanics, making itself appear most nakedly through the image of Trudeau.<sup>49</sup> As his image is re-captured and manipulated, the soundtrack is taken over by harshly oscillating feedback that intensifies in pitch as the image flickers faster and slower, shifting proximity to its projected icon, concentrating tangentially on his mouth and his fingers touching his lips as it runs through a gamut of colours, hot and cold, from blacks, whites, greys and blues to an oversaturated orange-red. [Figs. 130-131] Barrie Hale sensed here both the voluptuous and doomed, a kind of Roman death mask.<sup>50</sup>

When speaking of *Reason Over Passion*, Wieland repeatedly claimed that she felt she was making propaganda for Trudeau.<sup>51</sup> She was Leni Riefenstahl to his Hitler and together they would save the nation before it was erased by the forces of continentalism.<sup>52</sup> What form does such an erotic nationalism take and what kind of bodies does it assume? We have already seen how Wieland would assemble an eroticized body through the naked mechanics of cinematic technology and that this construction of order

was a sort of feminization of materiality. We also saw earlier how much she stresses the bond between *the female* and the nation and that she thought the essence of female sensibility was summarized in the work of Riefenstahl. [Figs. 132-134] In “Filming the Nazi Flag: Leni Riefenstahl and the Cinema of National Arousal,” Tom Saunders argues that in that director’s films, Hitler’s body provided the figure to the grounding of the masses in a reciprocal play of attraction: “This combination of eroticism and autoeroticism need not be seen as uniquely fascist to recognize that it was a key to Riefenstahl’s party rally films.”<sup>53</sup> If the dictator was depicted as a (ambivalently gendered) desirable seducer, National Socialism itself, in spite of being dominated by male bodies, was figured as basically feminine.<sup>54</sup> Saunders concentrates on one element of the careful erotic stagings that make up Riefenstahl’s work – the seductive depictions of flags as the femininely gendered embodiments of national desire, an object of desire that Wieland shares, both within her film and in her numerous flag-themed art works.<sup>55</sup> [Figs. 135-137]

In a visual iconography that stressed the erect body and discipline, flags and banners served as the icons of the nation to which men erected their arms. Saunders argues that, “Riefenstahl’s camera stages the flag as a substitute for herself, veiled and mysteriously seductive, a feminized complement to her staging of Hitler.”<sup>56</sup> Often overwhelming in size, the heterogeneous forms of fluttering flags overshadow the bodies of the militarized nation in Riefenstahl’s imagery while sometimes taking on the embodiment of the nation for itself.<sup>57</sup> Though they provide contrast, it is not in terms of strict opposition but generally in terms of two different modulations of kinetic energy.<sup>58</sup> “The effect is a significant double transformation: the images mechanize human beings

and breathe life into flags.”<sup>59</sup> Riefenstahl’s bodies are usually de-individualized, they have become architectural and are articulated through ritual and avant-garde influenced editing that makes them into highly stylized gestural sequences. While the nation becomes an oscillation between these shifting strategies of visual abstraction, Hitler becomes disembodied on screen and suspended over it, confined largely to the role of voiceover.<sup>60</sup>

While almost every aspect of this aesthetic can clearly be seen recapitulated in Wieland’s work, it undergoes some important changes. One significant distinction is that Wieland’s flags, even the majority of those that interject throughout *Reason Over Passion*, are almost aggressively flat, much like the bodies that populate her work. They lack volume and curves. What animation they have comes from their interruption of the vitality of movement. While the flags presented in *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique*<sup>60</sup> possessed tactile qualities due to the various processes and materials used to make them, they simultaneously insist on the visuality of these tactile qualities and dramatize the denial of hand-to-object contact by being housed under plexiglass or suspended behind a forbidding rope. This could be mistaken for a form of institutional critique if it were not for the fact that it was wholly consistent with her general aesthetic and at one with how she tended to present the elements that make up bodies. While possessing a heterogeneity of forms equal to Riefenstahl’s flags, Wieland’s deny their inflated vitality and increase their fetishistic value.

Bodies for Wieland are inevitably sundry fluids, detritus, bits of skin, organs and tufts of hair thrown into a bag of skin or plastic, animated or silhouetted by the principle of female energy (line and delimitation). These bodies are, as tantric tradition would put

it, sacks of excrement and meat which are then decoratively arranged. The decorative arrangement is their spiritualization; their essence if constituted in their becoming-décor, an eminently Decadent technique.

The union of Wieland's mystical and material tendencies may best be encapsulated by some of the things that she borrows from the Catholic mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The text from which Wieland appropriated the phrase 'bloom of matter' for one of her late exhibitions is one of de Chardin's *histoires* called "The Picture," which proposes to be a philosophical query into how Christ would look if he returned to earth. This is an overtly aesthetic question. Teilhard de Chardin insists that the holiness of Jesus could not be 'too precise' or 'too individual' in its beauty.<sup>61</sup> He has a vision of Christ in which the outlines of his figure dissolve and

these contours, and the folds of Christ's garment, the lustre of his hair and the bloom of his flesh, all seemed to merge as it were (though without vanishing away) into the rest of the picture. It was as though the planes which marked off the figure of Christ from the world surrounding it were melting into a single vibrant surface whereon all demarcations vanished.<sup>62</sup>

This vibrant world, which sounds remarkably like the way that Wieland fashions the body in *Water Sark*, is contrasted with the individuation of objects that float on the surface, while Christ's garments seem to be 'bloom[s] of matter', apparently stitched together by nature with indefinite lines that stretched out to "innumerable gradations of majesty."<sup>63</sup> This immense and complex surface itself was made of grades of images behind which the Divine remained while vibrating the visionary in ecstasy before leaving them 'dumbfounded' with the realization that the final expression of the Divine was indecipherable, making any distinction between agony and joy impossible.

Wieland has consistently claimed that the feminine is limitation, formal order, and the treatment of diverse materials as things that can be collaged. This is as true of quilts as it is of human bodies or the presentation of the landscape. What results from all of this is an autoerotic picturesque – the image that has sex with itself in much the same way that Engel wrote of nature’s perpetual orgasmic blossoming or what Wieland called, after Teilhard de Chardin, the *bloom of matter*. The body is fabricated not so much by the *écriture féminin* that Armatage and Banning interpret it through, and the domestic sphere that it uses to fashion a text, but what Wieland might typically call the *compost* heap of materials used to manufacture the skin. Wieland is not a writer; she is a farmer.

## **6.2. The Lips of Canada; (in)articulation and the horrors of romantic realism**

“You can tell by the differences in the writing styles the problems that exist between the two cultures,” Miss Wieland said.<sup>64</sup>

“Is it necessary to read a face? Is it just a female intuitive, crackpot attitude?”<sup>65</sup>

Applied to the bestial and quilted body outlined in the previous section, is one of the most persistent erotic nationalist icons in Wieland’s repertory, the lips. These are usually, though not always, her own. It has been argued that these lips combine a “yearning to speak and an unwillingness to be spoken.”<sup>66</sup> But this would be to misunderstand the more radical rococo gesture they make against speech and toward something else. The lips, even if they make word-images, are nondiscursive. They are colour. As with Boucher, they mix red and white to make flesh. For Wieland, “Red Vitalizes, with the element of life, all living matter. It is a good positive magnetic vibration, the first ray of manifested being... life force energy – heroic – courage, love, adventure, enthusiasm – the pioneer spirit.”<sup>67</sup> Sewing the intensity of their libidinal investment into a void, a wilderness, the

white space serves as the space for red lips to kiss and consummate their coming into space. Their subject matter is articulation, displayed through the registering of syllables and sounds translated to the surface of the print. Cosmetics are central to this translation and in keeping with the cosmetic nationalism discussed earlier. In the lip prints that Wieland created, lipstick takes the place of the grease traditionally used in the lithographic process. Their picture matter is the minimal mark of registering figure and ground, of insisting on the limited appearance at the surface.

These lips seem to take part in a tradition of tactile non-objectivism found in the anthropometries of Yves Klein [Fig. 138],<sup>68</sup> but they also share something with the late work of Paul-Émile Borduas. [Fig. 139]<sup>69</sup> In these works, Borduas worked through his landscape inspirations toward a collapse of figure and ground onto one cosmic surface articulated through a stark contrast between (primarily) black and white that undermined the legibility of depth with the creation of ‘overlapping lip[s]’ in his oils.<sup>70</sup> In Wieland, this thematic is transformed into a conceptualization of nationalism as a cosmetic surface and lips are used as the territorial marking for this claim on cosmic space.

Lauren Rabinovitz interprets Wieland’s lip works as a feminist attempt at the reclamation of women’s bodies, the mouth doubling the vagina. Within this gesture, she claims, vaginal shapes are insistently two-dimensional and used to produce “abstract overall patterns that dilute the sensation of vaginal confrontation.”<sup>71</sup> This decorative rendering also slightly obscures the extent to which she “consciously satirizes how advertising uses women’s body for commercial purposes: she then satirizes the satire by allowing the same package to reclaim women’s artistic heritage.”<sup>72</sup> Such a strictly allegorized reading makes the lips an easily mobilized political symbol, one which

Rabinovitz utilizes with a degree of contextual indifference. The doubled satiric movement she highlights, however, both asserts and negates itself, making its signifying gesture (the socio-political reading) absurd in terms of meaning but valuable as a kind of *rubbing out*, or perhaps as the kind of frottage between genres that we saw was so prevalent in erotic art in Chapter One.

While the vagina has often been given central symbolic significance in her oeuvre by feminist and non-feminist critics alike, this seems to be a mistake.<sup>73</sup> I am not convinced that Wieland is interested in vaginas in the way Rabinovitz asserts she is.<sup>74</sup> Wieland expressed more interest in what she termed ‘fringe eroticism’ such as toe sucking, that great fetishization of the surface and of non-genital sexuality or the pimple popping, nose picking, nose licking, hair plucking and snot eating of *Larry’s Recent Behaviour*.<sup>75</sup> [Figs. 140-142] It may be that she has no reason to displace the vagina to the lips because she has cultivated a generalized ‘orgasmic body’, for which genitals (male or female) were transient tools to water or fertilize the compost heap of the body. As the following section of this chapter will show, abstraction through the aesthetic models Wieland establishes is also a means of making the cosmetic into the cosmic. Between these two correlated worlds, the lips serve as a figurative means to articulate the passage of cosmic energy into particularity, whether on the erogenous zone of the mouth or the regional milieu of politics. This is mapped out between her own lips figuring Canada and Pierre Vallières’ figuring Québec, each treated very differently.

Lips rarely appear in Wieland’s work outside of the theme of nationalism. They speak traditions and slogans, impersonal codes and norms.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, they also disarticulate and distort those languages, breaking them into gestures and noise in the

way burlesque routines do with the language of the body. They also help to articulate an alien body, offering an orifice without a face, one that not only speaks but tastes, lest we forget the importance of food for Wieland. When the lips are dabbed with lipstick, they speak in and of cosmetic nationalism; not (necessarily) a nationalism in drag but one of boudoir games.

Lips are the central motif in an array of works from the late sixties until the early seventies. The most famous of these is the lithograph *O Canada* (1970). [Fig. 143] “In *O Canada* Wieland gives us the fragile tactility of her own skin. The repeated kiss of her lips stamps the print 68 singing times, each kiss a sexualized syllable of the Canadian national anthem.”<sup>77</sup> Fragile though her skin may have been, it is mechanically transformed in the creation of the work and displayed in an assembly line way. Their poster style also ties to some of her early, décor-like work. John O’Brian has written of the “capacity of the lithographic process to reproduce unmediated the autographic touch of the artist. (What could be more autographically tactile, more intimate, even *erotic*, than warm *lips* drawing life out of cold stone?)”<sup>78</sup> There is a mythic dimension to this, a sort of Pygmalion tale as she creates art from a dead thing through the power of her lips. The thing produced is also dead but given the skeleton of animation. This is done even more literally in *O Canada Animation* (embroidered [1970]). Here, her lips, teeth, tongue and the void of the mouth are sewn together by another woman. What is more, they place everything, from the tongue and lips to the teeth and hole of the mouth, on the same cosmetic surface. Both works then take the form of a kind of flickering motion picture. While they document an act of intimacy and appear through the force of technological reproduction, this image is not the final point in the series. The image is finally

suspended, its tactility displayed for voyeuristic desire as it imprints itself on the retinas of its viewer.

What Wieland is creating here is a kind of erotic ritual that allows for the circulation of erotic energy through the artwork. Part of this may be explained by the lithograph *The Arctic Belongs to Itself* (1973). [Fig. 145] Here again, her mouth *mouths*, this time the same words as the title. We know this because the syllables are spelled out beneath the lip prints in an orangey-yellow. This invites the viewer to mouth along as their eyes caress the work. The artwork is a machine for kissing without bodily contact. Her lipstick works are make-up and make-out pieces. Making out with an image also seems to be part of what is at stake in *The Maple Leaf Forever II* (1972). [Fig. 146] Here, seven mouths with lipsticked lips are drawn and appliquéd to quilts. Each mouth is stacked upon the other, standing seven feet high in an unmistakably totemic gesture.<sup>79</sup>

The tantric aspect of her work, alluded to in an earlier chapter, is given a different expression here than in Wieland's more directly mandala inspired pieces. Over the course of 1966, Wieland created a number of mandalas in quilted format (*The Film Mandala* [1966, Fig. 147], *The Square Mandala* [1966, Fig. 148]). She cultivated the generic symmetry of mandala patterns, whose flatness and repetitive values were intended to aid in the production of hallucinatory states. Like Dennis Burton, she seems to be experimenting with the question of how to create a mantra-yantra system appropriate for her milieu. What is at stake is fabricating an effective mechanism for the circulation of erotic energy. Part of how this circuit can be engineered in through what some tantric theory calls the 'necklace of letters' worn by the Goddess upon which the sounds of this alphabet tend to be visualized using variations of the vulva.<sup>80</sup> For Burton this was

crudely, and comically, stated in his text work, *Vowel Declention* (1972) [Fig. 149], which runs through the English vowels from TWAT to TWYT. In Wieland, the female element exists in the pun on female genital imagery while the mantras she uses are the already ritualized auditory figurations of the nation (*O Canada, The Maple Leaf Forever*) as modal devices for the assembling of erotic energy.

The mantra is the auditory means to gather cosmic energy, harnessing it through repetition to create a special resonating space through the patterns of vibration, a power that we have seen she associates with red.<sup>81</sup> The yantra is the visual equivalent of the mantra. Though it appears abstract, it is concrete and may function in unison with the mantra as ‘a linked diagram’.<sup>82</sup> As Philip Rawson explains

To use yantra thus involves a continuous meditative dialectic in which content and concentration drive each other to a higher pitch of intensity. This is one of the ways in which the psycho-cosmic mechanism worked. And it is also one of the aspects of Tantra art which appeals most to people who have become disillusioned with the vapid conceptualism of much modern art.<sup>83</sup>

The lip works function as ritualistic devices for channeling the sexual energy of Canada as the cosmetic and the cosmic directly map onto each other. So, in Wieland we see the invocation of the erotic through explicitly nationalistic mantras (*O Canada*) that are unified with the nondiscursive figuration of the nation (the *coloris* of red and white) produced by using her body as a graphic instrument (her lips). Tantrically, she has taken on the role of the sacred harlot who offers her body as a device for the circulation of spiritual/erotic energy.<sup>84</sup> However, things take on a slightly different colouration when we look at how she uses someone else’s lips.

If Wieland had realized that articulating a vision of Canada was exceedingly difficult and, judging by the reception of *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique*,

often unpleasant, she found someone whose vision was significantly clearer in part because of unpleasantness. Her consistent presentation as having her tongue in her cheek, of being a professional ironist, was rather starkly in contrast with the man whose mouth she would fixate upon. Pierre Vallières<sup>85</sup> had recently been released following three years of incarceration for counselling kidnapping. Wieland travelled north of Montréal to Mont Laurier to see him. She had been spending her time doing studies of birds in extreme close-up and wanted to turn her camera onto a pair of lips. In the case of Vallières they operated in a rather different register than much of what had preceded it and complicate the political implications they have been accorded in interpretations of her work.<sup>86</sup>

According to her notes, Wieland's interest in Vallières concerned his struggle to discover himself and his rejection by radical separatists after he sided with the Parti Québécois. Her interest was equally, if not more, aesthetic. Resonating with her sensibility, the subject made her think of the French Revolution and gave her the chance to experiment with 'Géricault's colour'.<sup>87</sup> More importantly, "I really wanted to do the film of just the mouth, and he had quite red lips anyway. I was very glad when I saw his mouth, it was a good subject matter. The moustache made the image even richer."<sup>88</sup> The redness of his lips was important because it provided the red for her consistent red and white colour scheme, placing it into direct relation with the set of works discussed above. Géricault, of course, was not just the colourful allegorical painter of revolutionary subjects; he was also the documenter of morbid decay and a portraitist of madness and maimed bodies.<sup>89</sup> [Figs. 150-151] His images of anatomical details severed from bodies "tread the uncertain ground between empathetic social statement and delight in social horror."<sup>90</sup> As Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer argues, this fascination with the

phantasmagoria of morbid social statement, complete with “hidden subtexts and disquieting innuendos,” introduced by careful staging, is intrinsic to the revolutionary politics generally espoused by Romantics and their derision of Classicism.<sup>91</sup> But in spite of certain traits of this ‘horrific realism’<sup>92</sup> finding themselves into her work, Wieland remains rococo precisely because she resists producing a humanized face, instead creating an artificial landscape with a discursive layer (the subtitles) treated as another visual aspect. Even ‘horrific realism’ is feminized in Wieland’s sense: carefully limited and arranged like a bouquet.

Since Vallières refused to speak English, Danielle Corbeil, director of Extension Services at the National Gallery, acted as translator. She also held his head in place while he read his three essays in one shot [Fig. 152]: one on the working class of the Mont Laurier region; one on women’s liberation; and one concerning the history of Québec. There is a momentary entre-act between the first two, consisting of blackouts and noises before resuming. The final shot is a seemingly random and agitated pan out the window at the snowy landscape. The top third of the image is broken up by a blurred power line. Wieland has described the intense psychic energy that pervaded the shoot, suggesting that the ‘séance’ quality of the experience even affected equipment itself, affecting colour temperature etc.<sup>93</sup> Wieland explained

What we see on film is the mouth of a revolutionary, extremely close, his lips, his teeth (and calculus), his spittle streaks [sic], his tongue which rolls so beautifully through his French, and finally the reflections in his teeth of the window behind me. This film mouthscape shows all the process of making the film, camera breakdown, Vallières pulling away after shots, and the final emptying of the camera...<sup>94</sup>

Much as *Reason Over Pasion* had, *Pierre Vallières* (1972) sought to meld the relationship between the face and the landscape, making both more alien in the process. [Fig. 153] The mouth becomes less an opening onto the depth of its subject, than a surface, one whose articulation is in process. The mouth as mechanism and landscape becomes the primary context for the text.<sup>95</sup> In spite of being held in place by a state bureaucrat, Vallières' head frequently moves, offering slightly modified views of the mouth and chin, weaving in and out of focus while the text remains constant, placed in the top third of the screen where the power line will be, or the eyes would be in a conventional portrait. The soundtrack, which sometimes overwhelms the voice, is the creaky mechanisms of the camera and static on the microphone, only accentuating the alien quality of the porous flesh and obscure thatches of hair.<sup>96</sup>

In 1974, Vallières would attack Michel Brault's film about the October Crisis, *Les Ordres* (1974), on the grounds that the director had betrayed the historical reality of the event by abstracting it from its historical specifics and transforming it into a "Kafkaesque melodrama in which the actors struggle helplessly in utter mystery of their oppression..."<sup>97</sup> As such, the film only fuels the accelerating apathy of the Québécois and, rather than "providing the real shock people need these days" serves to 'eradicate' memory and awareness by reducing it to individual sob stories.<sup>98</sup> More colourfully, "It is a film for the Civil Liberties Union with its overriding interest in mistreated dogs and socially conscious matrons who want someone to feel bad about."<sup>99</sup>

Wieland's film about politics in Québec functions differently. Vallières' spoken texts polemically detail aspects of the political situation in the province in a nearly didactic fashion. To a substantial degree they introduce the kind of perspective that

Brault's film lacked. Yet, simultaneously, the film abstracts the figure more, reducing it to one angry voice in a mechanical whirr rather than half a dozen clearly sobbing ones. And while something of her subject's life might be gleaned from his fragmented physiognomy, he is largely rendered alien by her unique application of the Riefenstahl aesthetic of the fragmented body, though in the world of Wieland, this 'alienation' is hardly negative. Aside from the lips, it is the teeth, meat and hair of his face, his bestiality, and pointedly not the more traditionally human qualities of the face such as the eyes, that dominates the image. It is the mouth of a man but also of a beast, released from his cage and prompted to speak. Offsetting this romantic suggestiveness, he does not speak off the cuff, or 'from his heart', but through a prepared statement, translated and rendered back onto the flatness of the screen. The bilingualism of the film hollows the words of their orality (already compromised by their overt mechanization) and spatially flattens them. It also highlights the stark contrast in her work between the cosmetic lips of Canada-as-female and the bestial lips of the Québécois. In her prints, Wieland presented her own lips – in stark red and white (or pink) as the revived rococo filtered through a parodic use of abstraction to celebrate the concrete particularity of Canada. With Vallières, documented with a fascination for his decaying teeth, she hits the counter-song (*parodia*) to her anthem.

