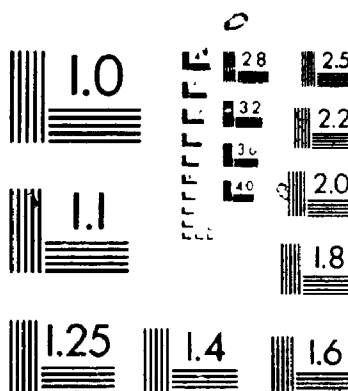


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**THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SUBJECT MATTER IN THE ART OF
JOYCE WIELAND AND GREG CURNOE**

By

Barbara K. Stevenson


A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Institute of Canadian Studies

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

28 May 1987

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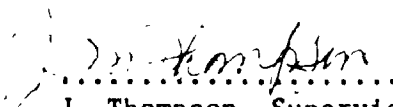
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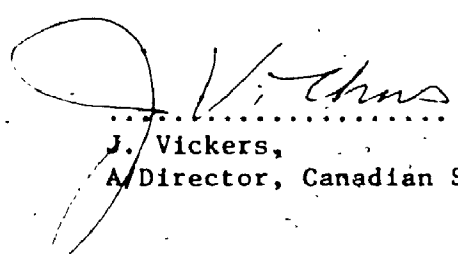
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ABSTRACT

In this thesis the political and social subject matter in the art of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe, particularly their work of the sixties and seventies, is described and analyzed. It is argued that the problems of interpreting and evaluating their work can be solved by using concepts and questions proposed by Marxist art theorists.

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CHAPTER II

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SUBJECT MATTER OF JOYCE WIELAND

This chapter will identify and discuss some major aspects of the political and social subject matter in the work of Joyce Wieland. Not every political or social concern which Wieland has expressed in her art is analyzed in depth, due largely to space constraints. The most significant issues which are fully developed in the course of the chapter include the following.

Initially, a consideration of Wieland's nationalism presents her thoughts about Canadian unity, with specific reference to Canada's multiculturalism. Next, we examine the aspects of the country through which Wieland believed its peoples could derive a sense of shared identity. These include Canada's natural features, such as geography and topography. The essay goes on to discuss Wieland's feeling that Canada's ecology and consequently the national identity which its peoples derived from the land were threatened by such dangers as pollution and American encroachment. The final topic in the examination of nationalism is how Wieland hoped symbolically to establish and strengthen a national consciousness through art which expressed a mythology of Canada.

A second section deals with the feminine orientation in Wieland's art. This is brought out primarily through a discussion of what Wieland calls her "women's work": her

political art as "the expression of some recognizable³ doctrine or set of values in aesthetic form". It is important to emphasize the Oxford's reference to the "body of citizens". This does not restrict political subject matter to governmental topics, but also includes people, events and issues of public concern. Likewise, the designation "social" is used in a broad sense to mean:⁴ pertaining to society.

The main emphasis in this thesis is on study of the art of Wieland and Curnoe in order to identify and discuss the political and social subject matter which they have incorporated. Their writings and statements will also be examined, however, in order to obtain as complete a picture as possible of their views. The present writer interviewed both artists at their homes in the fall and winter of 1988. This personal contact allowed a specific exploration of the issues that are most central to this study. The complete transcripts of both interviews are included as Appendices I and II.

Chapter II explores the political and social subject matter in the art of Joyce Wieland. The most intensely political period of Wieland's career was the mid-sixties to mid-seventies. Consequently, this thesis will concentrate on what she produced at that time, with particular emphasis on the works shown in her "True Patriot Love" exhibition at the National Gallery in 1971.

The political and social subject matter in the work of

Greg Curnoe is the subject of Chapter III. With Curnoe, as with Wieland, the thesis concentrates on one particular period of the artist's career, namely the work of the sixties and seventies. This constitutes the part of his oeuvre which most clearly manifests political concerns.

Chapter IV discusses the work of Wieland and Curnoe in terms of some of the issues raised by Marxist art theorists. The decision to use Marxist theory in this study stemmed from the fact that the Marxists have been very interested in the links between art and society, and have been especially concerned with the nature of art's political role and how that role should be fulfilled. Given the fact that Marxists believe in the inherently political character of art, it seemed particularly interesting to bring Marxist art theory to bear on the work of two artists who intentionally incorporate political and social subject matter in their work. It seems reasonable to expect that Marxist insights into the relationship between art and politics have a clear application to art which deliberately sets out to communicate a political message.

The contribution of the thesis to the study of Canadian art lies in its attempt to go beyond a mere description of the work of Wieland and Curnoe. Instead, it will try to resolve issues both within their oeuvres proper, and concerning the relationship between their work and Marxist art theory. Art writing in Canada typically has not been concerned with the relationship between art and society.

Moreover, in exploring such broad issues, the thesis may have application to art which is other than Canadian. In regard to the theoretical component of the study, it should be made clear that neither Wieland nor Curnoe is a Marxist, nor is the writer. Marxist theory has been adopted as a framework in Chapter IV because it provides useful perspectives from which to examine the political and social subject matter of these two artists. Barry Lord undertook an examination of Canadian art from a Maoist perspective in 1974 in his book The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art.⁵ The limitations of his study with regard to Wieland and Curnoe are related to Lord's survey approach, which did not permit him to treat their work in any depth, and his evangelical tone, which did not allow for an objective view. While no writer, including the present one, is completely neutral in attitude, it is possible to be more objective without a strong commitment to a pre-existing party line which, it can be argued, hampered Lord. This thesis considers the work of Wieland and Curnoe in its own terms in some depth and, as objectively as possible, discusses their political subject matter in relation to the broader questions of the role of art.

The thesis raises three questions. The first is: what is the major political and social subject matter in the art of Wieland and Curnoe? This question is answered in Chapters II and III. The second question involves the interpretation of Wieland's and Curnoe's work: should it be

looked at from a sociological perspective, an aesthetic perspective or a combination of the two? The third question addresses the evaluation of the two artists' work: does it satisfy criteria set out by Marxist art theorists for good politically-oriented art? These two issues are explored in Chapter IV.

NOTES

¹ Hauser, Arnold, "The l'art pour l'art problem," trans. by Kenneth Northcott, Critical Inquiry, V, Spring 1979, p. 438.

² The Compact Edition of the Oxford Dictionary, Vol. II (Glasgow: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 2228.

³ Graham, Gordon, "Art and Politics," The British Journal of Aesthetics, XVIII:3, Summer 1978, p. 230.

⁴ The full version of this definition in The Compact Oxford is : "Pertaining, relating, or due to, connected with, etc., society as a natural or ordinary condition of human life," Vol. II, p. 2902.

⁵ Lord, Barry, The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art (Toronto: NC Press, 1974).

CHAPTER II

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Initially, a consideration of Wieland's nationalism presents her thoughts about Canadian unity, with specific reference to Canada's multiculturalism. Next, we examine the aspects of the country through which Wieland believed its peoples could derive a sense of shared identity. These include Canada's natural features, such as geography and topography. The essay goes on to discuss Wieland's feeling that Canada's ecology and consequently the national identity which its peoples derived from the land were threatened by such dangers as pollution and American encroachment. The final topic in the examination of nationalism is how Wieland hoped symbolically to establish and strengthen a national consciousness through art which expressed a mythology of Canada.

A second section deals with the feminine orientation in Wieland's art. This is brought out primarily through a discussion of what Wieland calls her "women's work": her

adaptation of the traditional materials and techniques of sewing and needlework to express political and social ideas.¹ We will examine why she chose this means of expression and specifically what she used it to say. At the same time, the essay will explore the relationship between Wieland's work and folk art, and review her extensive use of quilting form and technique.

The final section of the chapter discusses the links in Wieland's art and thought among nationalism, nature and women's concerns. These connections are really what give shape to her oeuvre as a whole and allow us to see it as a relatively coherent statement of her political and social beliefs and interests. In this context, the paper posits some continuity between her nationalism of the sixties and seventies and her recent work.

It is important to state at the outset that Wieland is neither an adherent of a particular political party nor does she follow any pre-existing ideological position.² Hers is an intuitive understanding and expression of political and social issues.

Over the years, Wieland has expressed interest -- in words, deeds and in her art -- in many political and social concerns which will not be examined in depth by this paper. Yet it would be remiss to omit them altogether. In order to give as complete a picture as possible, some of the more significant of these issues are listed here. They are: criticism of major corporate interests; awareness of class

stratification, particularly in relation to the problems of the poor; interest in the labour movement, with an ability to see both its positive and negative aspects; condemnation of the war in Vietnam; interest in the problems of the Jewish people; commitment to world health issues, including the problems posed by food additives and pesticides; fascination with both the theory and practice of revolution, in the thought of Pierre Vallières and the actions of the heroes of the Cuban Revolution; horror of chemical experiments and the new technologies of warfare; and contempt for non-involvement and apathy.³

Joyce Wieland has been called a "laureate of Canadian nationalism".⁴ She has described herself as a "protective nationalist"⁵ and, in 1971, she said: "all the art I've been doing or will be doing is about Canada".⁶ An examination of Wieland's nationalism of the late 1960s and early 1970s reveals several concerns. None is more central than the issues of unity and identity:⁷ a wish to recognize and reconcile the multicultural character of the Canadian people, and an attempt to define the meaning of "Canada" and "Canadian". In regard to unity, the works in the "True Patriot Love" exhibition of 1971 emphasized the importance of Canada's founding cultures. Anglophone and Francophone Canada were explicitly represented in The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers (1970-71; figure 1), and the two cultures' historical roots were evoked in Montcalm's Last Letter/Wolfe's Last Letter (1971; figure 2).

The artist used both Canada's official languages in I Love Canada -- J'aime Canada (1970; figure 3), and made two separate works, the quilts entitled La raison avant la passion and Reason over Passion (both 1968; figure 4), to quote Prime Minister Trudeau's words both in their original French and in English translation. The significance of this quotation and the artist's attitude to Trudeau are further explored below. The show contained references to the language and history of the French and English cultures, and even attempted a symbolic embodiment of them in The Spirit of Canada... (figure 1) sculpture. The catalogue which Wieland wrote to accompany the exhibition is also called True Patriot Love.⁸ Reinforcing the dual French and English themes, it is bilingual throughout. In addition, it contains Gaelic and Inuktitut, which refer to other aspects of Canada's cultural past and present. The book is a collage of prose, poetry and images, which Wieland superimposed on a pre-existing government publication entitled Illustrated Flora of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. The artist considers this catalogue to be one of the works in the "True Patriot Love" exhibition.⁹

In addition to a concern with the French and English, Wieland has shown an interest in the native peoples of Canada, both in the "True Patriot Love" show and elsewhere. Wieland has stated the values she hopes Canada might learn from the Inuit by praising the way in which they organized society in the pre-contact period. In an interview with

Michael Snow and Pierre Th  berge, she identified some of the strengths of the Eskimo people, and drew a parallel between the decreasing Inuit population and what she saw as the decline of Canada's political, economic and cultural independence in the late sixties:

J.W. I envy some of the things they had in their past, their ingenuity, creativity, courage and innocence, and no corporate structure...

M.S. ...is the disappearance of the Eskimos a metaphor for...

J.W. the loss of the country.... Yeah, it's been a parallel decline.... 10

The native peoples of Canada were largely represented in the "True Patriot Love" show by references to the Inuit, although the catalogue does contain a brief mention of Indians gathering sea-bird eggs in Nova Scotia. Besides the Inuktitut passages mentioned above, the book also contains a photograph of an Eskimo doll. Among the other works in the exhibition was Eskimo Song -- The Great Sea (1970-71; figure 5), which consists of the words to an Inuit song, written out in both Inuktitut and English. This piece displays not only the syllabics of the Inuit language, but also something of the Eskimos' feeling for the physical and spiritual power of nature. The text is that of an Inuit song, which is part of an Inuit story entitled "The Creation of a Shaman".¹¹ This legend was collected by Knud Rasmussen in Igloolik. The speaker tells of being carried along by "The Great Sea", "the Earth" and "the great weather", an experience which "move[s] my inward parts with joy". The work is a textile piece of natural fabrics, wool and burlap,

perhaps reflecting both the song's nature theme and the fact that the Inuit themselves use such materials, both practically and creatively.

Examples of Wieland's interest in the native peoples, apart from the "True Patriot Love" exhibition and the statements quoted above, include her show at the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto in 1973, which focussed on her concerns about the flooding of the Cree homeland in northern Quebec for the James Bay hydroelectric project. She was involved in a benefit at the St. Lawrence Centre in Montreal which sold artists' prints to raise money for the Cree court case against the government of Quebec. In 1978 she travelled to the Arctic, where she became interested in, among other things, Inuit art, concentrating primarily on the artist Sorseelutu and her work.

Wieland proposed the possible unification of Canada's diverse cultural groups through the recognition of a shared identity. She believed that despite cultural and historical differences and even enmities, the peoples of Canada could find unity. She spoke of the unity of the Canadian people as the most viable means of regaining control over the fate of Canada which, she felt, was largely in American hands by the early seventies.¹² In 1971 she spoke of the "True Patriot Love" show as being about "what we have in common in Canada",¹³ and later she said that her work of the early seventies was an attempt "to find what was important or symbolic or what we understood as something we understood

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something about together". Not only could a sense of what we have in common unify us, it could also tell us who and what we are. As Charlotte Townsend-Gault has stated, Wieland's solution to what the artist perceived as Canada's identity crisis was to focus on that combination of this country's attributes which she viewed as peculiarly Canadian: northerness, winter and multiculturalism.¹⁵ Thus our cultural diversity was both part of the unity/identity problem, and also part of the solution. It did tend to separate us, Wieland believed; yet, simultaneously, it gave the country a unique mix of strong cultural traditions. The people of these traditions had the potential for learning and teaching such lessons as mutual tolerance and shared values. In the most optimistic light; therefore, Canada's diversity was a positive trait, which made the country different from many others. From this pluralism, we, as Canadians, could perceive a distinct identity, larger than our individual selves.¹⁶

In addition to multiculturalism, Wieland cited northerness and winter as aspects of Canada which help to define the country's character. The northern focus of a work such as Arctic Day (1970-71; figure 8) is self-evident: its multiple cushions each support a coloured pencil drawing of an Arctic plant or animal. Winter is clearly a large part of this and other explicitly northern works, and it is frequently seen in Wieland's southern landscapes too, as the last third of her film Reason over Passion (1987-89; figure

7) attests. This is a record of a journey across western Canada by train during the winter. The most frequently recurring image is that of snow lying thickly on the ground. About the significance of winter to Canada, Wieland has said: "...there's something that comes alive in Canada in the winter, there's something undefinable....And the song, 'My country is the snow' ['Mon pays c'est l'hiver']...it's a very strong statement, just that one line...."¹⁷

In addition to these geographical and climatic features, the topographical -- the landscape itself -- was crucial to Wieland's nationalism. She called her patriotism an "unabashed love of the land".¹⁸ Douglas Pringle sees her film Reason over Passion as linked to the ideas that the land is "the only true root of Canadian nationalism, self-image", and that a "sense of Canada comes from the land itself".¹⁹ It is from the land, no less than from our cultural heritage, that we can find identity, spiritual fulfillment and a secure place in which to live. Wieland perceived an extreme threat to both the Canadian environment and Canadian identity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She has said that in 1967 "I was in a panic: an ecological and spiritual panic about this country and, further: "The land is a strong Canadian theme. That land which we all count on, that we keep counting on, suddenly we look up and what has happened, it is all churned up, like the James Bay project".²⁰

The artist believed that the importance of nature for

Canada goes beyond the fact that many Canadians derive from nature a collective sense of who they are. In addition to the link between one's national identity and the land, Wieland saw a connection between one's personal responsibility to one's country and one's relationship to nature. If an individual feels physically or emotionally or spiritually connected to his or her natural environment, that person will act on a perceived duty to defend and protect his or her country, as is evidenced by the following:

M.S. Do you want that, through seeing the beauty of the country, people will rediscover...themselves... in relationship with...the land.

J.W. I think that, and to feel our responsibilities towards it. 21

Three years later she linked national and regional responsibilities:

...maybe people can take responsibility for this place... 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 you can start in the most regional way to be responsible for what you are. I feel that's something all of us can do. 22

Wieland saw not only an ecological threat to the country; she also felt there was political danger from the United States. In 1974 she said she had politicized her film works five years before, "when I became anxious about Canada and the American takeover".²³ Wieland perceived an increasing amount of U.S. economic control of Canada and believed that this was being accompanied by political domination. In 1971 she said: "I would like to see us gain

control of our government from the U.S." ²⁴ She was also
disturbed by the 1960s' trend of hiring Americans at
Canadian universities and public art galleries. ²⁵ Both her
ecological and political fears for Canada are reflected in
her recent statement that at the time of the "True Patriot
Love" exhibition "there was a great urgency, I felt,
basically in the terms: 'Is there going to be a country
left?' " ²⁶

The work which most clearly illustrates Wieland's
perception of this combined ecological and political threat
to Canada is The Water Quilt (1970-71; figures 8 and 9).
This textile-piece comprises 64 kapok pillows laced
together. Each one supports a printed excerpt from James
Laxer's book, The Energy Poker Game; ²⁷ each is, in turn,
surmounted by a partially-transparent muslin flap with an
embroidered Arctic plant. Laxer's book is an exposition and
condemnation of Canada's increasing compliance with American
attempts to gain control of Canadian energy resources. He ²⁸
deplores the idea of a "continental energy resources deal"
which would allow the U.S. to use Canadian oil, natural gas
and, ultimately, water for "American corporate and military
interests". ²⁹ In Chapter IV, entitled "Water -- Next on the
Agenda", Laxer outlines a plan developed by a U.S.
corporation, which would divert the river systems of the
Canadian north to feed the Great Lakes and the Mississippi
and Missouri Rivers in the United States. Called the NAWAPA
or North American Water and Power Alliance scheme, this plan

was embraced eagerly by some American congressmen:

One might imagine that a scheme that proposed to tear out the water system of a neighbouring country, wreak indescribable havoc on much of that country's ecology and flood a vast part of the interior of one province of that country would be dismissed as lunacy. But such is the American thirst for water and sense of imperial grandeur that the NAWAPA scheme was taken with terrifying seriousness. 30