Lauren Rabinovitz argues that, "The visual image of the mouth, Vallières' French speeches, and the accompanying English subtitles blend and balance Wieland's concern for the image, word, and sound into one integral system."<sup>100</sup> The dialectic set up between text and mouth does not allow the mouth to dominate. This 'integral system', though Rabinovitz does not imply it, also mimics the structure of Trudeauvian federalism and its

neutralized eroticism. Rabinovitz continues, “Such a balanced system operates on the symbolic level, too. The visual image of the mouth, symbolic of a vagina, is the organ for a political oral narrative which connects the sexually erotic with the political.”<sup>101</sup> This interpretation is echoed by Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright, who argue the film marks Wieland’s political maturity, adding that “Vallières’ monologue [is] accompanied visually by a moist pulsating organ”<sup>102</sup> and stressing the importance of the function of subtitling and reading. “Essentially one makes one’s own time with Vallières; you become the camera person making your own film within Wieland’s structure.”<sup>103</sup> Her way of depicting him – fragmenting and abstracting him, treating him as an array of part-objects that are overtly mechanized through the nudity of the medium itself in its structural minimalism – is close to her treatment of Trudeau in *Reason Over Passion* but more clinical, less passionate. The sense in which she also renders Vallières into *something* that can be accessed, labelled, controlled and reconstituted by the viewer is also significant here. If the film is, as Rabinovitz suggested above, a fusing of the “sexually erotic with the political,” it seems to be in the female ordering and territorialisation of appropriated matter. Wieland herself stressed the degree to which looking at the mouth of this ‘poor’ man would allow the viewer to *become* the camera.<sup>104</sup> Is there less eroticism here, in this transformation of a revolutionary into a pliable mouth, than in her prints of her own lips? No. But unlike the autoerotic construction of her own body, as well as her exhibitionistic exploitation of it through a mantra-yantra system that allowed it to participate in a virtual orgy, there is a distinct difference between her cosmic/cosmetic body and the bestial/mechanical body she fabricates for Vallières or the flag-like body of mechanism and light that she created for Trudeau.

Despite the clear power dynamic that Wieland is enacting in her portrayal of the former revolutionary through the abstraction of his body, it scarcely seems to have been mentioned in the literature that has accrued on the topic. Vallières has gone from casting himself as a *nègre blanc* to being typecast as a talking vagina by feminist critics.<sup>105</sup> The mouth is translated by Wieland mechanically and unsentimentally, not as a space of enunciation but a space where his subjugation by the federalist ideological state apparatus is inscribed into his cinematically rendered flesh. In this reading, Wieland has used the medium itself to allegorize the relationship between French and English Canada, which is symbolically related to the relations between men and women. There are a few potential issues to be raised here that I will leave as open questions. First, why does the mouth need to be genitally symbolic as critics have contended? Is it not perversely erotic as a mouth, or is it this perversity that bothers some critics?<sup>106</sup> Second, if in the logic of Wieland, Canada is female (or, as in *Patriotism*, a phallically weak male<sup>107</sup>) and Canada has imprisoned Vallières, how is his mouth female? Is that femininity a product of being held captive by a woman? Does this suggest that feminization could be something other than liberatory, like in the sissified imaginary Canada of Harold Town's *Enigmas* or Canada as a matriarchal state in the novels of Scott Symons?

Over the course of this chapter, we have examined how Wieland constructed a general and gendered cosmology that tended to operate along the lines of man-as-matter and woman as the order of spirit. The erotic body was one that was assembled from motley materials and figured in both mechanical and mystical language. Foregrounded in this was not only the tantric aspect of the work of art, but also the work of art as the sewing together of the cosmic and cosmetic dimensions into an erogenous surface. One

of the perhaps surprising things to emerge from this has been that despite her sometimes avowed distaste for the Trudeau government, something like the federalist model of erotic management has emerged in her work.

The many ambiguities and strategies that Wieland has introduced through her work in various media to this point take a modified form in the major work that follows, her feature film *The Far Shore*. And it is an examination of this as a cumulative statement of her erotic nationalism since *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* that is the subject of the final chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce Wieland; edited by Jane Lind, *Joyce Wieland: Writings and Drawings, 1952-1971* (Erin: Porcupine's Quill, 2010), 122.

<sup>2</sup> Shirley Raphael, "An artists' plan for Canada," *Montreal Gazette*, July 10, 1971, 38.

<sup>3</sup> "Readers Views," *Ottawa Citizen*, August 7, 1971, 6.

<sup>4</sup> "Reader's Views," *Ottawa Citizen*, July 30, 1971, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Allen, *Joyce Wieland: Twilit Record of Romantic Love* (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, 1995), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Joyce Wieland, "Aqui Nada," *The Canadian Forum*, June 1971, 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>8</sup> 'Tuktu' is the Inuit term for caribou. It is also the name of the protagonist for several NFB pseudo-documentary shorts in the period by Laurence Hyde: *Tuktu and his Eskimo Dogs* (1966), *Tuktu and the Ten Thousand Fish* (1967), and *Tuktu and the Trials of Strength* (1967).

<sup>9</sup> Joyce Wieland, "Aqui Nada," *The Canadian Forum*, June 1971, 22.

<sup>10</sup> 'Nothing Here' also provides an echo of Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, which is simultaneously a nowhere and a now here, precisely the kind of paradoxical space that Wieland, like some of her fellow nationalists, imagined Canada as.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Halpern Martineau has also linked Wieland's work to *God's Country*, though her argument is rather different than mine. See her "The Far Shore: a film about violence. A peaceful film about violence," *Cinema Canada*, April 1976, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Kay Armatage, *The Girl from God's Country: Nell Shipman and the Silent Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 85-86.

<sup>13</sup> As Armatage notes, "We find something approaching hysteria, madness, even stupidity, in the almost pathological femininity of the Shipman character. For my contemporary students, Shipman/Dolores in *Back to God's Country* represents everything that as feminists they deplore in a woman." *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>17</sup> Originally planned as a pornographic short story for a compilation being put together by the Writers' Union of Canada (Hair, 35), Engels' novel received the same kind of hyperbolic reaction, positive and negative, that tended to be visited upon Wieland's work. Patricia Monk has written about the work in Jungian terms, stressing that the novel's energy derives from the "symbolic ambivalence of the bear itself" and argues that the bear is feminine in gender and operates as the Animus in her journey to self-awareness. (Monk, 29) Margery Fee interprets it as an instance of the Canadian Gothic. Although she recognizes the satirical elements of the novel, like Monk she succumbs to psychoanalyzing it (with Irigaray instead of Jung). Gerry Turcotte takes this line even further, concluding that the novel offers an antidote "to a

repressive symbolic order.” (Turcotte, 87) Leeann R. Drabenstott’s MA Thesis provides a Lacanian interpretation of the bear as the ‘phallic mother’. Coral Ann Howells sees the novel as part of a combination of pastoral myth and pornography to investigate the attainment of mystic vision through sex and the moral neutrality of nature’s indifference. (Howells, 105, 108) Adding, “Not only does this novel expose the hidden dynamics of women’s romantic fiction, it also turns upside down the power fantasies of conventional male-oriented pornography, for here it is not the woman who is tamed and transformed into a sex object, it is the bear...” (Howells, 109) Tania Aguila-Way historicizes the novel as part of a trend toward nationalist romantic fiction featuring protagonists who fashion themselves as victims by identifying with, and instrumentalizing, animal others, but notes that it disrupts this pattern in numerous ways. Tania Aguila-Way, “Beyond the logic of solidarity as sameness: The critique of animal instrumentalization in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* and Marian Engel’s *Bear*.” *Isle-Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* vol. 23, no. 1 (2016); Leeann R. Drabenstott, “Encounters with the Lacanian Real: The bear as phallic mother in Doug Peacock’s ‘Grizzly Years’ and Marian Engel’s ‘Bear’” (MA Thesis University of Montana, 1998); Donald S. Hair, “Marian Engel’s *Bear*.” *Canadian Literature* vol. 92 (1982); Coral Ann Howells, “Marian Engel’s ‘Bear’: Pastoral, Porn, and Myth,” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* vol. 17, no. 4 (1984); Margery Fee, “Articulating the Female Subject: The Example of Marian Engel’s *Bear*,” *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* vol. 14, no. 1 (1988); Patricia Monk, “Engel’s *Bear*: A Furry Tale,” *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1979); Gerry Turcotte, “Sexual Gothic: Marian Engel’s ‘Bear’ and Elizabeth Jolley’s ‘The Well’,” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* vol. 26, no. 2 (1995). Although it seems clear to me that the novel is a convincing and brutal mockery of psychoanalytic and sociological modes of interpretation such as those above, with the exception of Howells, none of these authors read the novel remotely as I do.

<sup>18</sup> Marian Engel, *Bear* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 35-36.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 71, 91.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>28</sup> The visual history of the book seemed to duplicate the over-compensatory interpretations it has received from academics. Originally, it was published in a stark grey hardcover. After winning the Governor General’s award (publisher Jack McClelland threatened to attend the ceremony in a bear outfit), it was re-issued as a mass-market paperback with a cover illustration by Bill Edwards [Fig. 117], a former actor and rodeo rider, who had established himself as an artist for various pornographic novels and magazines as well as *Weird Tales*. The cover was white, while the rather pliable and unthreatening bear serving as the cushion for the youthful protagonist (in the novel she’s middle-aged) to writhe against as her clothes fall away. This cover then became part of the cover for a feature in *Saturday Night*’s November 1977, held up by a nude, curly haired blonde woman against grey backing. [Fig. 118] Sandra Martin, “How did Marian’s discreet novel get that brazen cover?” *Saturday Night*, November 1977, 29-30.

<sup>29</sup> Her treatment of Trudeau’s statement also partakes of this as it pits her treatment of Trudeau’s image (described below) against the hyperproduction of reason described in the chapter on Trudeau.

<sup>30</sup> Kass Banning and Kay Armatage both make arguments to this effect. See Kass Banning’s “Textual Excess in Joyce Wieland’s *Handtining*” and Kay Armatage’s “The Feminine Body: Joyce Wieland’s *Water Sark*” in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999). This structural inversion *could* be productively conceptualized as a form of feminist transgressiveness, but strangely has not been.

<sup>31</sup> This much is observed by Johanne Sloan in her discussion of *The Far Shore* where she reverses an argument by Sherill Grace to suggest that, far from Tom taking Eulalie as a wilderness to be given form, “Tom becomes *her* wilderness, *her* inspiration, and that Wieland productively confuses the gender/nature question.” Johanne Sloan, *Joyce Wieland’s The Far Shore* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 108.

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<sup>32</sup> Sheila McCook, "O Canada: Our home sweet home under 150 pounds of icing," *Ottawa Citizen*, June 23, 1971, 41.

<sup>33</sup> Kay Armatage, "The Feminine Body: Joyce Wieland's *Water Sark*" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 144.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 142. Armatage's psychological characterization of the film is odd given that Wieland insisted that the film was a 'desperate self-portrait' where, much as in *Water Sark*, that self seems made primarily of non-human elements. Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 172. Brenda Lafleur has probed Wieland's drawing *Woman amusing herself* (1955) to test whether she is representing the female body narcissistically. Lafleur filters the drawing through a reading of Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage in psychic development and the engendering of intersubjective relations and self-definition. Yet, she sidesteps the auto-erotic suggestiveness of the image and the peculiarity of how Wieland has constructed it. The figure's mechanical features, with their articulated joints, strangely distorted sizes, and graphically superimposed breasts, all suggest that she is a cobbled together doll. This doll type is common to Wieland's drawings in that period. Faces have an unmistakably sculptural quality and are sometimes propped up as if they are too heavy or large for the bodies that support them. For examples, see *Lovers with Curly Hair* (1955) [Fig. 127], *Untitled* (nd), *Woman is a Parasite* (nd). Brenda Lafleur, "The Body in Trouble" in *Woman as Goddess: Liberated Nudes by Robert Markle and Joyce Wieland* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2003), 30-32. Lafleur's reliance on Lacan and Butler also relegates Wieland's work to subjective performance, an reifies a sociology that her cosmology renders absurd. See more remarks on this approach in Chapter One.

<sup>35</sup> Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 172.

<sup>36</sup> Gilles Deleuze; translated by Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 197.

<sup>37</sup> Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 172.

<sup>38</sup> Joyce Wieland; edited by Jane Lind, *Joyce Wieland: Writings and Drawings, 1952-1971* (Erin: Porcupine's Quill, 2010), 124.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 126. This, of course, sounds very much like a flag.

<sup>43</sup> Leone Kirkwood, "Canadian Artist in New York Excels in Nameless Art Form," *The Globe and Mail*, March 17, 1965, 13. And this limitation she linked directly to the way she made her work, particularly her early soft sculptures that encapsulated "the history of my life. Pieces of underwear, old dresses, newspapers. I encase them in cotton. Then I paint them." *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> The editing for the film was done under the influence of marijuana after several experiments with acid and some religious study. In conversation with Hollis Frampton, she tacitly agrees to his suggestion that this was a way of detaching herself from her work in order to see it, a process of alienation that he ties to Rimbaud's insistence on the poetic derangement of the senses to destroy "constipation in your consciousness." Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 173.

<sup>45</sup> *Sandwiching* has both sexual connotations and implies that she is spreading him on a surface. *Putting him on* and *sandwiching* him seem to be related. The original line: "I am going to make a sandwich, so I put Trudeau in the centre." Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 178. Wieland had also claimed that the film would contain a love scene between Ottawa and Toronto. If so, this seems to be it. See M. McC, "Joyce thinks Canada is the last hope for rats and people," *The Globe and Mail*, March 8, 1969, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Kay Armatage, "Kay Armatage interviews Joyce Wieland," *Take One* vol. 3, no. 2, November-December 1971, 25. Her capturing of Trudeau fondling his mouth recalls the still images of President Kennedy that she films for *Larry's Recent Behaviour*. Notable among these stills is one of a child placing its fingers in the president's mouth. This is set within the narrative as a spread in *Vogue* being viewed by a fur clad Wieland lounging in bed before culminating in images of her boating disasters and a penis waving at the camera.

- <sup>47</sup> George Lellis, "La raison avant la passion," in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 61.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> Joyce Wieland, [handwritten note], *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1993-009-009, nd., np.
- <sup>50</sup> Barrie Hale, "The Vanguard of vision: notes on Snow and Wieland," *Saturday Night*, June 1974, 22.
- <sup>51</sup> For one of several examples, see Pierre Théberge, "Interview with Joyce Wieland" in *True Patriot Love/Véritable amour patriotique* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1971), np.
- <sup>52</sup> And again, as she told Frampton, "When I started editing, I had fantasies of being a government propagandist. For weeks I was thinking, 'What if I was Leni Riefenstahl?' Maybe I am. [...] All its irony developed in relation to Trudeau. Was he gonna be any good or was he gonna be just another politician? [...] The whole thing is a very high, far-out fantasy, I admit, and to the power figure, the father figure." Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 178. Wieland eventually realized that it was she, not Trudeau, who was 'impassioned' about Canada.
- <sup>53</sup> Tom Saunders, "Filming the Nazi Flag: Leni Riefenstahl and the Cinema of National Arousal," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* vol. 33, no. 1 (2016), 24.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.
- <sup>55</sup> In the unpublished version of her talk with Frampton, Wieland claims that she never saw *Triumph of the Will*. "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza," *Joyce Wieland Fonds*, NGC/York: 1999/003/005 (09), 55. So, presumably, she saw it sometime before a 1974 interview when she again cites Riefenstahl's aesthetic as a noteworthy influence. See Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright interview Joyce Wieland, "Interviews with Canadian Artists: Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright interview Joyce Wieland," *The Canadian Forum*, May/June 1974, 62.
- <sup>56</sup> Tom Saunders, "Filming the Nazi Flag: Leni Riefenstahl and the Cinema of National Arousal," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* vol. 33, no. 1 (2016), 34.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 31. Wieland's *Patriotism II* (1965) is an exception to this. The short film is in two distinct sections. The second is a brief stop-motion animation of condiments chasing utensils around a table until they are all wrapped up in a tablecloth. The first, and lengthier section, features a young man trying to pose for the camera while an American flag moves across the space, caressing his face and covering him with motions suggestive of a sort of burlesque dance.
- <sup>60</sup> Tom Saunders, "Filming the Nazi Flag: Leni Riefenstahl and the Cinema of National Arousal," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* vol. 33, no. 1 (2016), 29.
- <sup>61</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin; trans. Gerald Vann, *Hymn of the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 36.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.
- <sup>64</sup> Kathy Denman, "Young artist depicts her idea of Canada through quilts, perfume and even soup," *London Free Press*, June 30, 1971.
- <sup>65</sup> Joyce Wieland, *Joyce Wieland: Writings and Drawings, 1952-1971*, ed. Jane Lind (Erin: Porcupine's Quill, 2010), 65.
- <sup>66</sup> Janine Marschessault, "Feminist Avant-Garde Cinema: From Introspection to Retrospection" in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*, ed. Kay Armatage (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 141.
- <sup>67</sup> *The Far Shore* notes and sketches, np, nd. *Joyce Wieland Fonds*, NGC/York: 1993-009/009/(107)
- <sup>68</sup> Starting in 1958, Klein's *anthropometries* famously featured nude female models impressing themselves on canvas (termed 'shrouds') to leave the mark of their bodies as they acted as his 'human paintbrushes' (though Klein did sometimes work in the opposite direction and painted around the bodies). These works stressed painting as an event and form of interaction, as well as inviting chance into the determination of the final work. Klein worked in his own singularized blue, inspired by Rosicrucian mysticism, creating stark monochrome images in much the same way Wieland did as she associated red with a mystical conception of Canadian nationalism. Both also (at times) concentrated on the artwork as performance and the blurring of its boundaries, celebrated the importance of space, and insisted on the spiritual content of art as object and practice. Klein did not have Wieland's sense of humour.

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<sup>69</sup> Louise Vigneault has documented the ways in which Borduas' later works attempt to negotiate between the various landscapes he moved through on the continent before moving to Europe. This integration of topography (both geographic and cultural) indexes "la dynamique relationnelle entre le sujet et son environnement, et de la résonance de cette expérience dans l'imaginaire spatial américain." Louise Vigneault, "Peinture et territoire en dialogue. Regard de Paul-Émile Borduas sur l'Amérique," *Mens* vol. 10, no. 1 (2009), 87.

<sup>70</sup> François-Marc Gagnon, *Paul-Émile Borduas* (Montréal: Montréal Museum of Fine Arts, 1988), 392.

<sup>71</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, "Issues of Feminist Aesthetic: Judy Chicago and Joyce Wieland," *Woman's Art Journal*, 1982, 40. One should note the surprising admission that the argument she makes for the political instrumentalization of the body also makes the body less 'confrontational'.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* Paradoxically, this also points to feminist discourse as an erasure of women's eroticism.

<sup>73</sup> Banning and Armatage seem to diverge on the extent to which the feminine can be read in terms of imagery (phenomenal or sociological) rather than structure and strategy. Armatage opts for a mixed reading. See Kay Armatage, "The Feminine Body: Joyce Wieland's *Water Sark*," in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 135-136 for her comments on the issue.

<sup>74</sup> Direct references to vaginas are comparably rare in her work while the penis pops up regularly and rarely in disguised form. Judging by the work of her colleagues in the period, this is not because of excessive prudishness regarding vaginal imagery. If her use of supposedly vaginal imagery during most of her career was satirizing the phallic, why does it need to be consistently sublimated into symbols or displaced into the sublime space of the non-representational? It is not that the vaginal is not present on some level, it is that insisting on it as a sort of despotic signifier excessively normalizes the way that she is imagining sex and ignores the extent to which the feminine in her imaginary is the principle of spiritual order and corporeal limitation rather than excess.

<sup>75</sup> One might reasonably argue, *if* one were psychoanalytically inclined, that the interest in 'fringe' eroticism corresponds to a specifically feminine form of desire in the vein of feminist thinkers like Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. This at least seems to be part of what is at stake for Armatage and Banning's use of the notion of *écriture féminine*. Unfortunately, neither of them worked this into a more expansive way of interpreting the body and its eroticism in Wieland's work. It is particularly striking that Wieland's interest in 'object' materials have not been explored to a greater extent by feminist art historians, though perhaps they have realized that Wieland's inversion of the order upon which the radical claims for the feminine are made significantly undoes such a reading.

<sup>76</sup> Her *Squid Jiggin' Grounds* (1974) [Fig. 144] also recapitulates the federalist theme, taking its title from the traditional Newfoundland fisherman's song that was played on Parliament Hill to mark the province's entrance into confederation in 1949.

<sup>77</sup> John O'Brian, "Anthem Lip-Synch," *The Journal of Canadian Art History* vol. 21, nos. 1-2 (2000), 144.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>79</sup> The lip motif also entered her work several years before the not completely dissimilar lip logo made famous by The Rolling Stones entered popular consciousness. It had been designed by John Pasche in 1970 and modelled on images of the Hindu goddess Kali. It first appeared on the cover of the album *Sticky Fingers* in 1971.

<sup>80</sup> Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra* [Rev. ed.] (London: Thames, 1978), 70.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>84</sup> These works also resonate with the excreta markings that were common in her stain paintings and their often-diagrammatic suggestion of the circulation of sexual energy.