Wieland's Water Quilt joins Laxer's warnings about the undermining of Canadian sovereignty and the destruction of much of its territory with delicate representations of northern flora. The embroidered plants are healthy and blooming on the upper surface of the work, while underneath lie descriptions of the disturbing scenario which Laxer foresees. The flowers and grasses may represent Canada before the Americans take the destructive action outlined in the book. They are a reminder of the natural beauty of Canada and an illustration of what will be lost if we do not take steps to defend politically and to preserve ecologically what is ours. The "Introduction" to The Energy Poker Game, written by Mel Watkins, contains the following passage: "What the Waffle Movement of the NDP is calling for, are demonstrations, rallies and marches across Canada that will force the Government to cease and desist. We will be armed with this book. Read it and join us".³¹ Wieland's juxtaposition of Canada's natural richness and the way it is jeopardized may be a quiet echo of this rallying cry. To be sure, Wieland denies that this work demonstrates any particular empathy with the NDP or the Waffle Movement per se. She explains her use of a publication by James Laxer,

the enfant terrible of both parties, by stressing that she was impressed by the content of the book:

I thought it was a brilliant book because it dealt with all the facts. The hard theories were that they had planned since 1953 to re-route all the major waterways south....It infuriated me to think that someone outside could be drawing plans for stuff like that And that's what inspired The Water Quilt -- the stuff that he dug up. 32

Before leaving Wieland's interest in nature, it should be noted that some of her nature works have been viewed from a different perspective. They have been interpreted as illustrations of organic processes: particularly, sex, reproduction and biological metamorphosis. Of Nature Mixes (1963; figure 10) and works contemporary with it, McPherson has stated that "images of hearts, flowers, hands and sexual organs all flow freely into one another -- all signify nature and love".³³ Stacey even suggests that Wieland's works with erotic and natural themes were an escape from the political crises of the day: "there is another side...which was revealed in her erotic paintings and drawings.... This was the time of political assassinations, social revolution, uncertainty and civil strife; yet there were compensations³⁴ in the flesh and in nature, in friendship and in art". If this statement implies that Wieland's interest in nature was a respite from the serious political issues of the day, it is a mistaken view. Far from being an escape or a means of avoiding significant political concerns, nature was one of the cornerstones of Wieland's conception of Canadian nationalism. Just how seriously she took nature and the

extent to which she viewed it as an important aspect of national and personal liberation and even a potential impetus for change are emphasized by her quotation of the following lines by Henry David Thoreau in the True Patriot Love catalogue: "To love nature was to worship freedom. To believe in nature was to rebel."³⁵

Wieland has acknowledged a spiritual dimension in both her interest in nature and her nationalism. As long ago as 1974 she articulated her "spiritual panic"³⁶ about Canada and identified "northern mysticism"³⁷ as one of the areas of Canadian life which she wished to incorporate into her work. In 1978 when she travelled to the Arctic, she was struck by certain qualities of Arctic light which she has linked to spirituality.³⁸ She says she thinks "about the Arctic being so spiritual" and connects her own interests to "that statement of Lawren Harris saying the Arctic has a very special spiritual quality which is sent southward".³⁹ Indeed, Harris did write that "the top of the continent is a source of spiritual flow",⁴⁰ and asserted that "true Canadians are imbued with the north".⁴¹ Moreover, Peter Larisey links Harris' views of spirituality and the north with art and Canadian nationalism, citing Harris' belief that the artist "creates an art and a home for the soul of a people".⁴² In at least two of her works Wieland makes specific reference to Harris. Visit to Lawren Harris' Iceberg Painting (1978) and The Goddess Visits Lawren Harris' Tamarack Swamp (1979) cast Harris' iconography in a

Wieland idiom.

Having established the importance of nature and Northern mysticism to Wieland's nationalism, let us now return to her perception in the late sixties and early seventies of economic and political threats to the existence of Canada. It has been suggested that she sought to combat these threats by awakening Canadians' will to survive through the creation of a national consciousness.⁴³ To this end, she attempted to develop national myths⁴⁴ and to focus attention on national symbols. One such attempt was The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers (1970-71; figure 1), in which she created human and animal characters to represent this country. This work is related to Arctic Passion Cake (1971; figure 11), which tells a story^{devised by Wieland} of the polar bear who mated with the Spirit of Canada to produce the two beavers, and was then killed by hunters. A related work is Bear and "Spirit of Canada" (1970-71; figure 12), a bronze sculpture which depicts the sexual union of the two beings. In a similar vein, the work entitled Aqui Nada (1970; figure 13) is a series of cartoon drawings which depict quintessential Canadian animal characters, Lapin du Nord and Tuku the Caribou. They live in peace until the arrival of Shithead von Whorehead, a robot-like creature who, as the drawing describes him, is "the tool of the U.S. Military Industrial Complex". The words "aqui nada" may be a whimsical variation on "Canada" or "O Canada": a new language invented by Wieland to render

allegorical the story of the country which she presents. Alternatively, "aqui" seems to relate to "aqua", the Latin word for water, and hence may refer to the natural richness of Canada. In Spanish the word "aqui" means "here" or "now", two other possibly relevant connotations. While all these mythological works, and particularly Aqui Nada, contain recognizably humorous elements, their use of the conventions of mythological story-telling is evident. That Wieland was clearly familiar with this genre is illustrated by her inclusion of the Inuit story "The Creation of a Shaman" in the True Patriot Love catalogue. Arctic Passion Cake and Aqui Nada are both based on simple, linear stories, involving few characters, who act out Good and Evil until one side triumphs. In both cases, it is Good which ultimately wins, resulting, in symbolic terms, in the triumph of Canada over those who wish to undermine her.

In the late sixties and early seventies, Wieland made several works which involved the established national symbols of Canada: the flag, the anthem and the maple leaf. Although it cannot be said that she created these icons, she did put her own stamp on them and used them for her own purposes. One example of such a work is O Canada Animation (1970; figures 14 and 15). This piece consists of 71 mouths embroidered on cotton, forming the words of the Canadian national anthem. The work suggests to the viewer that he or she concentrate on the individual words of the anthem, thus breaking it down into its component parts. Further, it

encourages the spectator to mouth the words while following their visual representations, and so to match the movements of a human mouth with the permutations of the embroidered ones. While the piece makes the words to "O Canada" discrete and abstract, stressing individual syllables, it also makes the anthem immediate and personal. The work revivifies customary patriotism. Convention can numb awareness of content and meaning. By using lips, Wieland simultaneously notes a problem and offers a solution. She implies that usual experiences of hearing and/or singing -- at beginnings of movies, hockey games and school assemblies -- can be mere lip-service patriotism. By transforming an aural experience into a visual and tactile one, she permits a fresh engagement with an expression of patriotism which is often experienced only as a perfunctory ritual. Hence one may accept Townsend-Gault's assertion that Wieland's use of national icons is "an attempt to revive or refresh the most banal symbols of national identity".⁴⁵

The female lip-sticked mouth is a motif which recurs in Wieland's work. It has been suggested that she uses the mouth as "an instrument of intelligence and contact",⁴⁶ emphasizing her intense interest in communication. The erotic overtones of the mouth are also important. Dennis Young has pointed out the coexistence of erotic and patriotic love in several of Wieland's works.⁴⁷ The mouths in O Canada Animation can be interpreted as kisses, suggesting quite simply the artist's love for Canada. In

addition, mouths in Wieland's art have been related to
 vaginal images.⁴⁸ If sexuality and patriotism are linked,
 this may relate to the fact that nature is a component of
 Wieland's nationalism. Nature for Wieland, as we have seen
 in Nature Mixes (figure 10), embodies not only mountains and
 trees but also the sexual impulse. Moreover, sexuality is
 an important component of several of Wieland's works with
 explicit nationalist content: Bear and "The Spirit of
 Canada" (figure 12), Arctic Passion Cake (figure 11) and
Aqui Nada (figure 13). The sexuality in each seems to
 suggest that the life force animates a healthy nation as
 much as it drives the natural world. In addition, Lauren
 Rabinovitz suggests that Wieland uses the female mouth as
 portrayed in the media both to satirize "how advertising
 uses women's bodies for commercial purposes"⁴⁹ and to turn
 the negative aspect of the image into a positive one as part
 of the reclamation of women's artistic heritage. The mouths
 are combined with embroidery, a traditional female craft
 through which, as we will see, Wieland sought to provide
 women with a revitalized means of expression for their
 political and social concerns. Rabinovitz has recently
 suggested that the female mouth is "Wieland's personal motif"⁵⁰
 for women's strength and power".

It should be noted that Q Canada Animation (figure 14),
Aqui Nada (figure 13), Arctic Passion Cake (figure 11), the
 "Reason over Passion" quilts (figure 4) and I Love Canada --
 J'aime Canada (figure 3) all incorporate elements of the

American Pop Art style. Some of the iconographical and stylistic features of Pop which are present include: the mouth as a variation of a commercial advertising image in Q Canada Animation, the cartoon format of Aqui Nada, the mixed-media construction aspect of Arctic Passion Cake, the bright colours and heart motifs of the "Reason over Passion" quilts and the use of words in Aqui Nada, the "Reason over Passion" quilts and I Love Canada -- J'aime Canada.

Wieland's Flag Arrangement (1970-71; figure 18) recalls Jasper Johns' use of the flag motif in the 1950s (figure 17). Claes Oldenburg is a Pop influence specifically acknowledged by Wieland: she adapted elements of his soft sculpture in both her plastic hangings and quilts. ⁶¹ There

is no doubt that Pop Art was an important influence on Wieland. She lived in New York from 1963 to 1970 and was thus surrounded by Pop in her immediate artistic

⁵² environment. In the early to mid-sixties, before her most intensely nationalistic period, Wieland was particularly affected by Pop. Distinctions can be made between Wieland's work and Pop Art, however. Wieland believes that she

responded to Pop in her own way and characterizes her work as "sloppy and grungy" in comparison to the more formal ⁵³ arrangements of Pop. Moreover, there is always a personal dimension in Wieland which is frequently absent in Pop's often slick surface-oriented images. The personal aspects of the six works mentioned at the beginning of the paragraph are unmistakable. It can be argued that Johns' paintings of

flags present familiar objects in a deliberately neutral way so as to heighten the existence of the works of art as objects in themselves. Moreover, they display more of a concern with formal issues such as paint handling than with connotative associations such as patriotism or

⁵⁴
nationality. Wieland's flags never lose their primary meaning as Canadian national symbols. Furthermore, the knitting worsted medium itself has significance beyond its formal qualities as part of Wieland's revitalization of domestic craft.

Wieland's adaptations of artistic conventions developed elsewhere to express Canadian subject matter is not as problematic as it might at first seem. Wieland incorporated Pop Art, Dada and Abstract Expressionism into her own creative vocabulary before her nationalistic interest

^{54a}
surfaced. Thus these styles were all fully-integrated aspects of her artistic expression by the mid-1960s. Furthermore, by modifying these styles with the addition of personal, Canadian and feminist dimensions, she succeeded in making them truly her own.

To return to Wieland's use of myth and symbol and, specifically, her attempts to develop a Canadian national mythology, one of her most important forays into this area was her film The Far Shore (1978; figure 18). The two central characters are a man, based on "the legend of" the
⁵⁵
artist Tom Thomson, and a young French-Canadian woman. The Thomson figure, called Tom McLeod in the film, is an

artist who paints the landscape of the Canadian north woods. The woman, whose name is Eulalie, is an accomplished amateur musician. She is married to a man with little interest in art, creativity or nature. He, along with his corrupt friend, eventually drive Eulalie away from their world of seemingly genteel civilization into an increasingly close relationship with Tom. Eulalie finally leaves her husband and goes to Tom in the wilderness, where the passionate union they consummate is cut short by the murder of Tom.

This scenario allowed Wieland to explore several areas of Canadian myth and reality. In an early version of the story published in Film Culture in 1971, Wieland called the film "a Canadian love, technology, leadership and art

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story". Several components of Wieland's Canadian nationalism which we have previously examined are evoked in this film. It has been said of Tom and Eulalie that

"together they represent a whole -- the masculine-feminine, English-French, mutually complementary parts of the ideal Canadian unity".⁵⁷ In addition, it has been suggested that

Tom's relationship with Eulalie parallels his relationship to nature and that Eulalie represents nature in its most

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beautiful, vital and sexual aspects. Tom and Eulalie's relationship is consummated within the deep forest in the waters of a northern lake. This free, natural union has been compared to the coupling of animals, causing one author to see a parallel between The Far Shore and The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers (figure 1).⁵⁹

Similarly, Tom is shot and killed at the end of the film, like the polar bear on the Arctic Passion Cake (figure 11). Wieland's original title for the film was True Patriot Love, the title used in the version of the scenario published in Film Culture. In that version, Wieland described the Thomson character as distrustful of the new industrial technology; she had him predict the "Age of Great Pollution", and foresee the day when the Americans would own Canada.⁸⁰ The Thomson character thus expresses Wieland's own concerns about Canada in the 1960s and 1970s: preoccupation with technology and rapid growth, destruction of the land and the rapid undermining of independence.

⁸¹ Wieland's statement, "Canada died with Tom Thomson", may help to explain why she chose to set the film in 1919. She has explained that she meant by this assertion that many pre-World-War traditions and a large percentage of Canada's male youth of the 1910s died during World War I.⁸² She still believes that Canada never recovered from that blow and that it served to weaken the country against American encroachment later in the century. It has also been suggested that Canadian nationalism was as strong in 1919 as it was in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Wieland was planning and preparing The Far Shore.⁸³

It was not simply for these historical reasons that Wieland decided to set her film in the year 1919. It was also her wish to use the time period, habitat and personality -- as far as she understood it -- of the artist

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Tom Thomson. Wieland always conceived The Far Shore as an exploration of the relationship between the artist and nature. At one time she proposed Emily Carr as one of the characters in addition to Thomson. Wieland's decision to include Thomson is explained by the way she has described her reaction to seeing his work at the Art Gallery of Toronto when she was studying art in high school: "What interested me as a budding artist was the freshness and the intensity of the feeling for nature which is something that is close to all of us as Canadians".⁶⁴ She has further stated: "I can't see him as a painter without looking at his life -- the way he lived and his very personal and powerful relationship with the land and the people that lived on it and had to work the land, and his spiritual sense".⁶⁵ This helps to explain what Wieland saw as the relevance of Thomson as a person, or a character in a film, beyond the visual legacy of his paintings. Moreover, Wieland's reference to Thomson's spiritual sense recalls her awareness of nature and spirituality as characterized by Harris. It should be noted that scholars have discovered that more than half of Thomson's paintings "are pictures of the opposite shore of a lake"; hence there is an explicit relationship between Thomson's art and the title of the film.⁶⁶

Wieland believed that for many Canadians, particularly those who know little about art, the Precambrian landscapes of Thomson, the Group of Seven and their contemporaries are the pre-eminent expression of what is Canadian.⁶⁷ When asked

to characterize this Canadian aesthetic, Wieland replied:

...there has been nothing more powerful than the Group of Seven. Nothing more remembered and more important to people even if they just touched upon a Tom Thomson print in Public School when they were twelve. For some reason those things have a terrific impact, people say that is us. I think it is unconscious, it exists subconsciously. 88

For Wieland, the roots of nationalism lay not only in one's own personal experience of the land, but also in one's contact with nature through art. She has stated her belief that a close link between art and nationalism not only applies to Canada, but is also discernible in the painting and literature of many other countries. "I can't tell you where it comes from. I just know that you can talk about Russian poets and the Revolution. You can talk about it in any country, and there is an artistic brand of
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nationalism". Given the existence of nationalism of this kind, it has been said that Thomson and Wieland are both part of the same creative continuum in Canada, "intent upon making images that express a uniquely Canadian
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sensibility".

To summarize, this examination of Wieland's use of national symbols and her explorations of national myth-making has shown that she has produced three types of works to create and develop a sense of the Canadian identity. First, she has used allegorical embodiments of aspects of Canada in pseudo-mythic stories in such works as The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers (figure 1), Arctic Passion Cake (figure 11), Bear and the "Spirit of

Canada" (figure 12) and Aqui Nada (figure 13). Second, she has recast and re-interpreted Canadian symbols that we all recognize, such as the national anthem and flag, in works such as O Canada Animation (figure 14) and Flag Arrangement (figure 16). Finally, she has created a highly-developed mythic narrative of Canadian cultural unity and human beings in harmony with nature in her film The Far Shore, and, in so doing, has demonstrated the ties that exist among art, the land and nationalism.

Wieland's anti-Americanism has been referred to several times in this paper without being fully discussed. Wieland has said that she became increasingly unhappy living in the United States because of the crime and pollution in New York

⁷¹City. Moreover, it has been suggested that her involvement in anti-Vietnam War protest in New York in the 60s combined with her early reading about Canadian political and economic issues in books and periodicals such as The Canadian Forum encouraged her to think about the harm which the United States was doing not only in Southeast Asia but

⁷²also in her own country. In her film Rat Life and Diet in North America (1968), the protagonists escape from oppression and persecution in the United States to freedom in Canada, only to be threatened by the U.S. again at the end of the film. We have seen that Wieland actually feared an American takeover of Canada in the late sixties and early seventies. The Water Quilt (figure 8) predicted dire consequences for Canada in the event of the Americans

gaining control of our resources. I Love Canada -- J'aime Canada (figure 3) not only expresses her love for her own country, but also, less prominently, the message "Death to U.S. Technological Imperialism". Wieland's negative views about the United States seem closely tied to what she perceived as its ability to weaken and destroy Canada. Fleming has suggested that because of her feminist orientation she saw Canada's economic and social exploitation by the United States as analogous to women's exploitation in a male-dominated world.⁷³ The attempted rape of Lapin du Nord by Whorehead in Aqui Nada (figure 13) is an explicit illustration of the conjunction of these two ideas.