<sup>85</sup> Pierre Vallières was a Québécois journalist for a variety of newspapers and journals, including *Cité Libre*, as well as for radical separatist publications. He was associated with the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) and published their newspaper. Following a bombing campaign by the group, Vallières and several of his FLQ associates were convicted of manslaughter. Although he received a life sentence, the conviction was overruled on appeal, and he was sentenced to thirty months in prison during a second trial. He was paroled in 1970 and would renounce violence after the October Crisis, joining the PQ and advocating for gay liberation in subsequent years. He was most famous for his autobiography/polemic, *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* (1968).

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<sup>86</sup> No interpretation of the film that I have read substantially questions Wieland's highly artificial appropriation of Vallières' mouth into her iconography and the implications it may have both for her politics and aesthetics. She had tried to sell the project to the CBC and CFTO but both expressed reluctance because of its subject matter.

<sup>87</sup> Joyce Wieland, "Notes on Pierre Vallières," *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1994-004-003, np., nd.

<sup>88</sup> Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright, "Interviews with Canadian Artists: Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright interview Joyce Wieland," *The Canadian Forum*, May/June 1974, 62. Wieland had also designed a Nellie McClung stamp that featured only the suffragette's mouth. See Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis: Carleton University, 1987), 168.

<sup>89</sup> Jean-Louis André Théodore Géricault is probably most famous for the allegoric History painting, *Le Radeau de la Méduse* (1818-1819). Other significant work includes the series of portraits of the insane that he conducted in the early 1820s and a set of macabre studies of severed body parts that he conducted in the morgue.

<sup>90</sup> Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, "Géricault's Severed Heads and Limbs: The Politics and Aesthetics of the Scaffold," *The Art Bulletin* vol. 74, no. 4 (1992), 610.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 613-615. The use of cadavers etc., of course, was also present in the work of Wieland's associate Graham Coughtry, and an explicit part of his morbid eroticism discussed earlier.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 616.

<sup>93</sup> Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright, "Interviews with Canadian Artists: Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright interview Joyce Wieland," *The Canadian Forum*, May/June 1974, 62.

<sup>94</sup> Joyce Wieland, "Notes on Pierre Vallières," *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1994-004-003, np., nd.

<sup>95</sup> More remarkably, the film was made the same year that Samuel Beckett's *Not I* (1972) [Fig. 154] was first published and performed. The play starred an isolated mouth manically detailing its mechanical existence. Coincidentally, Hollis Frampton compared Wieland to Beckett, specifically her *Water Sark*, because she claimed to make rules for herself that render her "crippled or shut in." Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 34.

<sup>96</sup> Notable among Wieland's commentators, Lianne M. McLarty has stressed the extent to which Wieland's portrait of the recently released prisoner is filled with ambivalence (to put it generously). She rightly notes that he is presented as a 'grotesque' and provided with a 'mechanical and impersonal' character. Lianne M. McLarty, "The Experimental Films of Joyce Wieland" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 100. Wieland expressed ambivalence about him, stating, "I feel mixed about some of the things he said, but I think that he's an interesting man and I think *The White Niggers of America* is an important book." Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis: Carleton University, 1987), 169.

<sup>97</sup> Pierre Vallières, "An Account by a Privileged Hostage of Les Ordres: Brault has Missed his Shot" in *Canadian Film Reader*, eds. Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson (Toronto: Martin Associates, 1977), 266.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 266-267.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>100</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, "The Development of Feminist Strategies in the Experimental Films of Joyce Wieland," *Film Reader* #5, 1982, 136.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>102</sup> Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright, "True Patriot Love: Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright discuss the work of Joyce Wieland," *Art and Artists* vol. 8, no. 7, issue no. 91, October 1973, 40.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright, "Interviews with Canadian Artists: Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright interview Joyce Wieland," *The Canadian Forum*, May/June 1974, 63.

<sup>105</sup> That he becomes a 'woman' after turning to the PQ is not something anyone has said anything about but only adds to the sense that Wieland's film is enjoined to a federalist aesthetics.

<sup>106</sup> Rabinovitz does not really address why the female workers of Wieland's short film *Solidarity* (1973) are reduced to feet beyond saying that the varieties of footwear suggested the diversity of a crowd. Given Wieland's established interest in foot fetishism, this deflection from erotic fantasy is rather strange. Lauren Rabinovitz, "The Development of Feminist Strategies in the Experimental Films of Joyce Wieland," *Film Reader*, 1982, 138.

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<sup>107</sup> For an interesting discussion of the phallically weak male in *Wieland*, see Lee Parpart, "Cowards, Bullies, and Cadavers: Feminist Re-Mappings of the Passive Male Body in English-Canadian and Québécois Cinema," in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*, ed. Kay Armatage (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). What Parpart ignores, however, is that the phallically weak man symbolically raped by expansive American liberalism in the *Wieland* film she discusses is equated with the new Canada, quite unlike the old Canada of the Group of Seven that *Wieland* celebrates elsewhere.

## Chapter Seven: The art of lust

### 7.1. Arctic Eroticism

“I am working on inventing the future of Canadian history through art and film. The way you make a future that you want is by paying attention to ecology, learning of our past to see what we’ve been, and transmitting soul energy into the spiritual compost of the act. Each country in different; the land form is a resource that influences the people. [...] We learn singing by being in a place which can speak through us. Mao said: ‘Patriotism is the food we are as children,’ and for me, it is.”<sup>1</sup>

“Camp is art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is ‘too much.’”<sup>2</sup>

So far, we have examined how Joyce Wieland constructed bodies and created structural forms that allowed for erotic energy to pass through them. These were usually figured allegorically using nationalistic myths mixed with concrete politics, abstracted into formal arrangements to optimize erotic engagement. On the level of meaning, her work tends to raise a lot more questions than it answers. While we have examined how she imagines gender, eroticism and nationalism, we have scarcely broached one of the other major facets of her work: the environment or nature. In Wieland’s symbolism, nature is identified with the erotic. Nature, specifically the Arctic, is also usually identified with Canada and her nationalism is expressed frequently in this conflation. This section looks at how central the Arctic, the erotic, and the national were to her thinking and what the formal elements of her work suggest about them. This is the final necessary component before turning to a discussion of *The Far Shore*. This section will also offer a further rumination on the erotic-energetics that were basic to her nationalism.

According to Anne Montagnes, “Wieland stated that, far from disputing sentiment, her feeling for the Arctic was love – realistic love. Behind the adulation was the knowledge that the Arctic is being raped.”<sup>3</sup> But why is this realistic love cast as so

romantic and mythical in her work? We have already seen two sides of romance in Wieland: the sardonic treatment of romance as an industrial candy wrapper for cliché sentiment and the more perverse flirtation with the bestial, seemingly ironized by presenting it in a mechanical way. This sensibility tended (and continues) to confuse and offend. In her attack on *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique*, Ashley Blackman argued that “[g]iven the history of Canada, one might consider it more appropriate that the woman [Spirit of Canada] should be skinning the beavers.”<sup>4</sup> Even though the artificial duck pond of the exhibition stunk, it still managed to be idealized since the ducks were suspended in the environment without bugs or predators. Pushing further, Blackman added, “Most obstrusely[sic], one could link the leaf with her ecology theme, but if so please note that the leaf is red, an autumn leaf, a dying leaf. I think there is a greater irony in all this.”<sup>5</sup> But as has been noted, Wieland’s grasp of irony was becoming more ambivalent since her embrace of nationalism. Or better yet, it was becoming Camp as it became seriously ludicrous and ludicrously serious simultaneously. More to the point, explaining the catalogue she designed for *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique*, Wieland insisted that the book had no irony or humour in it, at least “no more obvious humour than nature has...”<sup>6</sup> But what kind of humour is that?

We have just seen ambiguities in Wieland’s politics. These extend beyond her relationship to Trudeau, the odalisque she projected on her bedsheets and had a fascism-inspired fetish fantasy for, and her ambivalent relationship with separatism. Wieland has become identified in the critical literature with ecological issues to almost the same degree as she has with feminism and nationalism. While the latter is frequently regarded as slightly ironic, the former are not, although they are all treated by the artist with almost

the same rhetorical and formal values and techniques. The texts from James Laxer's book that appear in the *Water Quilt* [Figs. 155-156] are tucked away under pillows like a tooth for the tooth fairy. "'A beautiful way,' says Wieland, 'to hide something terrible.'"<sup>7</sup>

While speaking of her disaster-themed works, she commented, "I'm fascinated by disasters. Here one minute and gone the next. I save pictures of disasters. When they find bodies from a plane crash, they stuff them in white pillow cases."<sup>8</sup>

Wieland's attitude to the environment, and the question of the North in particular, has generally been conceptualized in terms of uncritical ecological activism.<sup>9</sup> But her engagement with environmental issues is more complicated and their expression in her artwork even more so. When situating her work, Wieland would explain, "I don't want to *just* harp on politics in my art. I want a really sensitive combination of all areas of our life; Canadian independence, northern mysticism, organic farming, sex."<sup>10</sup> The two central areas here would seem to determine what the politics of a Canadian independence would look like. On occasion, she would insist, as her harsher critics would point out, that the land should be preserved as a 'nationalist's park'.<sup>11</sup> Reluctant to make any claims for anarchism, she explained that she does not know how people could be their own masters. Judging by the outcomes of politics, the government could just as readily be a machine.<sup>12</sup> In a related note, she suggested that "[w]hat canada [sic] and most countrys [sic] need now is a benevolent dictatorship which would design a strict program for control of technology, economic groth [sic], pollution, population, etc.... which hopefully would lay the groundwork for survival of life on this planet."<sup>13</sup>

One side to her concern with the North that has consistently been ignored is her overtly stated interest in Arctic mysticism and its related erotic value, a concern that is

consistent and profound. It is this, no less than her more explicit referencing to Tom Thomson and Lawren Harris in her work, that ties her to the project of the Group of Seven and the ‘northern madness’ that she praised above as part of the spirit of Canada. This is not to underplay whatever practical purposes her environmentalism may have had, but it is only that the practical application of her attitudes does not explain the character or form they take in her work. This character fuses spirituality to nationalism. Wieland had long identified art as a religious practice, as a form of shamanism, and this separated it from most of the political art that she associated with the avant-garde. In a discussion of the premiere of *The Far Shore* in Edinburgh, she insisted that the avant-garde hated the film, especially the more politicized female artists. Distancing herself from them, she stated, “I don’t really know much about what they’re doing but there’s [illegible] something depressing to me about it from what I know.... It’s so masochistic. We have souls and spirits and we have the job of shamans, not the job of reiterating the misery that’s been done to us, but to live.”<sup>14</sup> Developing this last point, she added, “I’ve read a lot about [shamans] and I couldn’t really tell you what they are but I think that art is a religious practice and I think it’s an offshoot of the religious thing.”<sup>15</sup>

Arctic mysticism, or northern mysticism, is associated with the late nineteenth-century landscape painting based primarily in Scandinavian countries. After the turn of the twentieth-century, it was developed in Canada by Lawren Harris, J.E.H. MacDonald and other painters associated with the Group of Seven. Harris and MacDonald had seen an exhibition of the Scandinavian work and sought to ‘resuscitate’ its tradition when they were largely indifferent to what was occurring in modernism.<sup>16</sup> According to Roald Nasgaard, this tradition of mystic painting was rooted in both Symbolism and the

Synthesist attempt to “extract the supernatural from the natural motif.”<sup>17</sup> This aim tied to them to the landscape and generally resulted in highly regional art forms.<sup>18</sup> Much as Wieland claimed for herself in the lead-in quotation to this section, the Symbolists believed they were engaged in creating an art of the future and this was rooted in “the notion prevailing in Europe at the turn-of-the-century, and underpinned by Theosophical thought, that a spiritual, cultural, and aesthetic renaissance would come from the North.”<sup>19</sup> The Canadian North would be associated with the unexplored and the wilderness, a place for the re-birth of the soul through the pioneering spirit, much as the West had been for the United States.<sup>20</sup> The wilderness was understood as a place of the eternal and divine that allowed for the “rediscovery of primal experience.”<sup>21</sup> The truth to be uncovered there was ethical more than aesthetic, concentrating on “mystical form rather than aesthetically invented or initiated form.”<sup>22</sup> As in Tantra, and in a very different way in Regionalism, there is no representation. The stereotype is Divine. According to John Bramble, movements like Theosophy and the spread of Tantra developed as transnational means to create new universal myths that would restore a global epistemology via the connection of a kind of “holistic-organismic vitalism with the Romantic vision of empire...”<sup>23</sup> This falls in line with an opposition between what Niall Fergusson called Anglobalizing and Toryentalism, with the tradition dear to Wieland falling into the latter, and allying her to the kind of Tory surrealism mentioned earlier.<sup>24</sup>

Examining this stream of mystical painting in English Canada, Ann Davis’ *The Logic of Ecstasy* situates the rise of Theosophy in an ambivalent reaction to Darwinism. Evolutionary theory spawned not only the spectre of a Godless world, but also presumptions that there was a teleological direction for human life toward betterment.

Theosophy was founded on the assumption that through the study of world religions, philosophy and science, the laws of Nature and the powers of the psyche could be revealed and channeled to promote Universal Brotherhood. Three of its principle theorists were H.P. Blavatsky, P.D. Ouspensky and London Ontario's Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke, a psychologist and author of *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901), who appeared earlier in the work of Greg Curnoe. In its Canadian inflection, this mysticism would involve the influence of various metaphysical strains: Neoplatonism, Asian mysticism, Rosicrucianism, American transcendentalism, intuition, and cosmic optimism among others. Wieland's interest in Theosophy and its erotic dimension dates at least from the 1950s when she was part of an Ouspensky study group, preceding most of the other concerns associated with her and continuing until the 1980s.<sup>25</sup> This is not at all to claim that Wieland was a dogmatic Theosophist, but to separate her politics, her regard for the landscape and the environment, and the function of art from the broader mystic tradition she identified with is to ignore an essential complexity of her work and the epistemic hierarchy it was predicated on.

The key principles of Theosophy were known as The Secret Doctrine. It taught that there is one Absolute reality which is antecedent to Being. Like Tantra, it recognized that phenomenal life is ultimately illusory (*maya*) and without intrinsic value. Value is derived from life's capacity to function as an organon to access the Truth of the Absolute. Human life, as incarnation of the Universal Over-Soul, has access to such knowledge through disciplined apprehension. Following from Hindu thought, there are two levels of knowledge: empirical knowledge of particular objects and the higher insight that they are illusions hovering on the undifferentiated unity of the world. For a Theosophical artist,

the task of art was to reveal the latter through the former. This would be Wieland's stated interest as she attempted to discover universal truth in particularity, a concern we saw was also explicit in George Grant's neo-platonic critique of the failures of Canadian nationalism and the spread of liberalism.<sup>26</sup>

Arthur Lismer would claim that what he and the artists he associated with produced was an art *of* the land rather than an aesthetic product; it expressed the purposiveness of the world and of Divine order.<sup>27</sup> This ethos necessitated patriotism as a spiritual attachment to the land was intrinsic to the achieving of Divine revelation. "It was a short jump from a veneration of nature to seeing nature as the symbol and salvation of nation."<sup>28</sup> Harris insisted painting was a way of opening up to this higher logic, the 'logic of ecstasy'.<sup>29</sup> This ecstasy was a form of mystical vibration in matter where art would come into communion with noumenal reality. Art was not a so much a representation of things to be aesthetically perceived but a communion with the thing-in-itself.<sup>30</sup> As something in excess of human common sense and its distinction between subjects and objects, art collapsed the distinction between itself and life: "Art is therefore an arrestment and fixation of reality."<sup>31</sup> This frozen reality was opposed to the flux of ephemeral subjects, so, for Macdonald, this meant holding the conviction that "every object is a symbol of God ...reject[ing] history in favour of the everlasting now."<sup>32</sup> This primal experience was coded in an emanationist/hermetic interpretation as the circular return to the source of the divine's spark in matter.<sup>33</sup> The Arctic was regarded as the primal territory for the generation of this energy. Wieland explicitly tied herself to this: "And thinking about the Arctic being so spiritual and then that statement of Lawren

Harris' saying the Arctic has a very special spiritual quality which is sent southward. It's just weird because it just crops up. I guess certain creative people get that notion."<sup>34</sup>

Mystical experience and knowledge were usually presented in ways that adapted from Hindu mystical tradition but gave it different inflections and details. Burton and Wieland's developments of specifically Canadian mantra-yantra systems would be instances of this. For Ouspensky, nature tended toward "decorativeness, 'theatricalness.' The tendency to be or to appear different from what she really is at a given time and place."<sup>35</sup> The embrace of the decorative, the highly theatrical and formalized then serve as means to de-naturalize subjective perception and open the artist or viewer to means of seeing that escape the limits of phenomenality as they gain access to the noumena of the Fourth Dimension.<sup>36</sup> In this respect, mysticism is surprisingly complementary as a metaphysical-aesthetic companion to Camp.

At stake for these mystics was an exit from everyday human experience, whether on the side of spirit or matter. For the Theosophists, objectivation, or manifestation, was an extension of divine desire. "Hence Cupid or Love in his primitive sense is Eros, the Divine Will, or Desire of manifesting itself through visible creation," Blavatsky states.<sup>37</sup> Ouspensky uses the term 'love' to discuss both the carnal and spiritual instances of an excessive cosmic energy ("there is *much more of this force than is necessary*. Herein lies the key to the correct understanding of the true nature of love."<sup>38</sup>) which moves through the dimensions as it is expended, whether in reproduction or various transformations on the "different planes of life; into symbols of art, song, music, poetry; so can we easily imagine how the same energy may transform itself into a higher order of intuition, into a higher consciousness which will reveal to us a marvelous and mysterious world."<sup>39</sup> Eros

serves as the spur for most human action. The intensification it gives to life is manifest in the unfolding of human potency and potential through “an ocean of sex,”<sup>40</sup> fluctuating with genitalia where the surfaces of bodies become mirrored surfaces. However erotic energy is contingently differentiated, it is always within a unilateral monism where Eros and Thanatos are interchangeable. It is in this light that Ouspensky concludes his reflection with a quote from Schopenhauer which could count as a pithy statement of nature’s sense of humour: “I should point out how Beginning and End meet together, and how closely and intimately Eros is connected with Death [...] Death is the great reservoir of Life.”<sup>41</sup> This is, you may recall, precisely what Scott Symons had insisted that the liberal vision of Canada was annihilating.

Going forward, there are two things that are important about Wieland’s relationship to the environment and have been consistently ignored. One is that environmental devastation is equated with disaster and this has a quite specific formal and symbolic connotation in Wieland’s work, which will be examined in detail below. The other is that the erotic aspect of the North and of death are equally consistent and unified in mystical thinking. If one takes the irony angle concerning her work seriously, she is as ironic about environmental damage as she is about anything else. But if, as she claimed with *True Patriot Love*, she is not really being ironic anymore, *if* she is being Camp and relaying the humour of nature, that ultimate of artists, things are different. For an exponent of Camp, ecology is not important because it needs to be saved for the sake of life, but – for the same reason it is essential to the Romantic – because it is death, deadness is art, death is Eros, the reservoir of life. As Wieland presents it, nature *is* a

block of styrofoam with inedible snow and *we*, as her lead-in Mao quote indicates, are the food of the patriotism that protects that nature.

Admittedly, Wieland might object to these suggestions of morbidity, although, as will be shown in the following section, it is one that persists in her treatment of water themes as well as her depiction of a national ecology in the *Arctic Passion Cake*. As she once said, remarking on how snowstorms and wind make her feel more in touch with the cosmos, “I guess I just adore the winter, I don’t see it as a period of death, I see it as very alive.”<sup>42</sup> However, what this distinction between life and death is, is not particularly clear in her cosmology any more than the distinction between a destructive technology and nature is. The division between the living and dead is also considerably blurred by what we have seen as her consistent denigration of privilege for human subjectivity, preferring a kind of animism for objects. An important part of the explanation for this comes from her sense of mysticism and her use of politics in her work as (at best) allegorizing objectifications of spiritual forces. Her environmentalism seems to be as much about a love of nature as it is about the romance of doom. As the remaining sections of this chapter will make clear, her pictorial journey moves from death in a landscape to death of the landscape, the two being resolutely symbolically unified in *The Far Shore*. This makes the most sense by understanding it as the fulfillment of the Tantric ecstasy celebrated by theosophists like Ouspensky. Theosophical materialism filtered through Camp rococo is not a common thing to find. But if members of the Group of Seven could do the former through a mash-up of Art Deco and Impressionism, perhaps it is not so surprising.

This section of the chapter has endeavoured to sketch out the centrality of Arctic mysticism in Wieland's way of imagining Canada. Its clear roots in Theosophy not only place it in a longer nationalist tradition, they also imply a way of reading her work in line with what we have already established, namely as objectifications of essences rather than as representations of social themes. It has also pointed to the more ambiguous aspects of her environmentalism and how these function within her general cosmology. Such ambiguities will play a central part in the discussion of *The Far Shore* going forward.