Hence another aspect of Wieland's political and social subject matter involves what has been called her feminism -- her "feminine voice",⁷⁴ "feminine vision",⁷⁵ and "feminine...orientation".⁷⁶ Wieland sometimes uses the term "feminist" and sometimes chooses to avoid it. She once said: "feminism is something I take for granted; I am not a theoretician".⁷⁷ She prefers to describe her work as expressing "a female sensibility".⁷⁸ Wieland has said that it was her experience of the male-dominated and male-oriented art world in New York in the 1980s that caused her to turn to women's concerns. "There was a highly competitive scene with men artists going on there. It polarized my view of life; it made me go right into the whole feminine thing".⁷⁹

Wieland has said: "my greatest feminist involvement was
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the creation of the women's work". This justifies
concentrating primarily on women's work as representative of
Wieland's concern with women's issues. "Women's work"
involved several aspects for Wieland. The first was the
expression of ideas through sewing, quilting, rug-hooking,
embroidery, knitting and other kinds of creativity with
textiles. These activities have traditionally been
considered craft, and have not normally been associated with
intellectual or moral content, simply with mastery of
technique. In addition, Wieland sought to give the
recognition she felt was due to these artforms, which, like
many of the so-called "high arts", require the utmost skill
and result in beautiful creations. Finally, she has
attempted to incorporate into the notion of art an activity
which has been common to women, and which has clothed and
comforted society as a whole for centuries.

The devaluation of artforms which have come to be
associated with women is the basic theme of Rozsika Parker's
The Subversive Stitch. Embroidery and the Making of the
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Feminine. Parker discusses how embroidery and other

needle-and-thread arts were robbed of their value because of
the hierarchy of the arts which originated in the

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Renaissance. In The Subversive Stitch and in Old
Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, co-authored with

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Griselda Pollock, Parker contends that this hierarchy is,
in fact, not based on media only, but on such factors as the

maker's sex and social class, and whether the piece was made
for the public or the private sphere.⁸⁴ In the Middle Ages,
she says, embroidery was equal in status to painting and
sculpture, and was an occupation of both men and women of
different social strata.⁸⁵ It was the early histories of
embroidery, written in Victorian times, which re-interpreted
the historical place of the artform according to
contemporary opinion, projecting the nineteenth-century
practice of embroidery onto previous eras. Beginning in the
seventeenth century and continuing through the nineteenth,
embroidery and other needle arts were among the chief
methods of inculcating notions of femininity in young
girls.⁸⁶ In both response and reaction to this restrictive
context, embroidery and related arts are practised by
today's feminist artists for several reasons. First, these
crafts are a specifically female heritage; hence they are
"more appropriate than male-associated paint for making
feminist statements".⁸⁷ In addition, although the practice
of embroidery has lost its connotations of domestic duty, it
is still associated with the creation of bonds among
women.⁸⁸ Finally, many women see the history of embroidery
as significant because it demonstrates "that definitions of
sexual difference, and the definitions of art and artist so
weighted against women, are not fixed. They have shifted
over the centuries, and they can be transformed in
future".⁸⁹

Wieland has stated that she was profoundly impressed by

examples of Eastern Canadian women's handiwork in large craft fairs when she was teaching at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 1970.⁹⁰ In addition, she remembers that during Expo 87 she saw a group of quilts made by American Mennonite women displayed prominently in the United States pavilion.⁹¹ These experiences increased her awareness of the universality of these activities and the rightness of displaying quilts and embroideries in a prominent and prestigious setting.⁹² Wieland had observed her own family members sewing for years, and so, in the course of a search for what she has called her "female line"⁹³ she discovered that such objects also had a personal significance for her -- a personal significance that was part of a larger historical one.

Wieland's art has incorporated many of the traditional textile crafts, several of which were an important component of works in the "True Patriot Love" exhibition. Of the various fabric arts she has used, none has been as important as quilting. Wieland has said that she began work in the medium by designing the Michael Montague quilt in 1966 (figure 19) for a friend's son.⁹⁴ Her practice of the artform then evolved into more abstract yet self-referential hangings, incorporating images of camera lenses and film reels (figure 20). From there, she began to include political themes and statements in her quilted works. Wieland says she had read history and found no mention of women.⁹⁵ She felt that with the quilt as a political

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platform, women could finally enter history on a basis evolved and expanded from their traditional roles. Wieland wished to acknowledge women's traditional domestic accomplishments and to celebrate female nurturing, creativity and co-operation. By making the quilt a vehicle for political messages, Wieland was also implicitly bringing gender issues into the political arena. Here political art and a challenge to sexist art politics combine as domestic crafts claim status as fine arts promulgating political messages. She may have hoped to endorse co-operation and negotiation (values she considers female ones) as antidotes to competition and conflict (putatively male values) in the running of society. Wieland has said: "I thought that the only way to work was in things that we knew of as women's areas, and to take the quilt and use it....I saw what a fantastic thing it was to merge the quilt with the political idea -- poetry and women's labour with the political concept -- I felt I really had something".⁹⁷ Balkind has clarified this positive perspective on activities which have sometimes been viewed as "enslaving" crafts: "...like many blacks and Jews who choose to remember who they are with pride rather than shame, Wieland takes an atavistic pride in preserving and re-interpreting the skills that have for so many millenia been refined by her female forebears".⁹⁸

One way in which sewing, knitting and embroidery have traditionally been seen in the context of art is in their frequent characterization as folk art. Wieland's quilts and

bags have been explicitly compared to folk art, which

Wieland has been quoted as saying is "the ultimate kind of art".¹⁰⁰

The similarities which one author sees between folk art and Wieland's work is that they both incorporate a union of tradition and novelty and a combination of private and public experience.¹⁰¹

Although writing primarily about painting, J. Russell Harper has made several observations about folk art which may be useful to consider. He has

identified some of the major characteristics of folk art as follows: it is a form of personal expression; it is intended for the enjoyment of ordinary people; it is concerned with honest expression and unpretentiousness; it is a direct reflection of the life of ordinary people.¹⁰²

Personal expression has frequently been cited as one of the hallmarks of Wieland's work.¹⁰³

In addition, we have already seen in all the works by Wieland discussed to date a concern for matters which affect the lives of ordinary people, ranging from the way we perceive ourselves, to our ability to run our own country, to our relationships with the ~~land~~ we occupy. Honest expression in Wieland may be found in what have been called her "illusion-defeating devices".¹⁰⁴

Originally used to describe her film, this phrase seems to apply to Wieland's cloth pieces as well. The stitching and fastenings are almost always visible, allowing the viewer to see how a piece has been made and assembled. Wieland herself has commented that some of her works are "emphatic about examining [their construction]".¹⁰⁵ This

straightforward presentation in her textile works seems to exemplify Harper's concept of the honesty and lack of pretentiousness of folk art.

One might speculate that Wieland would have no difficulty whatsoever with her textile pieces being viewed either as folk art or as descended from it. For, in addition to their folk art materials and their exemplification of most of Harper's folk art criteria, Wieland's textile works were frequently co-operative creations, involving the participation of several individuals. Such collaborative effort calls to mind quilting bees. Wieland designed all her quilts and embroideries, but the actual execution in fabric and thread was undertaken by seamstresses with considerable experience and skill in the traditional uses of fabric, including the artist's sister, Joan Stewart. The fact that these skilled women executed traditionally-inspired objects with Canadian themes seemed to Wieland to render the art of her "True Patriot Love" show particularly authentic. In addition, she felt she was able to give these women national exposure, a public forum and a place within an institution devoted to high art:

Did you ever see True Patriot Love, the book I did? There is a lot in it about the glorification of the quilt, the embroidery, the hooking that women do in Nova Scotia. When I invited the women who did the work to my show, it was to give everyone an opportunity to talk. It was a suggestion to the government -- why*don't you do things like this, make these people our folk heroines? They have been doing great things for two hundred years. I took it upon

myself in one show to do a sampling of that stuff. There is no reason why more attention shouldn't be paid to these art forms. They should be more widely shown and appreciated so that the women who do them will continue. 106

Among the first quilts which Wieland imbued with political content are La raison avant la passion and Reason over Passion (figure 4).¹⁰⁷ These two works quote a portion of Pierre Trudeau's statement: "La raison avant la passion...c'est le thème de tous mes écrits..." This sentence is quoted the way it appears at the beginning of Wieland's film, Reason over Passion. The two quilts were made in 1968, the year that Trudeau first became Prime Minister. Wieland has said that she supported Trudeau¹⁰⁸ initially, but these works would seem to indicate that even at this early stage, she had some doubts about his intense intellectualism. The major clue that we should not accept these words without considering or questioning them, lies in the quilt form itself. The quilt is traditionally a functional bed covering, and it is surely ironic to use an object associated with a bed, the most normative site of sexual activity, to assert the importance of reason in relation to passion. By use of the quilt, Wieland implicitly and humorously undermines the words placed upon it. Moreover, Wieland's use of hearts and bright colours, including red, the colour usually associated with passion, further belies the thought which is verbally expressed. These quilts call to attention a statement by a political leader, but, through incongruity of the verbal and visual

cause the viewer to reflect upon and even question the
109
validity of the words.

On the other hand, Défendez la Terre/Defend the Earth (figure 25) employs congruity of the verbal and visual to communicate a statement she endorses unambiguously. The irregularly-shaped, flowing letters of the commandment resemble the elongated scalloped-edged and cloud-like flowers above it. The words also echo the wavy lines of stitching which cover the background, suggesting water or rolling hills. The text actually looks as if it is part of the landscape. The artist may be advising us to rediscover our origins in nature and to recognize that we are part of the natural world, so that we may find the desire and the will to preserve our environment.

In Défendez la Terre/Defend the Earth, then, "female" materials reinforce the ecological message. Nature and femaleness are implicitly linked and, if La Terre is Canada as well as the earth, national concerns are also present in the work. Whereas to this point the three preoccupations have been presented sequentially for the sake of expository clarity, it is crucial to underscore the inseparability of female-nature-Canada and personal-national-universal in Wieland's work.

Wieland once stated that she felt a personal connection to the land. "I identify with the land, I over-identify with it....I feel it as a direct extension of myself and
110
whatever...is done to it is done to me..." Beyond this

personal identification with nature, Wieland linked the concept of the female with Canada as a nation: "I think of Canada as female".¹¹¹ This idea has been explicitly developed in her work The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers (figure 1), in which the Spirit of Canada is portrayed as female.

We have already seen that Wieland used a female character, Eulalie, to represent nature in The Far Shore (figure 18). It has also been observed by several writers that many of Wieland's artworks and films, including The Far Shore,¹¹² use images of water to connote the female. Water¹¹³ is traditionally used as a female sexual symbol. Its frequent appearance in natural settings in works such as The Far Shore further emphasizes Wieland's identification of the female with nature.

Even in Wieland's more recent works, in which the ecological and nationalistic themes are not so explicit, the close link between the female and nature is apparent. In the coloured drawings of the early 1980s, the goddess figures float in the sky, lie in fields and forests, and swim in filmy seas. Describing the works in the "Bloom of the Matter" show at the Isaacs Gallery in 1981, Carole Corbeil wrote: "Nature here is roundly joined to womanhood...."¹¹⁴

Wieland sees her use of women's work as closely connected to both her ecological and nationalistic concerns. She has stated: "Women's work was used as a way of

announcing and speaking out against what was being done to the ecology...referring to our history, referring to nature...." ¹¹⁵ We have already seen The Water Quilt (figure 8) as an example of a sewn-and-embroidered work with ecological and political themes. The inherent connection between the textile works and nature is evident. The quilts and embroideries use natural materials and are soft, pliable and textured, like much of our flora and fauna. As Penelope Glasser has written, Wieland's fabric hangings are "natural, organic things in sterile, synthetic places". ¹¹⁶

In connecting Wieland's women's work with nature, one should recognize the stance which the artist has taken. Susan Crean has argued that the "True Patriot Love" show was "a plea, in avowedly female terms, insinuating that when it comes to saving our civilization it will have to be by cultivating the nurturing, collective and protective attributes of the feminine side of our culture". ¹¹⁷ What was important to Wieland, then, was not only that nature could be considered female, could be portrayed symbolically as female, and could appropriately be depicted in the "female" media of women's work. Her attempts to help women enter history with the quilt as a political platform indicate that she also felt strongly about calling forth and using the "female" social values to save both ourselves and the endangered natural environment.

In addition to its link with nature, the female orientation in Wieland's art had a connection with her

nationalism. In commenting on her film Reason over Passion, many writers have concentrated on the central sequence, which consists of a ten-minute close-up of the face of Pierre Trudeau (figure 27).¹¹⁸ This is an unmistakably male image in a work which minutely explores Canada's natural landscape and traditional symbols of nationhood: the flag and the anthem. It seems at odds with Wieland's assertion that she thinks of Canada as female. The explanation may be that Wieland is contrasting Trudeau as the rationalist, intellectual, male head of government with the passionate, untamed, "female" landscape of the country he must govern. The suggestion is, as Malcolmsen has stated, that Trudeau cannot subdue the passion of the landscape with reason. It seems to this writer that even at this early stage of Trudeau's leadership, Wieland had more doubts about the Prime Minister's abilities than faith in them, despite her admission that she was an initial supporter of Trudeau. Even if she harboured a hope that Trudeau could succeed as the saviour of Canada which many felt he could be, her intuition must have told her that his personality and methods were at odds with the exigencies of the task. Wieland must have had some inkling, however slight, of what some would claim to be Trudeau's inflexibility, arrogance and lack of imaginative solutions to the chronic problems of the country. She now says that she views him as a pathologically unbalanced person and leader, who was¹¹⁹ understandably unable to wield power effectively.

Wieland's women's work can also be said to have implicit links to her nationalism. Stacey has observed that quilting, so closely identified in the past with domestic pursuits, may be used now to refer to our ache for a home we feel we have lost in the complexities of modern

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civilization. This notion of home can be extended to include the idea of one's country as a home. Wieland's quilts may be an attempt symbolically to enwrap the citizens of Canada in the security of a national home, safe from anything which might threaten our domestic stability and peace. Finally, Wieland feels that her involvement in co-operative creation has been a small symbolic attempt to achieve a larger Canadian unity. With unity, as we have seen, Wieland felt that Canada would find strength and independence. She has called the communal effort which created the "True Patriot Love" show "a tiny, tiny step, but it's one way to work towards...this freedom that we

121
want...."

The connections among nature, nationalism and women's concerns would be even closer in Wieland's most recent work, if one were to accept her characterization of her paintings and drawings of the eighties as "coming out of the nationalism, coming out of the women's work -- women's art

122
-- as a platform for politics." She has also described her latest work as a synthesis of "everything that I'd ever

123
been involved with or loved." Despite Wieland's claims, it is more difficult to isolate nationalistic content in her

art of the 1980s than in her previous work.

Nevertheless, in 1981 she drew The Birth of Newfoundland (figure 28), which clearly takes a part of Canada as its point of departure. The work depicts a female figure, perhaps a goddess, lying in the water beside a young whale.¹²⁵ This image appears to be related to The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers of ten years earlier (figure 1). Whimsy, combined with a mythology based on the genesis of the whole or part of Canada, is a prominent feature of both works. Also apparent in each piece is the importance of both the female figure and representatives of the animal kingdom. The Birth of Newfoundland may represent the traceable point of contact between Wieland's nationalism of the late 1960s to mid-1970s and her seemingly more personal works of the 1980s. This work takes the myth-making aspect of her nationalism, which we have examined above, and applies it to a subject which is both explicitly Canadian and closely linked to her many other personally- and mythologically-oriented works of the eighties.

Wieland's continuing interest in Canada is also demonstrated by the occasional references to Canadian geography and culture which can be found in more recent works. Besides The Birth of Newfoundland, she has drawn, painted or constructed The Venus of Kapuskasing (1977), Visit to Lawren Harris' Iceberg Painting, The Goddess Visits Lawren Harris' Tamarack Swamp, Conversation in the Gaspé

(1980; figure 29) and The Venus of Scarborough (1982; figure 30).

The northern aspect of Wieland's recent work also links it to her nationalism. It has been noted several times that northernness is an aspect of Canada which Wieland believes can symbolically stand for the whole country, and is an integral part of our national identity. Her coloured drawings of the late seventies and early eighties such as Nourishing Light (1979) and Victory of Venus (1981; figure 31) experiment with the prismatic radiance of objects which she first noticed as an effect of Arctic light on her trip to the north in 1978. Moreover, Sunlight and Firelight (1980; figure 32) contains a landscape with evergreen trees, a lake, deer, foxes or wolves and a Canada goose. These animals combined with the deep clear blues and greens of sky, water and vegetation suggest a northern landscape. The mountains, trees, stag and snow of Mozart and Wieland (1985; figure 33) make the scene look unmistakably Canadian despite the absence of an explicit Canadian theme. Other examples of recent works with landscapes which are visually reminiscent of the north in general or Canada in particular include She will remain in the phenomenal world... (1983; figure 34), Crepuscule for Two (1985; figure 35) and Early One Morning (1986; figure 36).

The most politically-oriented period of Joyce Wieland's career was from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies. The most significant aspects of her political and social subject

matter during that time were three in number. They were: nationalism -- a love of Canada's land and peoples and a dread of potential American political and economic domination; a concern for nature, both as a symbolic component of national identity and as an irreplaceable living heritage; and feminism, a belief in women's values and the need for women to have a greater voice in the political sphere, expressed through a revitalized artistic version of traditional women's craft. These three major concerns encompass other important elements of Wieland's art: her eroticism, which has links with all three principal themes; and her spirituality, which finds expression in the connections between nationalism and nature derived from the art and thought of Lawren Harris and Tom Thomson. Recognition of the connections which exist among the three major political and social themes in Wieland's art is crucial to an understanding of her work as a coherent whole, despite her use of a wide variety of media and a multiplicity of styles. She used Pop Art conventions in some of her most politically-oriented works, but modified the American style to encompass her nationalistic messages and her incorporation of folk art materials and techniques. Her most recent work, while not as immediately concerned with Canadian nationalism as she used to be, does retain some vestiges of that preoccupation, and is increasingly characterized by her feminine orientation, her love of nature and her spiritual sensibility.

NOTES

1
p 174. Wieland, Joyce, Personal interview, Appendix I,

2
Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 187.