## 7.2. The Art of Lust

“Clearly the bear is only the medium through which she has been able to make her psychic wilderness journey, just as pornography has provided the appropriate language for naming some of the asocial primitive elements in female sexuality which are hidden within our own consciousness as within our writing.”<sup>43</sup>

“Canada died with Tom Thomson.”<sup>44</sup>

As we have already noted, *The Far Shore* had a gestation process that lasted several years. The film is, as Wieland contended, a kind of summing up of her basic concerns. It is both an allegory for liberal technocracy and its hostility toward northern madness, and a tragicomedy about the death of Canada. If *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* was a requiem, *The Far Shore* is a peculiar act of mourning. This section of the chapter charts the rhetorical and formal transformation of the film from its early stages, showing how it shifted from a manic historical phantasmagoria into a far more subdued, and in some ways, stranger film. One of the contributing factors to this strangeness was precisely the degree to which it became committed to being an erotic film for women. While, as we will see, subsequent scholarship has placed it in the realm

of domestic melodrama, it comes closer to Harlequin romance or the sexploitation films that were popular in the country at the time. A profile of Harlequin in the *Star* stressed that they were pornography openly consumed by women and acceptable because they portrayed a female viewpoint where “[w]omen are aggressively on the make: men are impassive wooden objects. [...] The behavior of the men... has strong sadistic undertones.”<sup>45</sup>

All the themes so far discussed in the chapters on Wieland come together in her only mainstream feature film, *The Far Shore*, also known as *L'autre rive* and *The Art of Lust*. The film was a fictionalized telling of the demise of painter Tom Thomson and his imaginary relationship with a Québécoise, Eulalie de Chicoutimi (Céline Lomez).

Wieland began planning the film in 1969 and recruited playwright Brian Barney to work on the script in 1970. As a logical by-product of the way the Wieland imagined erotic bodies, detailed at length above, the film was seemingly constructed as a series of still images animated into a narrative. More than 2000 storyboards were created in preparation for the filming.<sup>46</sup> Wieland also spent time photographing actors in costumes and frozen in specific postures as ways of developing the film.<sup>47</sup>

At the opening of the film, Eulalie is courted by an engineer and war veteran from Toronto, Ross Turner (Lawrence Benedict). Recently jilted by a politician, she accepts Ross' proposal and they move to Toronto. Their marriage is filled with dinners and public speeches he makes for his burgeoning political career. She is quickly bored and spends her time playing Debussy at home, pondering a performing career. The couple never bond, and Ross violently forces himself on her. She soon finds herself drawn to his friend, Tom McLeod (Frank Moore), a painter and wilderness guide. She admires his

painting and he appreciates her music. Neither of them appreciates Ross' oafish friend Cluny (Sean McCann), who frequently interlopes in scenes. Ross attempts to support McLeod's career but a local dealer refuses his work since Tom's paintings have no cows. Ross then tries to convince Tom to guide for a mining expedition. When Tom refuses, Cluny is outraged that he would keep awareness of mineral deposits from them and tries to attack him. Though things grow tense between the men, a different tension develops between Eulalie and Tom as they spend time in his shack playing music, talking and playing with his dog. [Fig. 157] Although they clearly fall in love with each other, he returns to the woods and she enters a deep depression. Ross then drags her off to the woods with Cluny and his female companion (Charlotte Blunt) in tow. An explosion sends the other woman home with a slight injury and the remaining three soon discover that Tom is camped nearby. After Ross decides to send Eulalie back to the city, she has a violent outburst, lashing out at him and smashing a canoe before swimming off to find Tom. They hide, camp out, and finally have sex. After a few moments of tranquility for the couple, Ross and Cluny track the lovers down and Cluny shoots them.

Fragments of the preliminary scenario appear in Wieland's catalogue for the *True Patriot Love* exhibition, but she published a scenario for film, then also called *True Patriot Love*, in 1971's spring issue of *Film Culture*. The early scenario features profiles of a substantially larger cast of character than those who appeared in the finished film. This cast included Jacques Furlough, the prime minister, who is handsome, brilliant and a great athlete, clearly modelled on Trudeau; a brain injured pilot named Claude, who looks like Clark Gable; Eulalie's brother Robert, a Napoleon-admiring libertine; and an English engineer named Turner (described as "a piece of luggage," 'lampost',

‘petrified’<sup>48</sup>) as well as his father and sister. Emily Carr also weaves into the framework – cast as ‘childlike and mystical’ and similar to Beatrix Potter. As in *God’s Country*, dogs also play a significant role and accompany the protagonists through the story.<sup>49</sup> Eulalie is an orphan and her large dog follows her everywhere. She loves modern technology and most of the male characters love her. Claude also loves technology and is intensely religious while Eulalie and her brother ‘unnaturally’ adore each other. Thomson is ‘sexy’ but not handsome. He is an organic farmer who wears buckskins and opposes technology. She compares him to the gamekeeper in D.H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.<sup>50</sup>

The film was broken up into ten distinct sections filled with anachronistic details and silent film references. Seventeenth-century furniture sits beside pictures of movie stars and radios turn into TV as the characters are languid, looking at ‘nudi’ books and eating luxuriant food. The emotions are boredom and excessive crying. She does her best to ignore Turner but is impressed when one of his dynamite explosions rocks the town. She is soon distracted by Claude and his religious ecstasy but then takes off for Ottawa, where parliament is covered with the slogan ‘Reason Over Passion’. Jazz fills the air and Eulalie speaks to Jacques; their lips move but no words are heard. He goes back to work, leaving her only a portrait of himself. She decides to marry Turner and they go to Toronto with their collection of cars. Toronto is full of rain and has a ‘Murneau’ [sic] quality and their entrance is played for slapstick.<sup>51</sup> Short scenes follow of parties and brief conversations as well as random inexplicable scenes. Robert is chased away by Turner at gunpoint. Tom is introduced, as is Emily Carr. Tom prophesies the “Age of Great Pollution” where “Canadians will become Americans and he says they will be the first to misuse the new technology.”<sup>52</sup> Wieland adds that Canada died with Thomson.

Eulalie communicates with him by playing Debussy's *West Wind*. "This scene can have great power but it has to have several levels (one of which is corn) ..." she comments.<sup>53</sup> The first sexual encounter between Tom and Eulalie is in a lodge in the woods. Music from "the period of Watteau" turns into Steve Reich's minimalism. "This scene is twice removed from reality" as Eulalie takes on the form of an odalisque to explain how much she understands art.<sup>54</sup> She fondles his gun and he fondles her war camera, filming her whole body. Outside, the world becomes a Thomson painting with snow superimposed on it. Tom convinces her that her interest in Jacques was just a lust for power and that's outdated. He rails against the U.S. and talks of a united Canada that would live in harmony with nature. This excites her, but "sometimes he is boring."<sup>55</sup> Finally, he suggests that she "gives up all of her extensions (but her cameras)."<sup>56</sup> They decide to run away to be organic farmers. This will make them 'the most modern' since they can bypass technology.<sup>57</sup> She and Tom canoe down the Don River, leaving her dog and Emily Carr behind in tears.

The original vision for the film is jaunty, comic and placed in an imaginary time where multiple centuries and genres co-exist, precisely the kind of aesthetic-historical imaginary that was basic to John Boyle. Nothing develops, it just abruptly changes or is interrupted by 'the inexplicable'. It was also basically optimistic and stylistically would have operated as a synthesis of the accessible fast-paced allegory of *Rat Life and Diet* and the structural intensity and alienating effects of *Reason Over Passion*.<sup>58</sup> Instead of this, the film became a romantic tragedy rather than a satirical comedy. Or at least, it largely does, since, as we will see, aspects of this earlier vision remain, transformed by its new structure and mood into something quite different. A major part of this shift comes from

her significant reconceptualization of the heroine. The original project is at least semi-autobiographical with the decadent world of the heroine echoing Wieland's Toronto milieu with her Napoleon fixation and her love of Trudeau barely hidden in the character of Jacques, who jilts her when he gets to power. As *The Far Shore* evolved, Eulalie became more clearly based on Wieland's mother-in-law, Marie Antoinette Levesque, and the stories she used to tell the artist about growing up in the "isolated, French Tradition in Quebec. Her species has gone, but the poignancy of that line is to be preserved in my film."<sup>59</sup> Wieland insisted on the film's value as a 'functional document' that preserves the truth about the time and the collision of cultures, regardless of whether or not that is of any use to anyone.<sup>60</sup> Jay Scott has remarked of the film's generally unflattering reception that, "Wieland, who has announced repeatedly that she doesn't care what people think of her, is not a woman suited to make movies for the masses."<sup>61</sup> You have to want a specific reaction to make mass cinema, although something similar seems to apply to avant-garde. As noted above, the film, and her general turn to Thomson and the Group, alienated her from contemporary artists as well, her Canadian nationalism was deployed to marginalize herself in Toronto much as she had done in New York. Her identification with Thomson reached the point that "I have to feel a fool amongst my fellows."<sup>62</sup> At the same time, she would insist that, "It is my intention in *The Far Shore* to identify in visual terms our national oppression."<sup>63</sup>

Rather than a comedy about the potentials of Canada, the film became more like a work of mourning for a dying or dead culture. But the style of this mourning is unique and closer to an Irish wake than the 'requiem' she feared *True Patriot Love-Veritable Amour Patriotique* had been. Wieland characterized the film as tragi-comedy, explaining

that “there’s an aspect of tragic comedy within the film that leaves the audience on their own... they have to find their own way through this film.”<sup>64</sup> At screenings, particularly in Toronto, people tended to laugh through the film.<sup>65</sup> This affective peculiarity is coupled with the film’s desire for ‘emptiness’. Wieland fought to frequently include frames empty of action or people to make the viewer’s relationship to the screen more estranged.<sup>66</sup> So there is a disjointed image without figures and one with, both instances of the suspension of a humanly experienced time. This strangeness is part of the world without people that often appears in her work and links her once again to the wilderness imaginary of the Group of Seven.

If *The Far Shore* was, as she claimed, *Reason Over Passion* with people, what role do these people play as part of its figurative strategy? Wieland told Debbie Magidson that *The Far Shore* “is a culmination of what I have been doing in my wall and cinema art for a long time; it is joining all of the forces, most important [sic] merging the landscape with its people.”<sup>67</sup> She took pains to insist that there is always an implied world without people of which, like her flags in the landscape, they are a sort of interruption. This world of things can also appear to interrupt the human characters. One of the clearest illustrations of this is when Ross performs a song and dance for Eulalie while remaining sometimes obscured behind a vase of dead flowers and a piano, his head comically popping up as he runs through his mechanized actions. [Fig. 158] The constancy of an alien object world in the film puts a considerable crack in the dominant claim, examined below, that the film is a domestic melodrama seen through the gaze of Eulalie. Instead, the characters, including the heroine, are part-objects in a shifting picturesque of things.

Wieland's treatment of characters draws her back to Camp, which invests in *character* rather than in people. Much as in the Regionalist's denigration of sociological and psychological content, Camp character refuses psychological complexity or depth. There is little development because development kills character, whose 'existence' is predicated on "being one, very intense thing."<sup>68</sup> Commentaries on the film have almost inevitably noted this. It does not really contain people but figures and types. This is in keeping with Wieland's general aesthetic of surfaces and echoed by the other formal aspects of the film. Imagery is flat, having little depth or shadow. With the collaboration of cinematographer Richard Leiterman, Wieland was careful to visually structure the film on the model of her favoured painters, borrowing the colour schemes and suggesting the textures of Tiepolo and Chardin. Notable in all of this is the film's smattering of dark reds, indicative of its general lack of vitality. Red is more of an interruption, appearing in the film in the flowers of restaurants, in the velvet curtains of the Rosedale study, in carpets, memorial poppies, flower bouquets in Tom's shack and in one of his scarves, the boots Eulalie kicks off when hiding from Ross and Cluny. In almost all these cases it is a sign of dead nature but also a *vanitas* sign reminding its viewer of their impending decay, or it is an object designed to shield its user from the elements.

The film received extensive newspaper and magazine coverage and criticism, putting its public profile in excess of what was usually reserved for art in the country. This was anomalous enough to have spawned several scholarly essays evaluating its reception as the lynchpin for a discussion of her career. Because of this, and for the sake of brevity, my analysis will concentrate primarily on the film, its context and the thematic and formal issues it raises rather than on its reception.<sup>69</sup>

One of the most persistent ways of interpreting the film has been through the lens of melodrama. This was first, and most convincingly, argued by Lauren Rabinovitz in 1982. She claims that the film continues the kind of subversion of the Hollywood family melodrama that Thomas Elsaesser detects in Douglas Sirk's films but pushes it even further.<sup>70</sup> Formally this translates to a 'painterly' style for the cinematography that correlates to Eulalie's psychological states while insisting on its general two-dimensionality.<sup>71</sup> Narrative events and character development are both subverted by elongating scenes to remove expected forms of affective tension and to "further heighten the expressiveness of setting, décor, objects, and gestures."<sup>72</sup> Objects then tend to disrupt the narrative flow that they are cut into as they 'become self-referential signifiers'.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, the film has minimal sense of acoustic or spatial depth while it inconsistently depicts time with its pacing. These strategies are interpreted through an implied opposition between the realism of three-dimensionality associated with (patriarchal) science and the flatly two-dimensional feminine world of art or simulacra. Art is then a source of 'spiritual redemption' and "symbolizes [Tom and Eulalie's] resistance to the destruction advocated by the patriarchal culture."<sup>74</sup>

Building on Rabinovitz, Johanne Sloan's monograph on the film complicates the model of melodrama by insisting on the importance of landscape to a greater degree than the American critic did. As a 'melodramatic landscape film',<sup>75</sup> its great strength lies in the tension created between the exterior landscape and the constraints put on interior space. Most of the film has an almost claustrophobic air as it transpires in Eulalie and Ross' Rosedale home or Tom's shack. Sloan reads the film's romance as a kind of *ménage-a-trois* between the heroine, Tom and the landscape. Removed from his

traditional role as a celibate loner in the environment, the Thomson figure is drawn into a 'complex, dialectic' by being placed in a relationship with a woman.<sup>76</sup> Their desire is not only for each other, but also for the landscape. Returning to Wieland's claim that the feature is *Reason Over Passion* with people, she suggests that "the ever-moving landscape image eventually will be thoroughly permeated by narrative and melodramatic affect."<sup>77</sup> This sense of permeation summarizes the basic drive of the film. Sloan claims that Eulalie is a figure of excessive libidinal energy that cannot be contained by marriage or social norms;<sup>78</sup> her desire and drive leaks out to saturate the landscape. So "melodramatic excess is transferred to the landscape genre as epitomized by the paintings of Tom Thomson."<sup>79</sup>

There are several tensions running through this strategy, however. Sloan, to a substantial extent, is also restating Brenda Longfellow's reading of the film and its re-imagining of Thomson in terms that would be more comfortable for her generation of Canadian cultural historians.<sup>80</sup> She stresses that

Wieland's appropriation of the landscape tradition has to be distinguished from the contradictory legacy left by the Group. *The Far Shore*, as I have argued, constructs a radical opposition to the extractionist myth of national development. However, while Wieland's aesthetic gaze maintains an affinity to Native reverence for the land, a Native voice is present only in sublimated form through the character of Tom Thomson.<sup>81</sup>

The painter character serves not only as the 'surrogate Native' but also the role of the "perfect embodiment of melodrama's (and feminism's) recurring fantasy of the feminized man."<sup>82</sup> As we have seen, the melodramatic reading stresses a schematic split between the aesthetic and technocratic attitudes to space, a schema only made possible by retaining a strict bifurcation of terms while at the same time complicating the essentializing characteristics of this structure.<sup>83</sup> And yet, the viability of the readings of

the film offered by Rabinovitz, Sloan and Longfellow also seem to be consistently undermined by either the ambiguity or specificity that Wieland accords to the terms they are taking for granted. By now, it should be clear that the evidence accumulated in this study suggests a very different reading of both the gendered terms and Wieland's spiritual and erotic understanding of nature and nation than any of these authors impute to her.

The three primary texts dealing with the film in detail all heed Wieland's statement that it was a romantic film but take this to mean that it was part of a genre of romantic melodramas. However, *romantic* seems to have more to do with the romanticism that Nasgaard identified as basic to the mystic North. The film is certainly romantic in its sense of fatalism and doom. When speaking of the value of its romantic side, Wieland likened it to travelling back in time and recovering the last gasp of Canada as a sort of Romantic fable.<sup>84</sup> One of the other, and more telling, ways that she described the film was as a tragi-comedy, though only the negative reviews seem to have recognized the film's humorous quality. As Wieland told Kay Armatage, "It will be a well-researched, tragi-comic historical love story."<sup>85</sup> If the film's politics are primarily rendered as fable, they are related through an art of lust which is quite different to that of family melodrama and which places the film within a very different, and appropriately regional, iconographic realm.

In her monograph, Sloan follows Rabinovitz<sup>86</sup> to briefly contextualize *The Far Shore* with respectable Canadian films *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Ted Kotcheff, 1974) and Claude Jutra's *Mon Oncle Antoine* (1971) and *Kamouraska* (1973), tying it to some of their shared thematic concerns with landscape.<sup>87</sup> Yet Wieland's film

was staked in rather different territory. Writing in *Art Magazine*, Bill Auchterlonie was notably explicit in trying to distance the film from maple syrup porn, otherwise known as the *films de fesses* or *films de cul*. This genre emerged in Québec in the late 1960s, directed primarily to a francophone audience in its more famous examples, but also oriented to the exploitation market more broadly. The films were centred primarily around Montréal distribution and production house Cinépix. Famous examples such as *Valérie* (Denis Héroux, 1969) and *Deux femmes en or* (Claude Fournier, 1970) provided allegorical tales of women coming of age or sexual liberation during the Quiet Revolution. They tended to be sentimental, humorous, and relied on very softcore sex and mild nudity.<sup>88</sup> The genre had a notable box office presence until the mid-70s.

Auchterlonie noted that the “CFDC is especially pleased with *The Far Shore*. Under severe criticism for investing in sexploitation and worse films in both English and French Canada, they have lost too many people too much money and have helped create an air of dull cynicism and hostility in the still young and weak Canadian film industry.”<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, Douglas Fetherling set the film in contrast both to exploitation films and *Duddy Kravitz*, adding that, according to Wieland, it was a work of female art disciplined to mass taste. Absent of self-indulgence “it is now more overtly a woman’s film than had been originally planned.”<sup>90</sup>

Like Auchterlonie, Wieland also tried to distance her film from softcore pornography. She identified the state of the Canadian film industry in reference to *Keeping It in the Family* [*Les Cocus*] (Larry Kent, 1973), a Québécois softcore porn comedy of manners and inter-generational politics. She explained, “The CFDC sponsored half of Larry Kent’s film *All In the Family* [sic]. It looks like something that is supposed

to be international and money making. The cost was \$500,000. The film has American actors and a kind of anywhere look. It is like Spring Thaw in the Holiday Inn. Everyone is vacant in it and clean. Again it is a very eccentric film which really misses what it was grabbing for.”<sup>91</sup> For her, Kent’s film failed because it ended up being like something that would have been produced by the CBC or the Toronto culture industry. It was a film from anywhere. Kent’s film had not failed effectively (or affectedly) enough to succeed at being *hick* art; it did not possess northern madness, only eccentricity. The question is, does *The Far Shore* succeed in being ‘dirtier’ than the erotic films that were its contemporaries, or did it succumb to the ‘glass asshole’ syndrome that Wieland suggested much of anglophone cultural production had? Did she succeed in making bad regional art, a film involuting upon itself like the shut-in world of *Water Sark*, or did she produce mediocre Contemporary (international) art? The point of this is not to simply historicize the film in a way which has not been done, but that failing to recognize it as part of the specific regionality that Wieland identified with other works of Canadian softcore pornography and incompetent ‘hick’ features means misinterpreting it.

Wieland’s casting of Céline Lomez as Eulalie who, along with Monique Mercure, Carole Laure and Danielle Ouimette, was one of the most recognizable faces in the country’s sexploitation industry is another sign of the extent to which it was throwing a shadow over the film. The casting was inspired after Wieland watched Lomez in Denys Arcand’s foray into the genre, *Gina* (1975).<sup>92</sup> Lomez’s body had by this time accumulated a significant iconography. In her film work, she debuted as one of the frequently nude women in *L’Initiation* (Denis Héroux, 1970) before appearing in sexpot roles in *Loving and Laughing* (John Sone, 1971) and *Après-Ski* (Roger Fournier, 1971).

Much like her use of Pierre Vallières, Wieland appropriated and translated a Québécois icon into the logic of her Canadian nationalism. As an icon, Lomez, moved from the frozen and icy world of Arcand's film, where she was raped to the sound of the Canadian anthem, to a watery grave in Wieland's film that serves as the symbolic grave of Canada. But more than just this iconic appropriation, *The Far Shore* recapitulates almost all of the formal norms common to the *films de cul*: the odd, disruptive pacing; the fragmentary scenes; the use of social types and extreme emotions rather than psychological realism; the play with stereotypical Canadian and Québécois imagery; the promotion of objects as characters; the depiction of the body in terms of mechanics and bodily functions; the treatment of sexuality as a form of comedy; the frequent reliance on a silent film aesthetic; and even the satirization of Trudeau and his politics.<sup>93</sup>

Over the course of this section, we have mapped out how *The Far Shore* evolved in concept and the way it has been received. The film moved from being conceived as a raucous comedy to a tragi-comedy. Losing its more vaudevillian aspects, it refined a flat, Camp quality that stressed stillness, figures as parts of place, and an elevation of objects and place as characters. Its romantic quality, choice of star with an established iconography, and formal aspects of the film's aesthetic also put into an ambivalent relationship with contemporaneous softcore pornography. The final section of this chapter will provide a reading of the manner in which the film works as an allegorization of the death of Canada, in the process recapitulating both aspects of the English Canadian nationalism discussed in Chapter Two, and many of the figurative traits that have emerged in the surveying of her work over the past two chapters.

### **7.3. Liebestod for Canada**

“Art is a suicidal activity... one anyone should be glad to give up, yet can't.”<sup>94</sup>

“I was on this particular kind of energy that was a form of madness when I made *The Far Shore*. It was a form of insanity. You can see in history what happened to certain artists who didn't know they were getting that far out. It is a very dangerous extension of energy; my energy got where I almost couldn't get I back.”<sup>95</sup>

“They were holding their arms outstretched in love toward the further shore.”<sup>96</sup>

In Wieland's allegory of the death of Canada, Toronto is reimagined as a place so stifling it makes death desirable. A poster for *The Far Shore* advertises that Eulalie is 'smothered' by Toronto and its puritanism, so she 'buries herself' in art while Ross buries himself in business. [Fig. 159] Tom and Eulalie have a 'badly buried love'. Once it blooms and they emerge from urban limbo, “The lovers will then try to reach the far shore, that of a land which possibly, might never exist.”<sup>97</sup> Both by implication, and visually, the far shore is depicted as a surface and the art of lust is a means to surfacing. This inverts the common-sense order of things where death leads to decomposition. Here, composition is the achievement of death, the space of burial and art. This is set in direct contrast to the opening of the film where Ross plans to construct a bridge over the shore, which presages the symbolic bridging between English and French Canada that will be affected by his marriage to Eulalie. The utopian possibility of the surface is then starkly contrasted with the catastrophe of the depths and what transcends the surface, namely the 'bourgeois' realm of extraction, appropriation and good sense.

Now cast your mind back to our discussion of *Aqui Nada*. Wieland's comic strip ended on an optimistic note as its highly-sexed bestial protagonists defeated the rape machine of American technology and set sail for Bagotville, a trip back in time even further than *The Far Shore* undertakes, and not to utopia (nowhere) but to Cape Nothing.

That comic ended on an equation. Technology is dead at the bottom of the page/void and the heroic couple sail on the surface of the water above. Unlike Ross' bridge that leaps to the other shore, the lovers unite with the surface (Tuktu and Lapin or Tom and Eulalie) of the water, a surface union paradoxically made possible through burial.

While it might be tempting to suggest that Wieland has shifted from an optimistic affirmation of surface as the transcendence of life over destruction,<sup>98</sup> this would ignore the fact that the seemingly grim end of *The Far Shore* is what unites its heroes with the surface and fulfills their erotic desire. The morbidity of nature is not unique to this work or *The Far Shore*. Since her early career, death has consistently appeared in her work, almost inevitably by water, almost always with a certain humour.<sup>99</sup>

From 1963 until 1965, Wieland did a series of disaster paintings featuring sinking ships and plane crashes. [Figs. 160-162] Though these have been crudely compared to Andy Warhol's disaster works of the same period,<sup>100</sup> they differ substantially in both style and content. Wieland distanced herself from the Pop referencing, stressing that her images of disasters were not about violence in general or in the United States, but about her own obsession with death and loss, an obsession she related to being orphaned.<sup>101</sup> Made in Wieland's para-cinematic painting mode, these were usually long and highly vertical works, broken up into frames like a storyboard or film strip. This provided them with a sense of narrative, though a linear progress is not present in all of them. As Bart Testa has argued, "The silent immensity of the landscape and the death of men's machines form the theme that engenders this imagery and its recurrent ironies."<sup>102</sup> He noted that Wieland's work at this time was obsessively repetitive, embracing serialized imagery that denied both the lyrical and heroic, transforming whatever it touches into the

stereotypical and disposable, much like the cheap toys that often appear in her sculptures at the time.<sup>103</sup> Along with this is a form of ‘ironic cruelty’ that is expressed by treating such imagery both playfully and sensually, with “the strange growth of eroticized soft frames around, and sometimes coverings over, the images.”<sup>104</sup>

*Four Films* (1963) [Fig. 162] is a long and narrow work that includes four lines of images that appear to be frames from different films. Two lines feature boats (a sailboat and sinking boatliner) while the other lines feature chromatic variations between pink and yellow and a yellow phallus against a pink backing at various stages of erection. If read together in a linear way, as their contextualization suggests, they seem to mock the circumlocution accorded the sex act in films of the period and the displacement of sex into symbolism. The sailboat’s sails suggest lips<sup>105</sup> that retract and expand, coming and going while the ocean liner appears to echo the phallic shape as it moves in and out of frame, sometimes just the tip, sometimes filling the entire frame. The phallus engorges, the testicles contract and it finally becomes a straight diagonal line before turning into a shadow of itself (or wasted condom).<sup>106</sup> The monochromatic line flickers like a lifeline documenting the shifts in intensity before finally resting in red, Wieland’s affirmation of vitality. By the time it reaches this point, it has also begun to drip and lose form while the blue of the liner has gone from a monochromatic blue sky to what looks like an Arctic shore and the lip-ship has become coupled, sailing on a blue surface with the depths of water and the sky mirroring one another. Unlike the mantra-yantra system in her lipstick works that involved the viewer in making out with the image, these paintings both ‘document’ oral sex and run it through the various semiotic systems (nature as sex, technology as sex, porn as sex, abstraction as sex) into one whole. The whole unites the

primary Wieland themes: the expressivity of colour as cosmic energy, the union of the couple as the construction of the cosmetic surface, and the frozen Arctic as the radiating force and summary of these modes. As affirmative of the erotic impulse as *Four Films* is, it also carries a morbid streak. This is true not just because it fuses genital and oral pleasure to disaster but because it suggests that this fusion is the summit of vitality itself. This is keeping in line with both the tantric and Theosophical position on the matter.

*Reason Over Passion* was created in the desire to survey the landscape before the country was destroyed by the urban growth she associated with continentalism.<sup>107</sup> But unlike that quasi-apocalyptic journey, *The Far Shore* is closer to a wake. As she goes on to explain, there is no closure to this: “But the reality lies within it [the fable] – of the capitalist, the wealthy husband. Nothing has changed, but their postures are different.”<sup>108</sup> History is morbid, like her ecology, and bound to romance because it offers postures to be contemplated and poses to be appropriated. As noted earlier, the distilling and organizing of postures and textures was one of the basic organizing principles of the film. These frozen moments can then be reanimated or used as stops to create a jerky flow. As she explained

I think that for me anyway the romantic nature of the film reflects my own nature, that I’m romantic. But the main thing is that I want to go back in time. If I make another film of my own it will go back further in time. This is also very necessary for Canada because none of the stories have been told about the English Canadian past in features. So in going back things change and I imagine the period 1919 in a kind of romantic fable.<sup>109</sup>

The romantic is in no way incompatible with a morbid erotic impulse. For a long time, and certainly within Wieland’s formative years, the term carried precisely such connotations, in addition to a frequent hostility to the Enlightenment, which she explicitly enacts in her hostility to reason and ambivalence about technology. Romanticism also

maps neatly onto the Theosophical conceptualization of death and the erotic that is basic to the Arctic mythos undergirding her work. As it was once glossed by Novalis, “Death is the romanticising principle of our life. Death is the negative, life the positive. Life is reinforced by death.”<sup>110</sup>

While death provides the negative space for the emergence of the vital figure, Wieland consistently blurs and merges the two since the Theosophical Now is the frozen. She returns to the image of the lips for *The Far Shore*. This happens when Tom and Eulalie are spending time together in his cabin. In a pivotal scene where their words cannot be heard, they take turns mouthing texts with a magnifying glass held over their mouths. [Figs. 163-164] The lips are depicted very differently here than earlier in her work, now appearing as elements of full faces. However, the glass distorts and separates body parts from them, insisting, yet again, on the collaged and cosmetic quality of the body image. They speak to each other, but their words are inaudible and illegible, rendered as gestures.<sup>111</sup> Nonetheless, they are both included (and visually blown up) while refusing to allow their legible communication to the audience. In effect, they perform the paradox of being an explicit secret. However, it is not a complete secret. In an interview with Kay Armatage several years later, Wieland explained that Eulalie is reading a poem by the doomed Girondin Mme. Roland about the French Revolution, making the poem about herself and her own revolutionary feeling. Roland, ironically, was put to death by the same revolution she had enthusiastically joined. Tom reads a William Wilfred Campbell poem, one of the Confederation poets and an avid imperialist, about dying in the North “so his reply is that it can only end in a drowning, it can only end in death, what you feel, Eulalie.”<sup>112</sup> This is shown to the audience but unstated and so

remains a secret between them. Wieland insisted, “But it doesn’t matter that we don’t know what they say because it’s their unspoken love.”<sup>113</sup> Their first love scene is close to a suicide pact, or at least an affirmation of her romantic desire for death. What is remarkable about it is its insistent formality and impersonality. Their unspoken love is a performance of the lips that silences speech, transforming it into gestures visually inflated and distanced from the body while the selected texts both displace them onto broader historical contexts (the French revolution and northern mysticism) and state their love in the public words of the dead. The final irony is that it denies this very publicness. The scene is an erotic celebration of self-destruction, both personal and collective, which Wieland ties to a secret kept from the audience. The power of this secret, the artist insists, is a form of magic.<sup>114</sup> This scene places the film in the realm of the *liebestod*, the love/death favoured by many of the German Romantics for its promise of fusing lovers together in death and the overcoming of selfhood often sought in mystical experience. In this case, however, things are more complex since Tom and Eulalie’s relationship is already less anthropocentric.

Sloan stresses that the lovers are not alone but part of a larger erotic chain that includes the landscape, that “mutual object of desire” and that the lovers seem as driven by a desire for the landscape as for each other.<sup>115</sup> However, and in part because she insists on reading the film as a psychic projection of its protagonist and the film’s narrative as one of self-realization rather than self-erasure, Sloan misinterprets the film’s climax as the last of a series of ‘breakthrough’ moments whose “melodramatic surge constitutes the film’s basic narrative structure, and it is thus that our collective vision of the Canadian landscape is transformed.”<sup>116</sup> Such a transformation is based on a dialectic of desire for

nature and its combination with the social collective that is more commonly associated with urban space and a need to place landscape into history rather than allow it to operate as the erasure of it.<sup>117</sup> Although she places most of her stress on the landscape as a utopian vision of what the “natural world offers up to human history and human consciousness,”<sup>118</sup> Sloan cannot shake the fact that by the conclusion, the landscape image seems to become ‘autonomous’, frozen, and removed from precisely this utopian domestication.<sup>119</sup> Much as in Boyle’s transformation of the History genre, Wieland has created an anti-lyrical pornotopia that evacuates the socio-political of any privileged value.

The suicidal drive of the last half of the film also places it in league with the Toronto softcore porn film *Diary of a Sinner* (Ed Hunt, 1974), which was written by and starred Ian Ewing, the brother of *The Far Shore*’s producer, Judy Steed. That film also mechanically relayed the embrace of fatalism and the release of erotic excess. In *Diary*, an alienated former priest (Tom Celli) and actor-pimp (Ewing) blur their positions. Both suicidal, they make a pact to spend a week in excessive sex and violence that will culminate in their deaths. Like Wieland’s shamanic artists, these characters managed to straddle the line of art and religion, but in a rather different way. *Diary*’s actor becomes a guru for suicidal but libidinous nihilism while the priest becomes a performer of blasphemous inversions and cinematic clichés. But the peak of that film comes when the former priest finds love and refuses death while the actor throws himself into the water to embrace his demise. [Figs. 165-166] It was not northern oblivion that he was headed for when jumping into the water, but rather death (or America).<sup>120</sup> Wieland’s film manages to embrace an even more fatalistic and anti-social vision of the erotic. In this, Martin

Knelman was quite right to state that she mythologizes Canadian artists as beautiful martyrs and “that’s a way of looking forward to your own defeat.”<sup>121</sup> Canada is the *spirit* of failure. Memorably, Wieland told Hollis Frampton, in language that clearly echoes that of Boyle and Curnoe, “But we know that it is good to be a failure. It really fucks up the Americans!”<sup>122</sup>

*The Far Shore* has three distinct peaks as it heads into its final half. These are the moment when Tom and Eulalie silently declare their love for one another and what this means (certain death); their sexual union within the water; and their deaths. Each of these have a unique and complex series of inflections. The most definitive statement of this comes at the peak of the film as Tom and Eulalie finally unite. Rather than the ecstatic release that might have been anticipated, it is played comically. Appropriately, it is at the peak of the film’s action as it enters its erotic climax, that it most strongly comes to resemble – yet still retain some important distinctions from sexploitation films as discussed above.<sup>123</sup>

In an ambivalent review, Martin Knelman writes that the sexual union of the protagonists comes across like ‘a non sequitur’.<sup>124</sup> It occurs less like a breakthrough than a breakdown. The lovers paddle their canoe with Ross and Cluny chasing after them, Cluny in a Mountie-style hat that may be a nod to the villain of *God’s Country*. [Figs. 167-168] After much rowing, the lovers camp and hide out. Once they have exchanged some lengthy embraces, she strips in the tent to the sound of surprisingly jaunty silent film style piano music. When he peeks inside, she pulls him in and there is giggling, clattering and noise before they come out in their underclothes.<sup>125</sup> She gets in the water and beckons him to her as a mandolin joins the piano on the soundtrack.<sup>126</sup> He joins her

in his long johns and toque. [Fig. 169] They help each other undress when they are submerged in the water. [Fig. 170] The music stops and he begins thrusting at her, splashing the water, for a minute and a half. The sex sequence begins with a long shot that dwarfs the figures and their canoe in the landscape. It then moves into a medium shot that places the lovers near the dead centre like numbers on the line of an equation bar before finally settling in on a two-shot. The camera moves in slight zooms and pans, cut in slight dissolves.

Jay Scott's sneer that the scene "carried out clamorously in the icy water – has become even funnier with time" seems entirely accurate, even if his conclusion that the film is damned by its 'sugary sentimentality' is not.<sup>127</sup> Unlike the sex scenes of the *films de cul*, where music generally intrudes to heighten excitement, here it is obscenely absent and the mechanics of sex and the ambient indifference of nature to anything other than the couple's bumping into it come together. Tom and Eulalie are so objectified that, within only minutes, he scarcely bleeds when shot and is left to turn in the water like a canoe while she will be reduced to a hat.<sup>128</sup> [Fig. 171] Romantic though it may be about self-destruction, it mocks the pathos accorded to the body. Tragi-comedy is a versatile term; it can imply the comedy of the tragic or the tragedy of the comic. What neither of these terms suggest is the status of 'cautionary tale' that Sloan accords the film,<sup>129</sup> even as she insists on the lovers' failure to gain access to landscape, "their mutual object of desire." The opposite seems true. Their *ménage-a-trois* was not just a human coupling; water penetrated them both in sex just as they have sex by penetrating the water, before finally uniting with its surface in death. Eulalie becomes a floating hat and Tom become a floating corpse that ejaculates water from his red wound.<sup>130</sup> [Fig. 172]

If *The Far Shore* in certain respects breaks from Wieland's earlier work by committing itself more, if not necessarily successfully, to narrative, what is the result? Another way of asking this would be to query whether the trip into the landscape was a trip outside or remained the nationalism of the boudoir, that same Proustian shut-in world that she had explored and celebrated in her earlier work. Judging by the interpretations of the film in the melodrama vein, the answer would have to be *no* since each of its proponents presume a world determined and constructed by a subject, whatever its external socio-political pressures, rather than by the forces of a mystically encountered noumenal realm. Yet, at the same time, we have seen that there is a movement in Wieland's work that pushes against this sort of interpretation and toward something more precarious and perhaps more peculiar as it fuses Camp and mysticism together in its art of lust.

Once you get to the far shore, what question remains? Probably the most appropriate one is one taken from one of Wieland's lip prints, why does the Arctic belong to itself? The answer rests on the intersecting line of Wieland's materiality and her mysticism, one which tends to be misunderstood. Once Tom and Eulalie have fallen in love through the sharing of postures and song, he admits that he will be leaving and will not return to the same shack to paint again. When she asks him how she should remember him, he offers no response (there are bird calls in the distance). Instead, Sloan says that he is 'stony', leaving Eulalie only to say that he was "in love with a rock, and a tree, and a piece of sky."<sup>131</sup> Sloan interprets this as a critique by Wieland of the idea that the aesthetic love of the land is 'pure', suggesting that it is always contaminated by other interests (such as business) and should also include 'human, erotic love', such as between

a man and woman.<sup>132</sup> And while she acknowledges that this makes the divides between art and commerce or society and nature difficult to sustain, she does not seem to recognize what the indifference to these categories actually suggests or that there are non-human forms of erotic love, arguably one of the primary themes of Wieland's general body of work. The film is, in a sense, a pursuit of this point of indifference, a point that Sloan calls the "radical alterity of nature" but which arguably saturates everything from the outset and which directly relates it to the Theosophical promotion of the noumenal *in-itself* over the delusion of phenomenal selves.<sup>133</sup> That there may be no difference between human erotic love and love for a rock, or a rock's relationship with a patch of sky, is also something that the film clearly suggests. After all, Eulalie, who is more than once identified as a hat, married a man she equates with furniture and falls in love with a man who seems like a stone.

The film emphatically begins and ends with an image of the sky. [Figs. 173-174] The opening shot pans down from a sparsely clouded sky to reveal trees, rocks and water below. The final shots pan across the undulating water with rocks, the sky reflected on the water's surface along with the outline of trees. Water as a mirror surface and space of sexual union and indifferenciation is, as outlined earlier, one of the central images of Theosophical eroticism. The opening shot is dominated by blue, which Wieland coded as the "opposite of red, harmony calmness, courtesy and happiness. Blue is the colour which the highest inspiration is from. [I]s not for the coarse sensual or material minded."<sup>134</sup> The final shot is dominated by blue and pink in the surface reflection of the sky. Tom and Eulalie die wearing blue and pink and are then abstracted into aspects of the erotic space most indifferent to life and death, the reflecting ocean of sex sought by northern

mysticism. This dead zone is the other aspect of the frozen and inedible Arctic (Canada/Aqui Nada) which uses its children as food to nurture a space that belongs only to itself.

Over the course of these final chapters, we have identified the cosmology Wieland's work was situated in, many of the formal claims she made about her work and attempted to analyse it according to the logic that these claims implied. This has frequently meant engaging with the work in ways that have been anomalous in writing on Wieland, specifically by concentrating on her often-stated mystical eroticism and its central role in her nationalism. These aspects of Wieland's work provide it with formal and thematic nuances which have generally gone unnoticed and allow for the often-contrarian reading of her work that I have presented.

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce Wieland, "Artists with their work," *Joyce Wieland Fonds* 1991-014-005, np., nd.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 284.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Montagnes, "Myth in Many Media: Joyce Wieland," *Communiqué*, no. 8, May 1975, 38.

<sup>4</sup> Ashley Blackman, "Jingoism for animals," *A Usually Reliable Source*, July 29, 1971, 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Théberge, "Interview with Joyce Wieland" in *True Patriot Love/Véritable amour patriotique* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1971), np.

<sup>7</sup> Harry Malcolmson, "True patriot love – Joyce Wieland's new show," *The Canadian Forum*, June 1971, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Leone Kirkwood, "Canadian Artist in New York Excels in Nameless Art Form," *The Globe and Mail*, March 17, 1965, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Sloan and Holmes for example both follow this route. In particular, see Holmes' "Negotiating the Nation: The Work of Joyce Wieland 1968-1976" (PhD. diss., Queens University, 2008), 146-180. Holmes uses the ecological theme almost entirely to try to highlight Wieland's relationship with First Nations issues. I am not trying to imply anything about Wieland's ostensible political concerns here, only about their artistic function, which may be extremely different.

<sup>10</sup> Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright, "Interviews with Canadian Artists: Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright interview Joyce Wieland," *The Canadian Forum*, May/June 1974, 61.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Théberge, "Interview with Joyce Wieland" in *True Patriot Love/Véritable amour patriotique* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1971), np.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Joyce Wieland, [untitled note]. *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1993-009-009, np., nd.

<sup>14</sup> Kay Armatage, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," Typescript, *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1999-003/005 (07), 6. For another statement of Wieland's ambivalence to being considered a feminist artist, see Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis: Carleton University, 1987), 171-174.