3
Lianne McLarty has offered an interpretation of several of Wieland's films as being against capitalism and the corporate structure in "The Experimental Films of Joyce Wieland," Cine-Tracts, V:1, Summer-Fall 1982, pp. 51-82. Wieland's film, Rat Life and Diet in North America, explores both political oppression and the unequal distribution of wealth. Wieland's film, Solidarity, deals with labour issues, specifically a strike against a Dare Cookie factory. McLarty discusses what she sees as Wieland's ambiguity toward this form of protest in "The Experimental Films of Joyce Wieland," p. 59. In the late sixties Wieland was involved in anti-Vietnam War protest in New York and made several works with anti-Vietnam War themes, such as Betsy Ross, look what they've done to the flag you made with such care (1986). Wieland went to Israel in 1984 and shortly after completed her film, Birds at Sunrise. Doris Finta quotes Wieland as explaining how the Jewish situation informs this film. The original Wieland passage is from The Art Post, Sept.-Oct. 1984. Finta quotes it in "Joyce Wieland - Her Life and Work," Unpublished Honours Essay, McMaster University, Hamilton, 1984, p. 30. Wieland designed a stamp for World Health Day in 1972, and has worked with the Federation of American Homemakers to ban food additives and eliminate the use of pesticides in farming. In her film, Pierre Vallières, Wieland explores Vallières' political ideas. In Rat Life and Diet in North America she makes reference to Cuban revolutionaries. In a recent painting, Experiment with Life (1983), she deals with the subject of chemical experimentation and, according to Lisa Balfour Bowen, nuclear war. See Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 176 and Bowen, "Joyce Wieland at the Isaacs Gallery," Artmagazine, XIV:63/64, Summer 1983, p. 37. Marguerite Pinney has noted Wieland's contempt for non-involvement in "Joyce Wieland Retrospective, Vancouver Art Gallery," Artscanada, XXV:2, June 1988, p. 41.

4
Malcolmsen, Harry, "True Patriot Love -- Joyce Wieland's new show," The Canadian Forum, LI:805, June 1971, p. 17.

5
Wieland quoted in Maggie Patterson, "Canadian Films Say: 'Rats' to U.S.," The Pittsburgh Press, Mar. 9, 1972.

6
Armatage, Kay, "Kay Armatage Interviews Joyce Wieland," Take One, III:2, Nov.-Dec. 1970, p. 24.

7 Stacey, Robert H., "Joyce Wieland," in Lives and Works of the Canadian Artists, Vol. 15, ed. by Robert H Stacey (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1977-79), n.p.

8 Wieland, Joyce, True Patriot Love (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1971).

9 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 162.

10 Wieland, True Patriot Love, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," n.p.

11 The entire text of the story and the facts about it stated here are included in Wieland, True Patriot Love, n.p. The text of the Eskimo song is as follows:

Aii Aii
The Great sea has set me in motion
Set me adrift
And I move as a weed in the river
The Arch of sky
And mightiness of storms
Encompasses me
And I am left
Trembling with joy.

12 Wieland, True Patriot Love, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," n.p.

13 Wieland, True Patriot Love, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," n.p.

14 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 169.

15 Townsend-Gault, Charlotte, "Redefining the Role," in Visions, by Alvin Balkind et al. (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), p. 124.

16 McConathy, Dale, "6. Reason over Passion," Artscanada, XXIII:3, Autumn 1975, p. 79.

17 Wieland, True Patriot Love, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," n.p.

18 Wieland quoted in Malcolmsen, "True Patriot Love," p. 18.

19 Pringle, Douglas, "'La raison avant la passion', a film by Joyce Wieland," Artscanada, XXVI:4, Aug. 1969, p. 48.

20 Magidson, Debbie and Judy Wright, "Debbie Magidson and Judy Wright Interview Joyce Wieland," The Canadian.

Forum, LIV:640/641, May-June 1974, p. 63.

- 21 Wieland, True Patriot Love, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," n.p.
- 22 Wordsworth, Anne, "An Interview with Joyce Wieland," Descant, 8-9, Spring-Summer 1974, p. 110.
- 23 Magidson and Wright, "Magidson and Wright Interview Wieland," p. 61.
- 24 Armatage, "Armatage Interviews Wieland," p. 24.
- 25 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 160.
- 26 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 160.
- 27 Laxer, James, The Energy Poker Game (Toronto: New Press, 1970).
- 28 Laxer, The Energy Poker Game, p. 1.
- 29 Laxer, The Energy Poker Game, p. 1.
- 30 Laxer, The Energy Poker Game, p. 36.
- 31 Laxer, The Energy Poker Game, p. 11.
- 32 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 167.
- 33 McPherson, Hugo, "Wieland: An Epiphany of North," Artscanada, XXVIII:4, Aug.-Sept. 1971, p. 19.
- 34 Stacey, "Joyce Wieland," n.p.
- 35 Wieland, True Patriot Love, n.p.
- 36 Magidson and Wright, "Magidson and Wright Interview Wieland," p. 63.
- 37 Magidson and Wright, "Magidson and Wright Interview Wieland," p. 61.
- 38 Lippard, Lucy, "Watershed," in Joyce Wieland, ed. by Marie Fleming (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario/Key Porter Books, 1987), p. 12.
- 39 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 162.
- 40 Harris Lawren S., "Revelation of Art in Canada," The Canadian Theosophist, VII:5, July 15, 1926, p. 86, quoted by Peter Daniel Larisey in The Landscape Painting of Lawren Stewart Harris (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1986), p. 225.

118
p. 46 } Such as Pringle, "La raison avant la passion,"
and McConathy, "Reason over Passion," p. 78.

119 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 164.

120 Stacey, "Joyce Wieland," n.p.

121 Wieland, True Patriot Love, "Interview with Joyce
Wieland," n.p.

122 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 174.

123 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 174.

124 When asked specifically about the presence of her concern with Canada in her current work, Wieland replied, "It's synthesized" (Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 175). Perhaps a key to the problem lies in the concept of synthesis. The Compact Oxford defines synthesis as: "the putting together of parts or elements so as to make up a complex whole....Also, the state of being put so together" (Vol. II, p. 3212). If this definition can be said to imply that the parts or elements lose some of their individuality in the process of being synthesized, then the difficulty in identifying nationalistic subject matter is at least partially explicable. Wieland's continuing interest in women and nature does seem to be more apparent than her nationalism in her recent work.

125 Murray describes it as "a baby whale" in "A Lusty Salute to the Erotic," Maclean's, XCIV:10, Mar. 9, 1981, p. 70.

56 Wieland, "True Patriot Love (A Canadian love, technology, leadership and art story)," Film Culture, 52, Spring 1971, p. 64.

57 Théberge and Reid, Drawings for "The Far Shore", p. 2.

58 Théberge and Reid, Drawings for "The Far Shore", p. 3.

59 Théberge and Reid, Drawings for "The Far Shore", p. 2.

60 Wieland, "True Patriot Love (A Canadian...story)", pp. 65 and 71.

61 Wieland, "True Patriot Love (A Canadian...story)", p. 71.

62 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 169.

63 Auchterlonie, Bill, "Joyce Wieland: Filmmaker, The Far Shore/In Progress," Artmagazine, VII:24, Dec. 1975-Jan. 1976, p. 11.

63a It should be noted that Wieland did not feel obliged to adhere to all the facts of Thomson's biography. Tom Thomson died in 1917, yet Wieland set her film in 1919. This is an obvious example of her manipulation of the historical facts of Thomson's life.

64 Wieland quoted in Joan Murray, "The Artist's View: The Tom Thomson Mystique," Artmagazine: Artfocus, IX:37, Mar.-Apr. 1978, p. 2.

65 Wieland quoted in Murray, "The Artist's View," p. 4.

66 Théberge and Reid, Drawings for "The Far Shore", p. 3.

67 Théberge and Reid, Drawings for "The Far Shore", p. 3.

68 Magidson and Wright, "Magidson and Wright Interview Wieland," p. 67.

69 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 166.

70 Théberge and Reid, Drawings for "The Far Shore", p. 8.

71 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 167 and Fleming, "Joyce Wieland," p. 69.

- 72 Rabinovitz, "The Films of Joyce Wieland," p. 164.
- 73 Fleming, "Joyce Wieland," p. 113.
- 74 McLarty, "The Experimental Films of Joyce Wieland,"
p. 61.
- 75 Moray, Gerta, "New Perspectives: Portraits at the
Art Gallery at Harbourfront," Artmagazine, XV:65, Fall 1983,
p. 44.
- 76 Stacey, "Joyce Wieland," n.p.
- 77 Wieland quoted in Sandra Paikowsky, Joyce Wieland: A
Decade of Painting (Montreal: Concordia University Art
Gallery, 1985), p. 4.
- 78 Magidson and Wright, "Magidson and Wright Interview
Wieland," p. 62.
- 79 Wieland quoted in Janice Cameron et al., Eclective
Eve (Toronto: Women's Press, 1972), n.p.
- 80 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 172.
- 81 Parker, Rozsika, The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery
and the Making of the Feminine (London: The Women's Press,
1984).
- 82 Parker, The Subversive Stitch, pp. 60-61.
- 83 Parker and Griselda Pollock, Old Mistresses: Women,
Art and Ideology (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).
- 84 Parker, The Subversive Stitch, p. 5 and Parker and
Pollock, Old Mistresses, pp. 50-51.
- 85 Parker, The Subversive Stitch, p. 17.
- 86 Parker, The Subversive Stitch, Chapter 5.
- 87 Parker, The Subversive Stitch, p. 211.
- 88 Parker, The Subversive Stitch, p. 215.
- 89 Parker, The Subversive Stitch, p. 215. See also
Heather Dawkins, "Cultural Politics: Social History and
Embroidery," Vanguard, XIV:7, Sept. 1985, pp. 10-12 for a
summary and discussion of Parker's and Pollock's ideas.
- 90 Rabinovitz, "An Interview with Joyce Wieland,"
Afterimage, May 1981, p. 10 and Wieland interview, Appendix
I, p. 173.