- <sup>15</sup> Kay Armatage, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," Typescript, *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1999-003/005 (07), 7.
- <sup>16</sup> Roald Nasgaard, *The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Painting in Northern Europe and North America 1890-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 4.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>18</sup> Mondrian would be the notable exception.
- <sup>19</sup> Roald Nasgaard, *The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Painting in Northern Europe and North America 1890-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 7.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>22</sup> Ann Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting, 1920-1940* (London: London Regional Art and Historical Museums, 1990), x.
- <sup>23</sup> John Bramble, *Modernism and the Occult* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 24.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.
- <sup>25</sup> Iris Nowell, *Joyce Wieland: A Life in Art* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2001), 73-74.
- <sup>26</sup> Pierre Th  berge, "Interview with Joyce Wieland" in *True Patriot Love/V  ritable amour patriotique* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1971), np.
- <sup>27</sup> Roald Nasgaard, *The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Painting in Northern Europe and North America 1890-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 166.
- <sup>28</sup> Ann Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting, 1920-1940* (London: London Regional Art and Historical Museums, 1990), 163.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, x.
- <sup>30</sup> Housser conflated the spirit or consciousness of Canadians as a race with the noumenal reality of the space they inhabited and which was expressed in the paintings of the Group of Seven. "There is an austere serenity in the rounded rocky island forms expressive of a baffling but superb identity. The spirit in them is a distinctly detected 'thing in itself'." F. B. Housser, *A Canadian Art Movement: The Story of the Group of Seven* (Toronto: Macmillan Co. of Canada, 1974), 54.
- <sup>31</sup> Ann Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting, 1920-1940*. (London: London Regional Art and Historical Museums, 1990), 90. This conception of art could not be more alien to the one that Johanne Sloan ascribed to Wieland earlier in this chapter.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. Wieland, in some ways, though less explicitly than Burton, carries on Macdonald's interest in hermetic and mandala forms designed to show the infinitude of Blavatsky's 'Mother-Nature'. See Davis on Macdonald's *Fall (Modality 16)*. *Ibid.*, 140-143.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.
- <sup>34</sup> Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1987), 162. The statement she is referring to seems to be, "We live on the fringe of the great North across the whole continent, and its spiritual flow, its clarity, its replenishing power passes through us to the teeming people south of us... This emphasis on the north in the Canadian character that is born of the spirit of the north and reflects it, has profoundly affected its art, and its art in turn clarifies and enhances the quality of Canadian consciousness..." Quoted in Charles C. Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), 164.
- <sup>35</sup> Quoted in Ann Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting, 1920-1940* (London: London Regional Art and Historical Museums, 1990), 141.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-149.
- <sup>37</sup> H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy. Ed. 3* (London: Theosophical Soc., 1908), 69.
- <sup>38</sup> P. D. Ouspensky, Nikolai Bessarabov, and Claude Fayette Bragdon, *Tertium Organum; The Third Canon of Thought; A Key to the Enigmas of the World* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1922), 169.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.
- <sup>42</sup> Pierre Th  berge, "Interview with Joyce Wieland" in *True Patriot Love/V  ritable amour patriotique* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1971), np.
- <sup>43</sup> Coral Ann Howells, "Marian Engel's 'Bear': Pastoral, Porn, and Myth," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* vol. 17, no. 4 (1984), 112.

- <sup>44</sup> Joyce Wieland, "True Patriot Love (A Canadian Love, Technology, Leadership and Art Story: A Movie by Joyce Wieland)," *Film Culture*, Spring 1971, 71. A slightly less hyperbolic re-statement of this line is given in her interview in Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1987), 169.
- <sup>45</sup> Heather Robertson, "The Harlequin romance: True love for 50 cents." *Toronto Daily Star*, June 28, 1969, 37. This will be, to a substantial degree, how Joyce Wieland will imagine the men in her films.
- <sup>46</sup> Bill Auchterlonie, "Joyce Wieland: Filmmaker: The Far Shore in Progress," *Art Magazine*, December/January 1975-76, 6.
- <sup>47</sup> Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 166.
- <sup>48</sup> Joyce Wieland, "True Patriot Love (A Canadian Love, Technology, Leadership and Art Story: A Movie by Joyce Wieland)," *Film Culture*, Spring 1971, 66-67.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 72. Wieland, you will recall, claimed that she had also transformed Trudeau into an odalisque in *Reason Over Passion*.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.
- <sup>58</sup> Wieland states, "But in *Rat Life* the rats go towards the land which is Canada. *Reason Over Passion* is a survey of the land, a topographical survey. In *True Patriot Love* it is the land but it is peopled by these four characters." Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 164. [original emphasis]
- <sup>59</sup> Joyce Wieland, "Problem writing" [handwritten note], *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1999-003-005 (03), nd., np.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> Jay Scott, "Full Circle – True Patriot Womanhood: The 30-Year Passage of Joyce Wieland" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 27.
- <sup>62</sup> Joyce Wieland, "Problem writing" [handwritten note]. *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1999-003-005 (03), nd., np.
- <sup>63</sup> Anne Montagnes, "Myth in Many Media: Joyce Wieland," *Communiqué*, no. 8 (May 1975), 39.
- <sup>64</sup> Kay Armatage, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," Typescript, *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1999-003/005 (07), 2.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* Johanne Sloan has also commented on this, particularly in relation to Wieland's development of the film through storyboards and individual sketches, to claim that the film retains some of its identity as singular frozen images in spite of being part of a motion picture Johanne Sloan, *Joyce Wieland's The Far Shore* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 48.
- <sup>67</sup> Debbie Magidson, "Joyce Wieland's Vision," *The Canadian Forum*, September 1975, 70.
- <sup>68</sup> Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 286.
- <sup>69</sup> For rather different accounts of Wieland's reception, both concentrating primarily on her film work, see Kass Banning's "The Mummification of Mommy: Joyce Wieland as the AGO's First Living Other" and Michael Zyrd's "'There Are Many Joyces': The Critical Reception of the Films of Joyce Wieland," both in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999).
- <sup>70</sup> Strangely, none of the variants on the 'domestic melodrama' argument point out that German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder had been making archly political Sirkian melodramas about his country's history and society for years before and after Wieland. Some notable examples of this were his *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974) and *Despair* (1978), but it pervades many of his films in the 1970s. For one of many discussions of this, see John David Rhodes, "Fassbinder's Work: Style, Sirk, and Queer Labor" in *A Companion to Rainer Werner Fassbinder*, ed. Brigitte Peucker (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 181-203. Sirk's significance appears in several essays in the collection.

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<sup>71</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, "Feminist Family Melodrama: Joyce Wieland's *The Far Shore*," [conference paper] *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1999-003-005 (04) 1983, 6. This paper was developed into a rather different essay in 1987. Her revision of the argument makes it far more of a psychological film, stressing the "personal and emotional rather than social and behavioural." Rabinovitz, "*The Far Shore*: Feminist family Melodrama," in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 121. As a result, the film becomes the protagonist's psychological projection. But I think that this undermines the more radical possibility that the film is anti-psychological (as well as anti-social), that it becomes a film about the external and the expressiveness of space and things rather than of reducing the external to the projections of people. This is in keeping more with Wieland's general aesthetic and its spiritual/political considerations.

<sup>72</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, "Feminist Family Melodrama: Joyce Wieland's *The Far Shore*," [conference paper] *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1999-003-005 (04) 1983, 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. By way of contrast, George Steiner detected an almost identical sensibility in the Decadent art by homosexual men often genealogically tied to Camp, locating this sensibility less in sexual desire than in the strategic power its performance has accorded for a form of anti-social elitism. See Steiner's "Eros and Idiom" (1975) in *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 95-136.

<sup>75</sup> Johanne Sloan, *Joyce Wieland's The Far Shore* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 15.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>80</sup> Like Sloan, Longfellow also seems to be anxious about Wieland's querying of the 'appropriate (or inappropriate)' ways of showing love for Thomson and the Group of Seven. *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>81</sup> Brenda Longfellow "Gender, Landscape, and Colonial Allegories in *The Far Shore*, *Loyalties*, and *Mouvements du désir*" in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*, ed. Kay Armatage (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 171. Suffice it to say that Longfellow and Sloan both avoid dealing with the erotic death/Arctic energy nexus I discussed above.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 169. As we saw earlier, Wieland was quite repelled by such a figure.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>84</sup> Kay Armatage, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," Typescript, *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1999-003/005 (07), 4.

<sup>85</sup> Kay Armatage, "Kay Armatage interviews Joyce Wieland," *Take One*, November/December 1971, 25.

<sup>86</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, "*The Far Shore*: Feminist family Melodrama," in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 121.

<sup>87</sup> Johanne Sloan, *Joyce Wieland's The Far Shore* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 106.

<sup>88</sup> See John Dunning's autobiographical account of his role in the genre, *You're Not Dead until You're Forgotten* (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014) and Paul Corupe's "Sin and Sovereignty: The Curious Rise of Cinepix Inc." *Take One: Film & Television in Canada* vol. 14, no. 49 (2005): 16-21; as well as footnote 32 from Chapter One.

<sup>89</sup> Bill Auchterlonie, "Joyce Wieland: Filmmaker: *The Far Shore* in Progress," *Art Magazine*, December/January 1975-76, 9.

<sup>90</sup> Douglas Fetherling, "Wieland's Vision," *The Canadian Forum*, May 1976, 40.

<sup>91</sup> Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright, "Interviews with Canadian Artists: Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright interview Joyce Wieland," *The Canadian Forum*, May/June 1974, 67.

<sup>92</sup> Bill Auchterlonie, "Joyce Wieland: Filmmaker: *The Far Shore* in Progress," *Art Magazine*, December-January 1975-76, 9.

<sup>93</sup> For more examples to those cited above, see *Les Chats bottés* (Claude Fournier, 1971), *Love in a 4 Letter World* (John Sone, 1970), *La Mort d'un bûcheron* (Gilles Carle, 1973) and the Torontonians answers to the genre, such as *My Pleasure is my Business* (Al Waxman, 1975) and *The Pleasure Palace* (Ed Hunt, 1973).

<sup>94</sup> Shirley Raphael, "An artist's plan for Canada," *Montreal Gazette*, July 10, 1971, 38.

<sup>95</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, "An Interview with Joyce Wieland," *Afterimage*, May 1981, 8.

<sup>96</sup> George Parkin Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Kingston; Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 95.

<sup>97</sup> *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1993-009-009 (105).

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<sup>98</sup> Sloan's concentration on Eulalie's leap into the water as a moment of liberation would be suggestive of this. Johanne Sloan, *Joyce Wieland's The Far Shore* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 106-108.

<sup>99</sup> It is particularly striking that Rabinovitz insists on interpreting water as life in Wieland given that the artist tends to accord this primarily to frozen water – snow, thus resulting in the importance of the frozen images that serve to break up *The Far Shore* and register much of its libidinal intensity. See Lauren Rabinovitz, "The Far Shore: Feminist Family Melodrama," in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 123.

<sup>100</sup> Warhol's "Death and Disaster" series began in 1963 and included more than 70 works featuring images of car accidents, suicides, plane crashes and more. These images were appropriated from newspapers and police archives and then presented in paracinematic fashion as film strips, generally done as shimmering duotones and/or coupled as a diptych with a monochrome. Wieland claimed, "I think mine started earlier, so I don't think I was very influenced by Warhol at all. I can think of influences I did have when I went to New York, but the disaster things started earlier." Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1987), 157.

<sup>101</sup> Barbara K. Stevenson, "The Political and Social Subject Matter in the Art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1987), 156.

<sup>102</sup> Bart Testa, "A Movement Through Landscape" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 76.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>105</sup> These lip-like sailboats also appear in *Sailing* (1963) and bear a striking resemblance to the lips that will often appear in Vittorio Fiorucci's work around the same period.

<sup>106</sup> Distasteful though it may be to point out, this routine with the sinking phallus is duplicated by Eulalie in her leap away from Ross and toward Tom and their sexual union.

<sup>107</sup> Wieland explains, "When I made it I thought it was the last chance to look at the country and to avoid cities." This statement comes soon after her claim that. "We are thinking of building a wall along the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel," after citing how many New Yorkers seem to be buying up land in Canada. Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 176-177.

<sup>108</sup> Kay Armatage, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," Typescript, *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1999-003/005 (07), 4.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Nicholas Saul, "Love, death and *Liebestod* in German Romanticism" in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 166.

<sup>111</sup> However, they also take part in one of the consistent formal strategies used in her soft sculptures, the placement of secret texts meant to be used or seen by few if anyone. This testifies again to the ambiguous use or publicly communicative value that Wieland often gave to her art.

<sup>112</sup> Kay Armatage, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," Typescript, *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1999-003/005 (07), 3.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* Rabinovitz insists on reading the magnifying glass on mouth as "Wieland's motif for women's strength and power" Lauren Rabinovitz, "Feminist Family Melodrama: Joyce Wieland's *The Far Shore*," [conference paper] *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1999-003-005 (04) 1983, 8.

<sup>115</sup> Johanne Sloan, *Joyce Wieland's The Far Shore* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 22.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 81. Sloan is here referring to the complex issues raised by 'wilderness' art and the critical approbation of it. A general, albeit unwitting, survey of the moral and epistemic anxiety caused by art's potential threat to the historicist model of reality is on display in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity and Contemporary Art*, eds. John O'Brian and Peter White (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), Jonathan Bordo's "Jack Pine - Wilderness Sublime or the Erasure of the Aboriginal Presence From the Landscape," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'Études canadiennes* vol. 27, no. 4 (Winter 1992); and Leslie Dawn's *National Visions, National Blindness: Canadian Art and Identities in the 1920s* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006).

<sup>118</sup> Johanne Sloan, *Joyce Wieland's The Far Shore* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 108.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 114. In a different vein, *The Globe and Mail's* review argued that the film failed because it presented nothing but clichés and then fell into a "sequence of static pictures" with no flow where the

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people are less interesting than their surroundings. R.M. "Far Shore beautiful but flat," *The Globe and Mail*, September 25, 1976, 37.

<sup>120</sup> This echoes the suicide of the libertine Svidrigaylov in Dostoevski's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) who shoots himself after claiming that he is going to America.

<sup>121</sup> Martin Knelman, "Films," *Toronto Life*, May 1976, 83.

<sup>122</sup> Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 180.

<sup>123</sup> The closest rival for overwhelming erotic climax would be Claude Fournier's *La Pomme, la queue et les pépins* (1974), which culminated in a wave of semen being released once the mark of Trudeauvian liberalism had been dislodged from the rectum of its protagonist in the aftermath of a failed suicide attempt.

<sup>124</sup> Martin Knelman, "Films," *Toronto Life*, May 1976, 83.

<sup>125</sup> This element of the sequence is reminiscent of the far lengthier and sound-dominated opening sequence of Larry Kent's *Les Cocus*.

<sup>126</sup> In earlier sequences, she plays piano and he plays mandolin.

<sup>127</sup> Jay Scott, "Full Circle – True Patriot Womanhood: The 30-Year Passage of Joyce Wieland" in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999), 26.

<sup>128</sup> Rabinovitz suggests that the film provides no satisfying closure because Eulalie's dead body is not shown, only her hat. However, if we want to take the surface aspect Rabinovitz foregrounds seriously, and which was discussed above, this could imply that she is only her clothes. This would map quite neatly onto the rendering of Tom as *just a body* and would make sense according to the dualism Rabinovitz sets up between the 'true' as visual (simulacra) whose flatness resists the three-dimensionality of patriarchal science.

<sup>129</sup> Johanne Sloan, *Joyce Wieland's The Far Shore* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 22.

<sup>130</sup> More crudely, one might argue that Eulalie's highly phallic leap into the water, which initiates this sequence of events, is a way of penetrating into the *terra incognita* of Tom, that eventually leaves him dead (with a squirting hole), twisting in the water like the wind-up doll Wieland had turned Trudeau into. This image of erotic Canadian nationalism clearly shares a great deal with Graham Coughtry's works discussed earlier.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>134</sup> *The Far Shore* notes and sketches, *Joyce Wieland Fonds* NGC/York: 1993-009/009/(107), np, nd.

## Conclusion

“...in decadence as in other matters, nothing fails like success.”<sup>1</sup>

“The key to personal nihilism lies in self-denigration, self-effacement, self-denial, masochism, if you like. The purging of the mind. [...] We must empty our minds. We must unteach ourselves. We must withdraw from all of the realities that surround us, from the world. We must undirect and undress ourselves, not with a view to gaining direction, but with a view to making ourselves helpless, weak, shapeless, mindless, armless, legless, toothless, powerless, thalidomide, protoplasmic blobs.”<sup>2</sup>

Covering works from the early 1960s until the mid-1970s, this dissertation has examined a set of English Canadian artists – John Boyle, Greg Curnoe, and Joyce Wieland – in a bid to construct a picture of how nationalism and eroticism were interwoven in their bodies of work. This relationship could be one of models or of figures and often overlapped to the point that they were indistinguishable. I have suggested that this was not simply esoteric, but clearly had at least a family resemblance to the discourses of English Canadian nationalism that surrounded them at the time. Such imaginative forms tended to focus on the death, already passed or imminent, of Canada. The spectre of bare *survival*, and what is less, *survival as the loser* is however, far more complex than the term hints at. The aesthetic realm that ‘survival’ captures was also the graveyard world of Tantra and Arctic eroticism with its orgiastic union with death. As Octavio Paz once put it, eroticism is “the capricious servant of life and death.”<sup>3</sup>

These ways of imagining emerged in an almost entirely negative relationship to liberal Canada. Despite whatever ‘anti-Americanism’ may have been overtly involved, the antipathy was to liberalism in general and the Liberals in particular. This extended beyond real politics to the level of metaphysical rejection. The image of Canada presented by Pierre Elliott Trudeau stood in as the liberal model. Trudeauvian Canada

was a technocratic management system for the manufacturing of individuation and diversity. Evincing an existential horror at the ‘passions’ of nationalism, the Trudeauvian model of Canada sought to neutralize them through welfare, health care, demographic management or cultural warfare.

Some Canadian nationalists regarded this sort of position as a form of cultural genocide. For George Grant, it was too late to protest. His work, which had an enormous if not necessarily coherent influence on the image of nationalism that developed at the time, stressed that liberalism had eliminated any ground for Canadian nationalism, and, what was more, liberalism itself had no grounding in reality. This was the context of Canadian Decadence. To pretend nationalism was possible was either to commit to a sad and ultimately ridiculous romanticism, or to be an absurd nihilist. The impossibility of politics was matched by an insistence that the basic epistemological frameworks that allowed liberal thought and its descriptions of the world to be viable were a nullity. These themes would be taken in a variety of different directions, including into the kind of Tory surrealism of Scott Symons, an explicit re-encoding of Grantian critique in erotic terms that sought to reinvigorate ‘death’, or in Dennis Lee’s negative nationalism.

In this context, Canadians could be imagined as anachronisms, as inarticulate, romantic losers, or heroic martyrs. The new identity being imposed by the Liberal state was often regarded as a form of institutionalized schizophrenia, a kind of irresolvable living-death, or in fascist terms. The art of such a place was the concern of the rest of the dissertation. If Grant’s work delineated the nihilism of modern Canada and its vacuous, farcical quality, Boyle and Curnoe’s art embodied this. This was legible in two sets of attitudes – the nationalist and the Regionalist – played out in an (anti-)political register

and in terms of geographical and historical models of erotic art. It was in the almost mechanical cultivation of these erogenous zone within a more general fossilization process that they could manufacture the autochthonous that Grant saw as crucial to Canadian nationalism but absent and impossible. But here it was enacted in an anti-humanist, structural way that stressed and exploited alienation to construct an art bound to place that made a show of exhibiting its evacuation of psychological and sociological significance.

Curnoe's work involved creating an erotic geography that mixed regional materials in an avowedly machinic matter, fossilizing time, the erotic existing within the crystallization of form. Meanwhile, Boyle reinvented the History genre as an eccentric model of pornography consisting of the assemblage of materials-to-hand. This was matched by an explicitly Decadent figuration of the Canadian nationalist as a *poète maudit*, or erotic boy.

The gesture toward a mythologization of Canada would be crucial to Joyce Wieland's practice. While Boyle and Curnoe's work tends to be figurative but concentrates on deliberately undercutting narrative development, Wieland's work concentrated on constructing a more thorough and broad mythology. Erotic boys were absent, replaced by beasts and the idea of woman as the orderly quilter of the world, assembling its materials into a set of abstract designs. Even in her most overtly narrative work, *The Far Shore*, the mythologizing of history was consistently undercut to the point of sometimes being overwhelmed by her attention to texture, colour, and atmosphere over plot. Although the most ostensibly concerned with 'meaning production', Wieland was also consistent in mocking this with the paradoxical attitude appropriate to someone who

would insist that art was primarily a suicidal activity.<sup>4</sup> *The Far Shore*, she insisted, would be a functional document indifferent to being useful, and a way of identifying with the nation simultaneously designed to stress alienation.

If for Boyle, history was accumulated garbage that could be masturbated with, for Wieland it was a way of shifting around a series of postures while nothing ever actually changes. All three artists would embrace serialized imagery that undermined the lyrical while their rhetoric undercut any sense of the heroic, transforming whatever it came in contact with into the stereotypical or farcical. This is also, in part, why so much of the work discussed was serial. Images rarely came alone but packaged as micro-communities of images that constantly undermined articulation, taking their apparent pleasure in the process of marking out and then dis-coordinating a territory. Gilles Deleuze has helpfully put it this way: “The serial form is founded in the erogenous zone of the surface, insofar as the latter is defined by the extension of a singularity or, what amounts to the same thing, by the distribution of difference of potential or intensity...”<sup>5</sup> This was in keeping with the statements from the introduction borrowed from Boris Groys, namely that the work of the avant-garde, and as we saw Curnoe insisted that nationalist ‘content’ was avant-garde, was a way of promoting ‘nonunderstanding’ by perversely constructing ‘nonexistent’ differences to ruin social unity or use.

In all three artists, we consistently saw a mock dialectic, one which appropriated the Hegelian logic of the liberal state, while then disavowing its logical telos toward progressivism, insisting on a kind of perpetual negation. This is in keeping with Georges Bataille’s notion of unemployed negativity and its perverse waste of ‘l’action’ which produces nothing of actual social value.<sup>6</sup> And as we saw, this was most evident precisely

in the artists' appropriations of politics, whether in the forms of ostensible feminism or pragmatic nationalist discourse, which would posit such claims in increasingly ludicrous forms in order to erase them, not to bring them to a productive resolution. In this, they remained in *Canada* as a kind of negative space with no real community. This allowed for a certain degree of investment in materials which could then be wasted, resulting in a largely paradoxical kind of art.

Like the Regionalists, Wieland would also embrace tradition and the outmoded. This extended to her appropriation of traditionally women's crafts, the rococo aesthetics that she identified with the origins of French-English Canada and her allegiance to the tradition of northern mysticism. I have insisted in not reading any of these very deliberate and consistent aesthetic strategies as simple pastiche or parody, but as a genuine attempt to reinvent a Canadian nationalist art. If the Regionalists were reterritorializing Canada primarily through local materials and variations on customs, she was doing this through foreign aesthetic forms (Camp, rococo, fascist etc.) that were applied to encourage the 'madness' to slip out. Central to this was also her use of a Theosophical metaphysics and a complementary appropriation of tantric art models that celebrated the spiritual value of décor and stereotype. For the Regionalists, Canada was a fossil, the surface of which was an erogenous zone to caress; for Wieland it was pulsating and fluid field of energy to be sewn together, domesticated or maintained as artificial wilderness and transformed into a glittering surface. In this way, both tendencies were imagining the ecstatic and the autochthonous.

In both directions, what is fundamental is the expending and hollowing out of socio-political significance to allow for the circulation of elemental energy, whether this

is in nihilistic or mystical materialism. Nationalism in respect to this is not the expression of a people or a form of communal meaning, but of the concretion of space or *heritage* (to use Boyle and Symons' term), generally misinterpreted due to its exploitation of political notions of representation. In this, the nationalism of all three comes closer to approximating what Roger Caillois understood as the art of stones than it does to approximating the narratives of cultural nationalism that they have been associated with. Caillois' *L'écriture des pierres* (1970) profoundly revisits many of the basic themes of Surrealism (beauty and automatism), recasting them in a decidedly geological framework that severely demotes the idealization of the mind that had been so essential to André Breton and his associates. For Caillois, human art comes after beauty, registering only a pallid and absurd invention that can echo the creative aesthetics of the universe.<sup>7</sup> Life is a 'surface mildew' or 'slime' whose primary privilege is its capacity to decay.<sup>8</sup> As the gelatinous, irrigated and blurry, life is driven to domesticate the minerals of the world so that a surface can be constructed, allowing for this excretion of an earlier surface to multiply. Sentience promotes the creation of shelters and habitats which will gradually be abandoned, agglomerating into masses and returning to the inertia of stone. And so, "Wonder can only arise and increase when a spectacle endures, survives perception and is ultimately seen to be less transient than the ephemeral being who came upon it."<sup>9</sup> The random 'pictures' seen in rock, created without intent or significance, are ultimately unsettling because they call into question precisely what picturing actually is.

According to Caillois, life flourishes ultimately to perpetuate the immortal signature of the fossil. This is in keeping with Boyle and Curnoe's dismissal of psychological and sociological content; art involved 'consciousness' only insofar as it

was the meaningless assemblage of images in immediate space, effectively congealing into art images that reduplicated the fossilization process of the region. This concentration on a mineral model of the world was wholly in keeping with the aesthetics of Decadence. According to Jean Pierrot, the appropriation of mythic symbols and allegory – common enough among our artists – was less due to their significance than to the material elements that they brought into play.<sup>10</sup> Being both profoundly and pessimistically materialist, Decadence is simultaneously, and paradoxically, severely essentialist, though it tends to express the *spirit* of things less in their allegorical than material form. Perfume would be the ultimate expression of this, but this is applicable in general to the investment in materiality that has been common to these artists.

The vision of *Canada as the far shore* expressed in Wieland, and the potential escape from modernity that this image suggested in the thought of George Grant, was a flight toward ecstasy and excess. Those who did not exactly make the leap, like the London Regionalists, and who embraced a minimal technical life that accentuated its own artificiality, investing in its bio-region, also embraced the idea of internal exile and an affluent poverty. If John Boyle had been a reader of Marshall Sahlins, he likely would have advocated for the “low standard of living” of stone age affluence rather than the luxury of modernity.<sup>11</sup> While Curnoe and Boyle clearly embrace the implications of nihilism, Wieland’s embrace of decadence actually leads her back into romanticism and an attempt to reinvent Canada through radically essentializing and eternalizing it, turning to what is irreconcilable with what Grant termed ‘process’.

Over the course of this dissertation I have endeavored to examine how the models of eroticism that were present were related to ideas, and, more importantly, aesthetic

tendencies, within nationalism in English Canada. This, I believe, introduces a way of thinking about both nationalism and eroticism which is quite different from (and significantly complicates) that which currently exists in scholarly literature in Canada. Although I have observed some continuities between the artists, I have tried not to overstress them. The artistic material covered has consistently revealed in irony, negativity, sarcasm and parody, treating the discourses of abstraction, politics, and pornography on exchangeable footing and frequently mocking or deriding the sociological value of art while simultaneously positing itself as a nationalist art. This, paradoxical or absurd though it may be, I think is important, because it demonstrates a need to shift from reducing nationalism in its artistic expression to a mode of meaning production and community formation to recognizing that it can be, and was, something quite different.

Among the artists discussed, we saw eroticism consistently conceptualized as a form of fragmentation or self-erasure that persisted in a deliberate abjection. We also consistently saw nationalism conceived not so much as the affirmation of community as its deadness, noting its *irreality*, celebrating its destruction, or satirizing whatever values it could claim. In Curnoe, Boyle and some of the other Regionalists, we saw art as detritus, a radical materiality that denied any privilege to meaning or experience, denigrated the value of the viewer, perverted a rational sense of representation, effectively treating the subject as another machine for processing matter and refusing it narrative substance. In Wieland we saw something quite different: a hyper-symbolic mode of imagining the world that derided the subject and their phenomenal life as little

more than excrement and treated the symbol or stereotype as the vessel of a holy transcendent reality.

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<sup>1</sup> David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), ix.

<sup>2</sup> John B. Boyle, "Address to the general assembly of the Nihilist Party of Canada," *20 Cents Magazine*, April 1969, np.

<sup>3</sup> Octavio Paz; trans. Helen Lane, *The Double Flame: Essays on Love and Eroticism* (London: The Harvill Press, 1995), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Shirley Raphael, "An artist's plan for Canada," *Montreal Gazette*, July 10, 1971, 38.

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze; trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 225.

<sup>6</sup> This is articulated in a letter by Bataille to Alexandre Kojève, the same man who we saw Grant use in a convoluted way to attack liberalism. See Georges Bataille; ed. Michel Surya, *Choix de lettres: 1917-1966* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 131-136.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Caillois; trans. Barbara Bray, *The Writing of Stones*. (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1985), 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Pierrot; trans. Derek Coltman, *The Decadent Imagination, 1880-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 207-237.

<sup>11</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine and Atherton Inc., 1972), 1.

## Illustrations



Fig. 1: Installation for *La Chambre nuptiale* (1974-1976)



Fig. 2: Crowd waiting to enter *La Chambre nuptiale* (1974-1976)



Fig. 3: Francine Larivée, *La Chambre nuptiale*; l'autel de la femme (1974-1976)

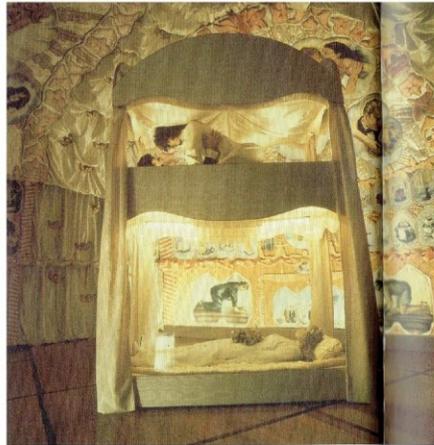


Fig. 4: Francine Larivée, *La Chambre nuptiale*; lit tombeau et autel du couple (1974-1976)

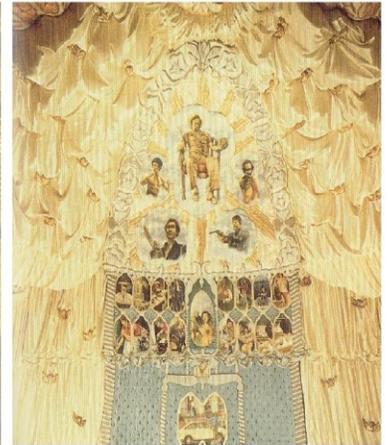


Fig. 5: Francine Larivée, *La Chambre nuptiale*; l'autel de l'homme (1974-1976)





Fig. 10: Joyce Wieland, *Balling* (1961)



Fig. 11: Joyce Wieland, *Laura Secord Saves Upper Canada* (1961)

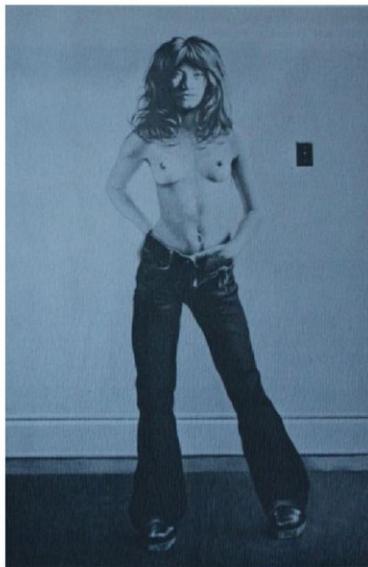


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Fig. 16: Badanna Zack, *Phallic Object* (1972)



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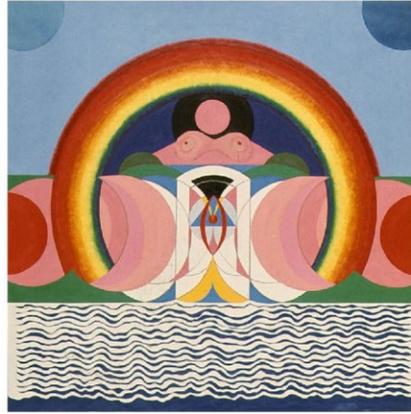


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Fig. 22: Dennis Burton, *Maple Sugar* (1967-68)



Fig. 23: Claude Breeze, *Strange Fruit* (1964-65)

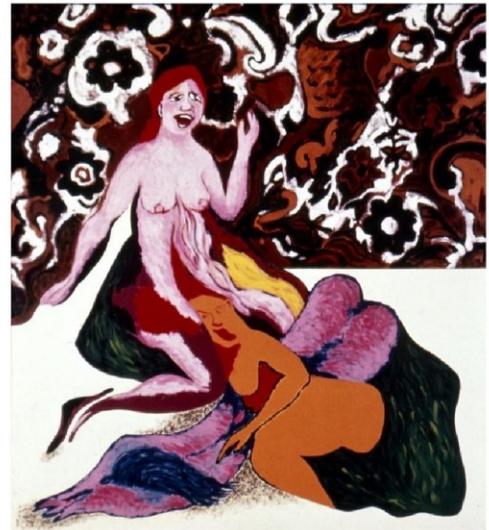


Fig. 24: Claude Breeze, *The Matriarch* (1964-65)



Fig. 25: Claude Breeze, *The Homeviewer No. 1: Mother and Child* (1967)

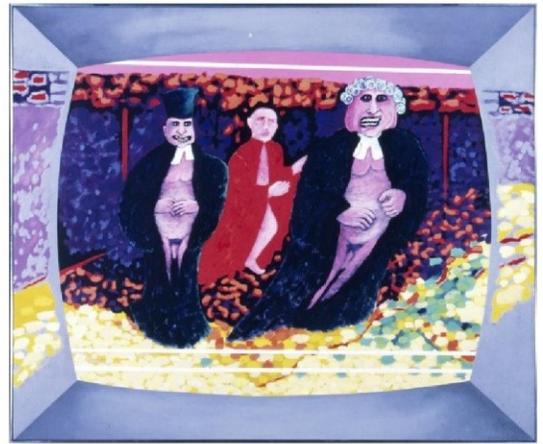


Fig. 26: Claude Breeze, *Transmission Difficulties: The Dignitaries* (1968)

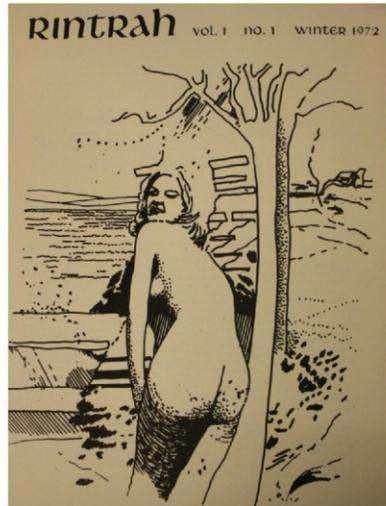


Fig. 27: Claude Breeze, *Twilight Pages* (1972)

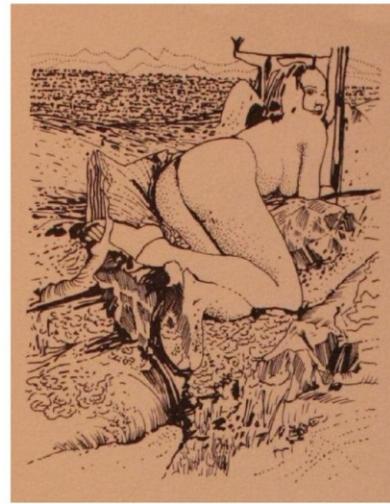


Fig. 28: Claude Breeze, *Twilight Pages* (1972)

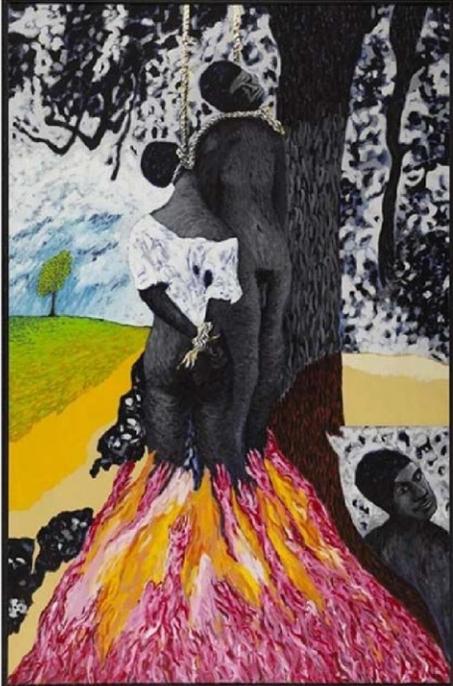


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Fig. 30: Lynching poster circulated by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and reproduced in *The Ubysey*.

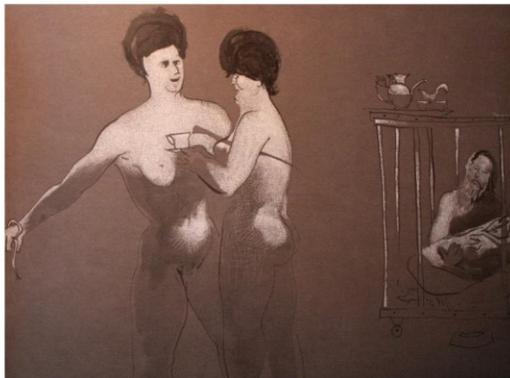


Fig. 31: Harold Town, *Enigma* (c. 1964)



Fig. 32: Harold Town, *Enigma* (1964)



Fig. 33: Harold Town, *Enigma* (1964)

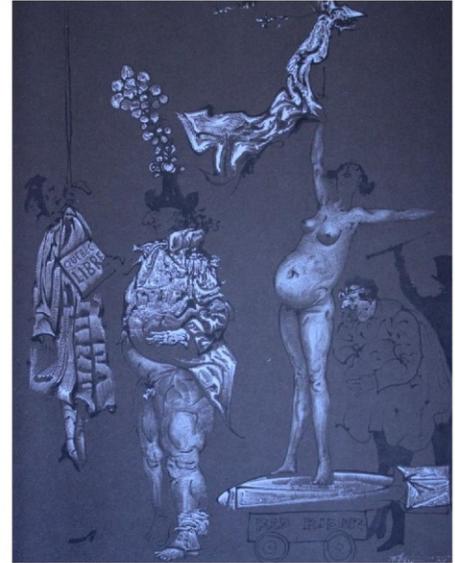


Fig. 34: Harold Town, *Enigma* 1972 (1972)



Fig. 35: Newspaper coverage for the bombing by Paul Joseph Chartier (1966)

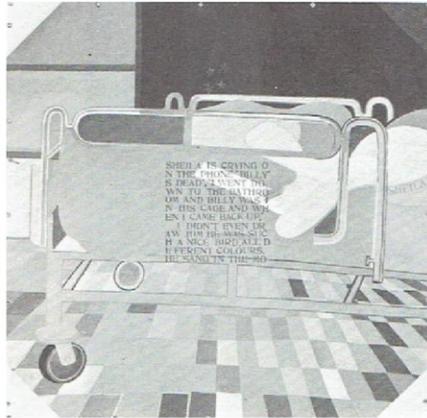


Fig. 36: Greg Curnoe, *Family Painting #1, In Labour* (1966)

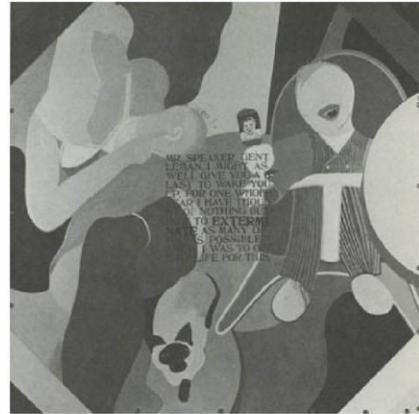


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Fig. 38: Greg Curnoe, *Family Painting #3, Under the Apple Tree at Mitchell Hts. Cor. Robert & Walter Sts.* (1966)

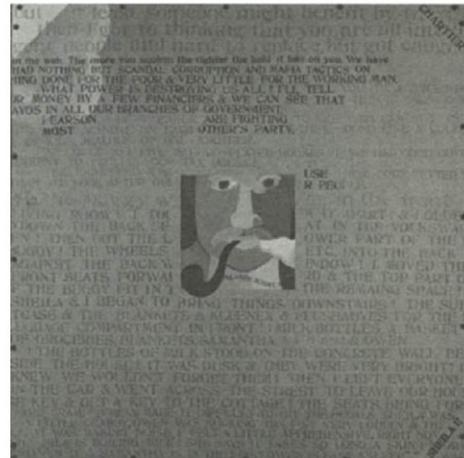


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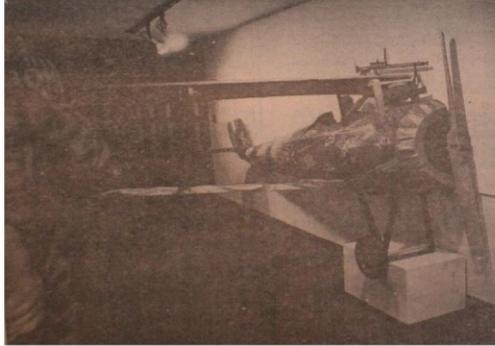


Fig. 43: John Boyle, *Little Daisy* (1974)



Fig. 44: John Boyle, *Little Daisy* (1974)

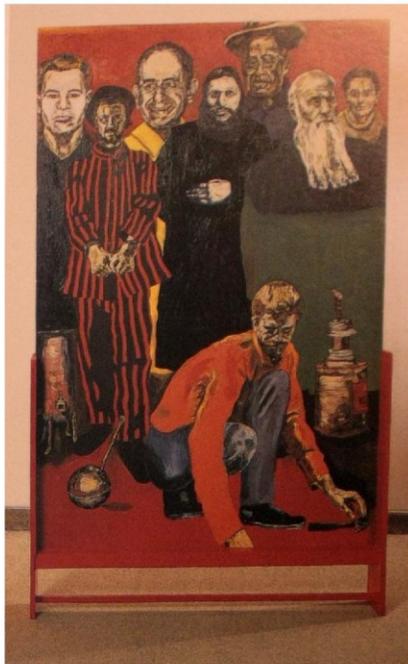


Fig. 45: John Boyle, *Making Bombs* (1965)



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Fig. 52: Greg Curnoe, *Blonde* (1963)



Fig. 53: Greg Curnoe, *Open Slowly* (1962)



Fig. 54: Greg Curnoe, *From Behind* (1962)

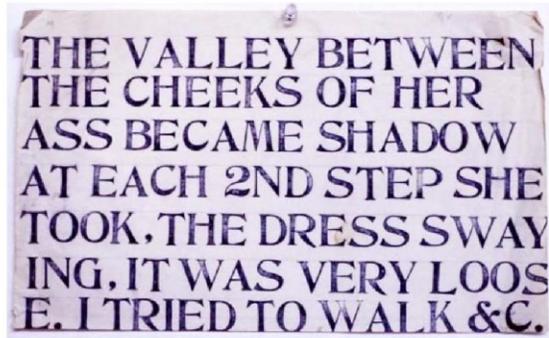


Fig. 55: Greg Curnoe, *Blue Book # 2* (1964)

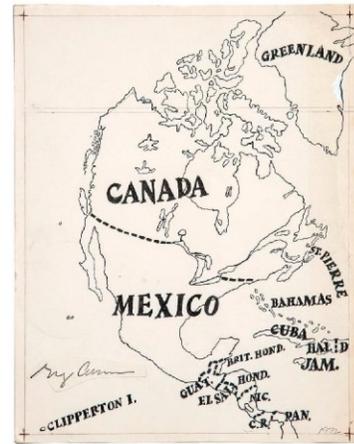


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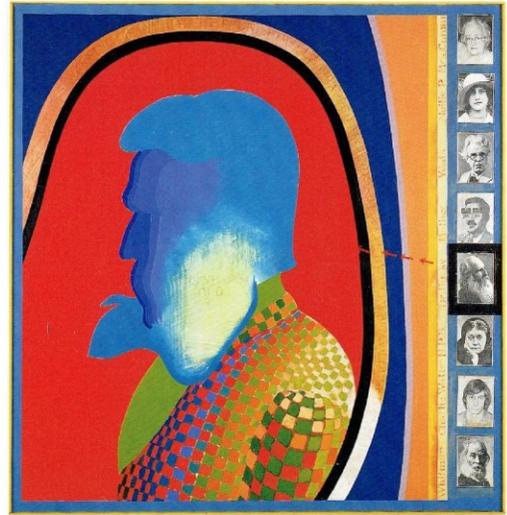


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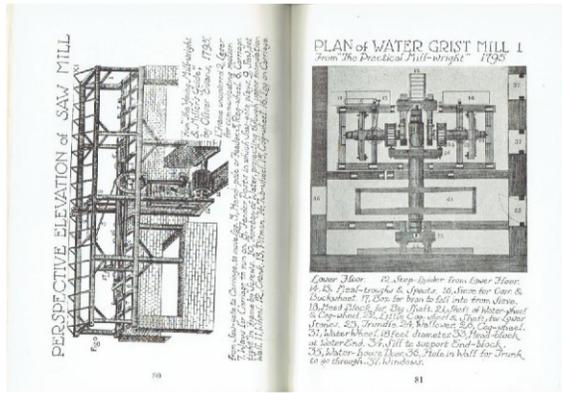


Fig. 69: C.W. Jefferys, From *The Picture Gallery of Canadian History Vol. 2* (1945)

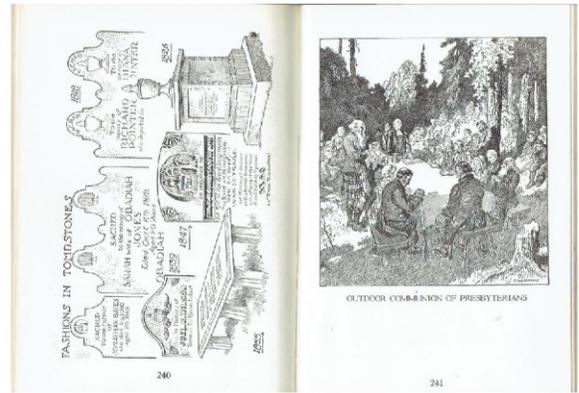
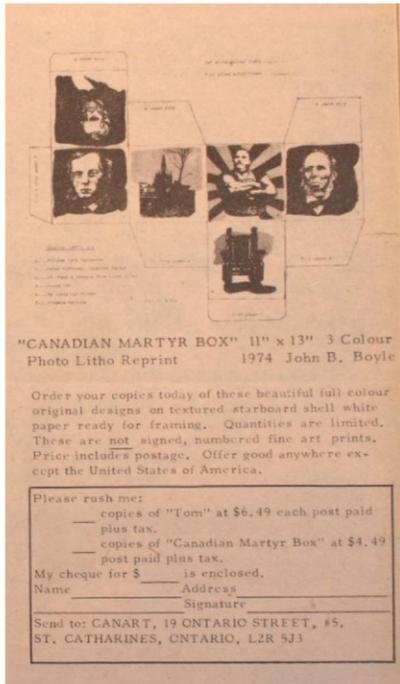


Fig. 70: C.W. Jefferys, From *The Picture Gallery of Canadian History Vol. 2* (1945)



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Fig. 71: Ad for John Boyle, *Canadian Martyr Box* (1974)



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Fig. 77: John Boyle, *Yankee Go Home – Elsinore* (1974)

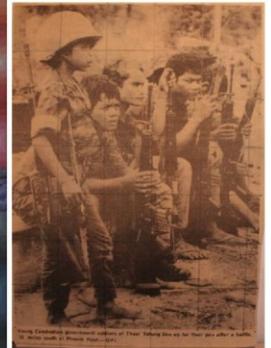


Fig. 78: John Boyle, Gridded source material *Yankee Go Home – Elsinore* (1974)



Fig. 79: John Boyle, *DeCew Cathedral* (1971)



Fig. 80: John Boyle, *Yankee Go Home - The Rape of St. Catharine* (1973)



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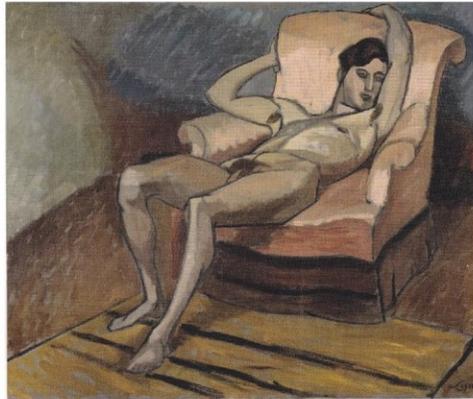


Fig. 89: John Lyman, *Jeune homme indolent* (1922)



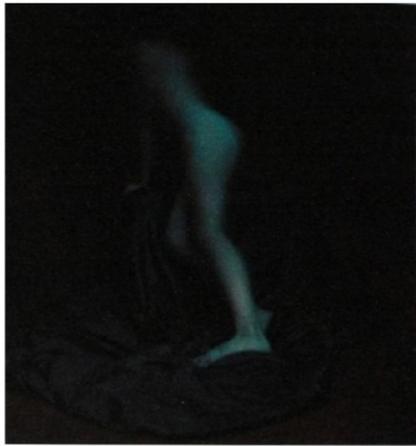
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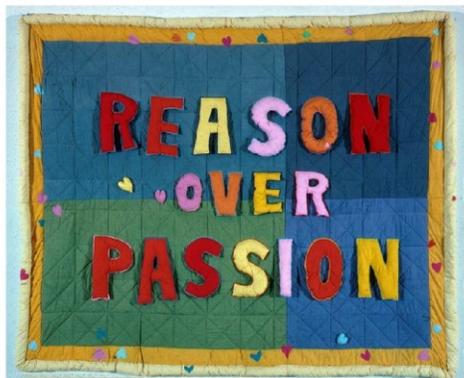


Fig. 95: Joyce Wieland, *Reason Over Passion* (1968)



Fig. 96: Joyce Wieland, *La Raison avant la passion* (1968)



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Fig. 98: Banner for Joyce Wieland's *True Patriot Love* at the National Gallery (1971)



Fig. 99: Installation shot for Joyce Wieland's *True Patriot Love* at the National Gallery (1971)

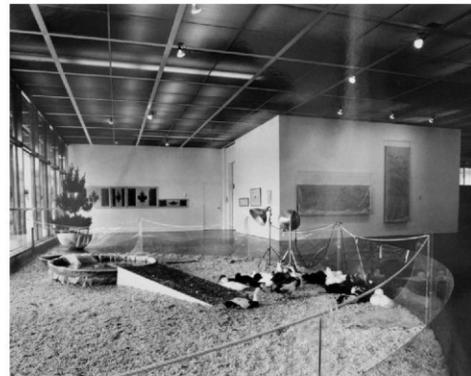


Fig. 100: Installation shot for Joyce Wieland's *True Patriot Love* at the National Gallery (1971)



Fig. 101: Guests at the opening for Joyce Wieland's *True Patriot Love* at the National Gallery (1971)



Fig. 102: A guest at the opening for Joyce Wieland's *True Patriot Love* at the National Gallery (1971)

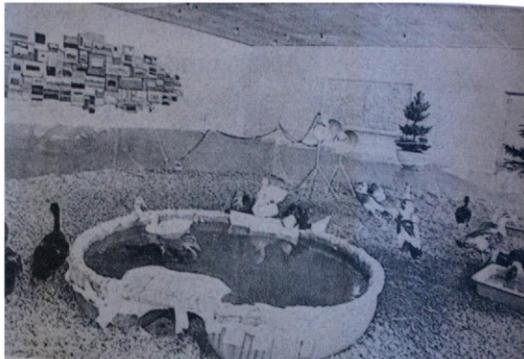


Fig. 103: Installation shot for Joyce Wieland's *True Patriot Love* at the National Gallery (1971)

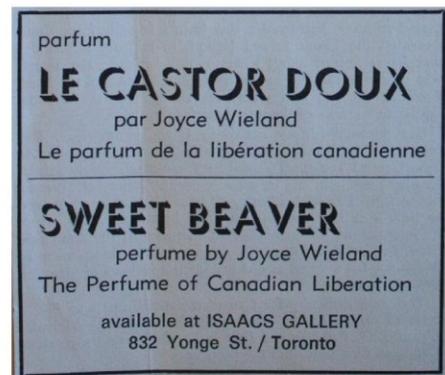


Fig. 104: Ad for *Sweet Beaver* perfume by Joyce Wieland



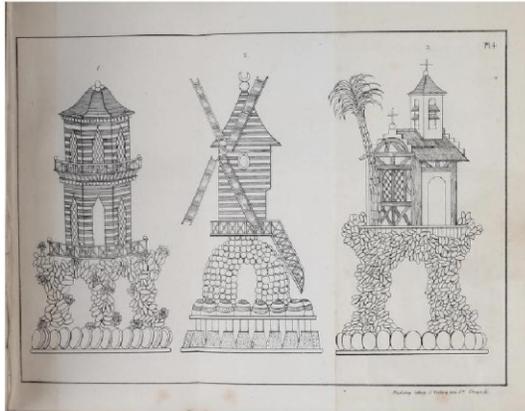
Fig. 105: Le Hameau de la Reine (Richard Mique, 1783-1786) and its artificial lake  
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Fig. 107: Joyce Wieland, *Arctic Passion Cake* (1971)



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Fig. 116: Still from *Back to God's Country* (David Hartford, 1919)



Fig. 117: Still from *Back to God's Country* (David Hartford, 1919)

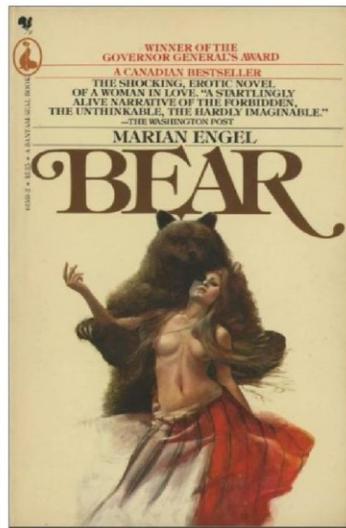


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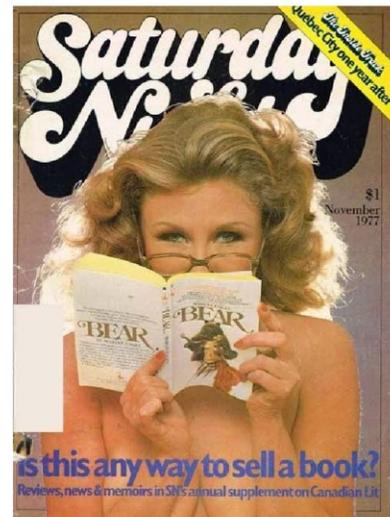


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Fig. 120: Joyce Wieland,  
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Fig. 121: Joyce Wieland,  
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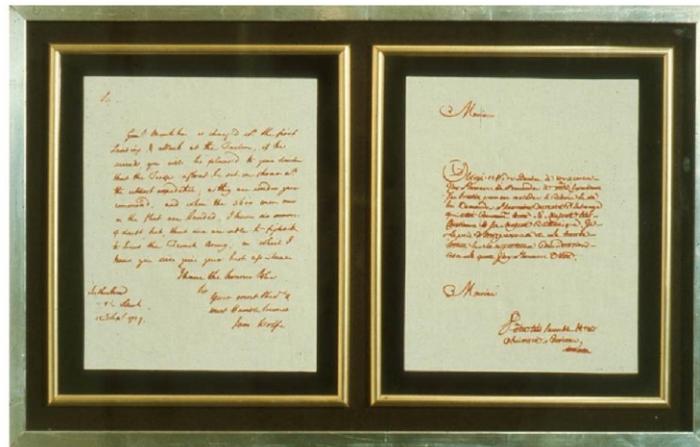


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Figs. 123-125: Stills from *Water Sark* (Joyce Wieland, 1965)

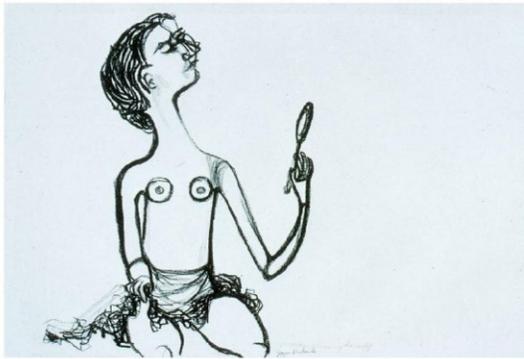


Fig. 126: Joyce Wieland, *Woman Amusing Herself* (1955)



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Fig. 129: Still from *Larry's Recent Behaviour* (Joyce Wieland, 1963)



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Fig. 131: Joyce Wieland, still from *Reason Over Passion* (1969)



Figs. 132-134: Stills from *Triumph des Willens* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1935)



Fig. 135: Still from *Patriotism II* (Joyce Wieland, 1965)

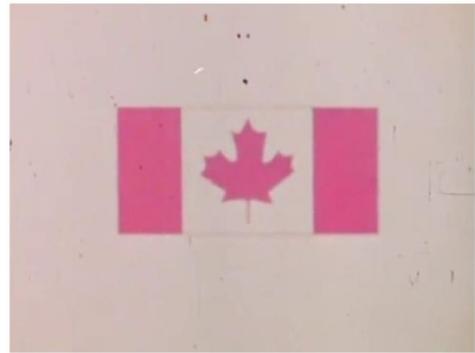


Fig. 136: Still from *Reason Over Passion* (Joyce Wieland, 1969)



Fig. 137: Joyce Wieland, *Flag Arrangement* (1970-71)

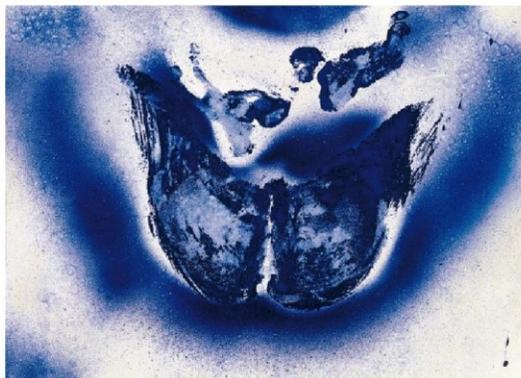


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Figs. 140-142: Stills from *Larry's Recent Behaviour* (Joyce Wieland, 1963)



Fig. 143: Joyce Wieland, *O Canada* (1970)

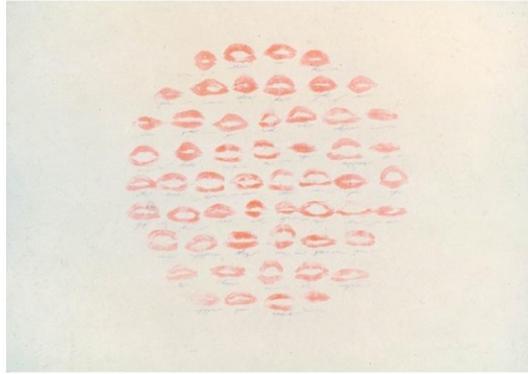


Fig. 144: Joyce Wieland,  
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Fig. 145: Joyce Wieland,  
*The Arctic Belongs to Itself* (1973)

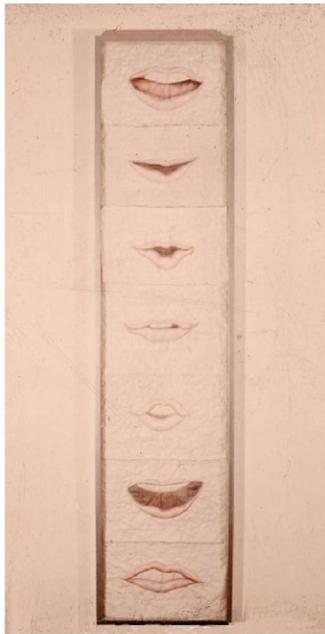


Fig. 146: Joyce  
Wieland, *The Maple  
Leaf Forever II* (1972)



Fig. 147: Joyce Wieland, *Film Mandala* (1966)



Fig. 148: Joyce Wieland, *Square Mandala* (1966)

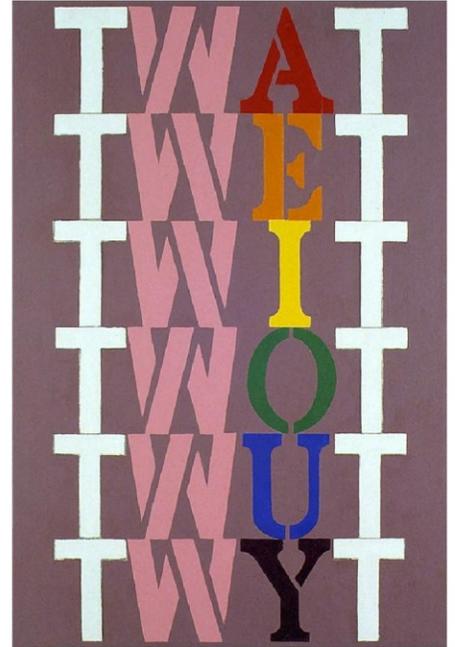


Fig. 149: Dennis Burton, *Vowel Declention* (1972)



Fig. 150: Théodore Géricault, *Têtes coupées* (1818-19)



Fig. 151: Théodore Géricault, *L'Aliéné* or *Le Kleptomane* (1822)



Fig. 152: Production still from *Pierre Vallières* (Joyce Wieland, 1972)



Fig. 153: Still from *Pierre Vallières* (Joyce Wieland, 1972)



Fig. 154: *Not I* (Samuel Beckett, 1973)

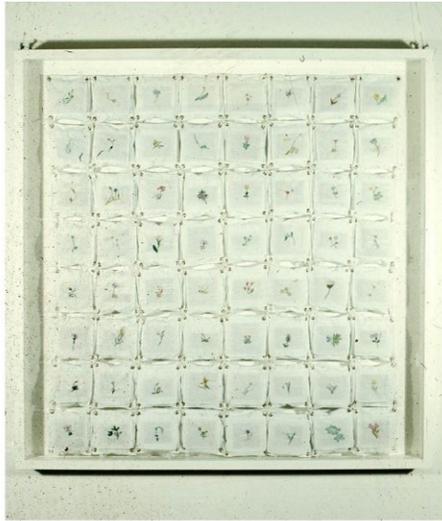


Fig. 155: Joyce Wieland, *The Water Quilt* (1970-71)



Fig. 156: Joyce Wieland, *The Water Quilt* (1970-71)  
[detail]



Fig. 157: Still from *The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland, 1976)



Fig. 158: Still from *The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland, 1976)





Fig. 163: Still from *The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland, 1976)



Fig. 164: Still from *The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland, 1976)



Fig. 165: Still from *Diary of a Sinner* (Ed Hunt, 1974)



Fig. 166: Still from *Diary of a Sinner* (Ed Hunt, 1974)



Fig. 167: Still from *The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland, 1976)



Fig. 168: Still from *Back to God's Country* (David Hartford, 1919)



Fig. 169: Still from *The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland, 1976)



Fig. 170: Still from *The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland, 1976)



Fig. 171: Still from *The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland, 1976)



Fig. 172: Still from *The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland, 1976)



Fig. 173: Still from the opening of *The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland, 1976)

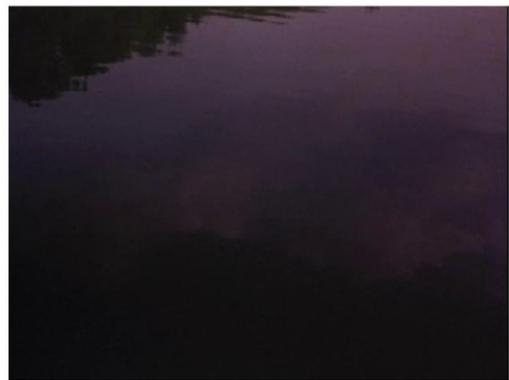


Fig. 174: Still from the closing of *The Far Shore* (Joyce Wieland, 1976)

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Scott Symons, Library and Archives Canada

Harold Town, Library and Archives Canada

Joyce Wieland, National Gallery of Canada/Clara Thomas Archives (York University)

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Over the course of my research, I consulted thousands of newspaper and periodical articles from the period. I have only listed those cited or directly relied upon in the text. In surveying the era, and in addition to drawing heavily upon mainstream periodicals such as *Maclean's*, *Saturday Night*, and *Canadian Art/artsCanada*, I also reviewed these publications for their issues that appeared within my timeframe: *Allez Chier*, *Bisexus*, *Body Politic*, *Branching Out*, *Canadian Dimension*, *Cinema Canada*, *Cinéma Québec*, *CineWorld*, *Cité Libre*, *Causeway*, *Cul Q*, *Duet*, *La fédération des femmes du Québec*, *Frou-Frou*, *Jeux d'hommes* [both variants], *Kinesis*, *Mainmise*, *Montréal Flirt*, *Montreal Women's Liberation Newsletter*, *The New Feminist*, *Northern Woman Journal*, *Ozomo*, *Objectif: Revue indépendante du cinéma*, *The Other Woman – A Revolutionary Feminist Newspaper*, *Parti-Pris*, *Pedestal*, *Proscope*, *La Revue OM*, *Saskatoon Women's*

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### **Masters theses and dissertations**

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