- 91 Wieland interview, Appendix I, pp. 174.
- 92 Rabinovitz quotes Wieland as saying: "I want to elevate and honour craft" in "An Interview with Joyce Wieland," p. 10.
- 93 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 172.
- 94 Rabinovitz, "An Interview with Joyce Wieland," p. 10.
- 95 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 172.
- 96 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 174.
- 97 Wieland quoted in Cameron, Eclective Eve, n.p.
- 98 Balkind, Alvin, 17 Canadian Artists: A Protean View (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1976), n.p.
- 99 Pinney, "Joyce Wieland Retrospective," p. 41.
- 100 Wieland quoted in Pinney, "Joyce Wieland Retrospective," p. 41.
- 101 Chandler, John Noel, "Notes towards a New Aesthetics," Artscanada, XXIX:4, Oct.-Nov. 1972, p. 29.
- 102 Harper, J. Russell, A People's Art (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1974), p. 3.
- 103 Some who have cited it include David Donnell in "Joyce Wieland at the Isaacs Gallery, Toronto," Canadian Art, XXI:2, Mar.-Apr. 1984, p. 64 and McConathy, "Reason over Passion," p. 79.
- 104 Cornwell, Regina, "'True Patriot Love': The Films of Joyce Wieland," Artforum, X:1, Sept. 1971, p. 37.
- 105 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 159.
- 106 Magidson and Wright, "Magidson and Wright Interview Wieland," p. 62.
- 107 Wieland's other nationalist quilts include I Love Canada -- J'aime Canada (figure 3), O Canada (figure 21), Canada (1972), The Maple Leaf Forever I and II (figure 22; both 1972) and Laura Secord (1974; figure 23). Her nature/ecology quilts, which also have nationalist or political overtones, include 109 Views (1970-71; figure 24), Arctic Day (figure 8), The Water Quilt (figure 8), Défendez la Terre/Defend the Earth (1974; figure 25), Indian Summer (1974-75) and Barren Ground Caribou (1978; figure 26).

108

Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 185.

109

In the film Reason over Passion Wieland has established an ambiguous relationship between word and image. She uses the phrase "reason over passion" as a continuous subtitle, but constantly scrambles the letters to form a series of new words. If this process is viewed as the destruction of language, it may suggest the advisability of questioning Trudeau's conception of Canada, the need to reject old political formulas or even the insignificance of language and human rationality in the face of the country's natural landscape. If we see the subtitles as a new language, they may be read as a metaphor for the viability of new human solutions to Canada's political and ecological problems.

110

Wieland, True Patriot Love, "Interview with Joyce Wieland," n.p.

111

Armatage, "Armatage Interviews Wieland," p. 24.

112

Théberge and Reid, Drawings for "The Far Shore", p. 4 and McLarty, "The Experimental Films of Joyce Wieland," p. 62.

113

Paikowsky, Joyce Wieland, p. 5.

114

Corbeil, Carole, "Joyce Wieland finds room to bloom," The Globe and Mail, Mar. 2, 1981, p. 17.

115

Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 160.

116

Glasser, Penelope, "Two Toronto Artists: Bandanna Zack and Joyce Wieland," Artmagazine, IX:38/39, June 1978, p. 72.

In this context, it is interesting to note Parker's observation that a close relationship existed between the needle arts and nature as far back as the sixteenth century (The Subversive Stitch, pp. 94-96). She suggests several reasons for this connection, such as the presence in many embroidered pieces of Bible stories, which frequently include plants and animals; the reciprocal relationship between flower gardening and embroidery which developed in the sixteenth century; and the Church's eschewing of images of childbirth and reproduction in textile decoration in favour of floral symbols of fertility and growth. What is important for our purposes is that there exists a traceable historical relationship between needlework and nature, which may be said to have resurfaced in Wieland's textile pieces in the mid- to late 1980s.

117

Crean, Susan, "Guess Who Wasn't Invited to The Dinner Party," This Magazine, XVI:5, Nov. 1982, p. 23.

118 Such as Pringle, "La raison avant la passion,"
p. 48 and McConathy, "Reason over Passion," p. 78.

119 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 164.

120 Stacey, "Joyce Wieland," n.p.

121 Wieland, True Patriot Love, "Interview with Joyce
Wieland," n.p.

122 Wieland interview, Appendix I, p. 174.

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Salute to the Erotic," Maclean's, XCIV:10, Mar. 9, 1981,
p. 70.

CHAPTER III

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SUBJECT MATTER OF GREG CURNOE

The political and social subject matter in the art of Greg Curnoe engages several of the major concerns found in Wieland's work. In most cases, however, Curnoe looks at these issues in a different way, treats them differently and comes to different conclusions. In addition, there are some political and social concerns that Curnoe explores which Wieland does not. The aspects of Curnoe's subject matter which are discussed in this chapter include his view of Canadian nationalism; his attitude to the United States, including his anti-Americanism, his fascination with American culture and his relationship to Pop Art; his conception of regionalism; and his interest in nihilism and anarchism.

One of the most obvious contrasts between Curnoe and Wieland involves their respective attitudes toward Canadian nationalism. We have seen how nationalism and questions of Canadian unity and identity were central to Wieland's art of the late 1960s to mid-1970s. Curnoe, on the other hand, has called Canadian nationalism "a frightening thing",¹ and has commented specifically on Wieland: "I was frequently a little bit uncomfortable with her sense of nationalism".² The reason for Curnoe's negative viewpoint is that he³ believes the concept of a pan-Canadian culture is invalid. He feels instead that Canada comprises a series of regional

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cultures, each separate and distinct. For Curnoe, the differences among regions are both authentic and worth preserving, because they represent the lifestyles and aspirations of people in each part of the country.

Nationalism has the effect of homogenizing these distinct areas,⁵ resulting in people's loss of pride in those things which make each region unique, such as local industry, local craftsmanship and folk art, and regional cuisine. When people no longer value local traditions and accomplishments, these things disappear, resulting in what Curnoe sees as the loss of irreplaceable aspects of the Canadian heritage.

Curnoe's well-known anti-American stance is closely linked to his regionalist critique of Canadian nationalism. He sees "the U.S.'s overweening influence everywhere"⁶

including Canada, as having a levelling effect: countries all over the world become more like the United States, abandoning aspects of their own national and regional characters:

I think it's important to see that Canada is not a melting pot. For instance, London (Ontario) has a unique culture, very different from culture in Quebec. I've always stood for that kind of society...where differences can co-exist...and for anti-Americanism, because the American influence is against this kind of society. ⁷

As one author has said, "nationalism heralds for Curnoe⁸ simply a variant on cultural assimilation".

A further reason for Curnoe's distrust of nationalism is his opposition "to centralism of any kind, political or cultural",⁹ which the artist has further specified as a

suspicion "of the whole idea of a national culture that is
controlled from a centre".¹⁰ Curnoe believes that each
region must think and speak for itself, without being
subjected to the attempts of a central authority to
inculcate a sense of national pride, which can have no
meaning in such a diverse country. Likewise, if centralism
means the imposition of cultural uniformity on Canada's
regions, Curnoe wants no part of it.

Despite this rejection of nationalism and national
culture in Canada, Curnoe has expressed a wish to examine
what he feels are several important aspects of the country
as a whole. "I feel the need for a good look at the
(Canadian) landscape, hockey, domestic architecture,
lacrosse, the French-English conflict, etc."¹¹ These are
all aspects of Canadian life which have significance beyond
individual regions. In fact, Curnoe has called hockey one
of the few legitimate elements of a Canadian national
culture!¹² Curnoe is interested in many aspects of Canada,
but these must be examined from a regional viewpoint, not
simply accepted as universal Canadian phenomena. When asked
whether it would be possible for Canada to develop a common
identity among its peoples -- an issue in which Wieland was
very interested -- Curnoe said he felt that it could be done
"out of respect for the differences, but you don't develop a
common identity by trying to work out a synthesis".¹³ For
Curnoe, even our constant search for identity is itself a
valid aspect of the Canadian identity. Wieland's conception

of the development of a national identity based on aspects of Canada which we all share seems irrelevant to Curnoe. The enshrining of national legends and the insistence on national loyalty, which he feels are central to the American self-concept, strike him as out of place in Canada, and even dangerous.¹⁴ He feels that the strong regions make it impossible to develop a national consciousness in Canada, notwithstanding those who would try. Even an institution like the CBC, with its government funding and national mandate, is largely unsuccessful at uniting the country, either for the sake of unity itself or against American encroachments on Canadian culture.¹⁵

In a recent interview, Curnoe denied that Canada needs to unite in order to survive.¹⁶ He does not think that Canada's cultural fragmentation makes the country especially vulnerable to the encroachments of other nations. In the early seventies, however, he did advocate developing a national consensus on certain matters:

Because we are obviously at a point in this country where individual effort isn't going to stop what is happening to us, we have got to get together.... We have to get together on national issues... like the stuff that they are doing in James Bay and what they are doing to the water in the north, those are things that we have to get together on. ¹⁷

It is interesting to note that the environmental concerns which Curnoe cites, the James Bay project and the fresh water supply of Canada's north, are among matters raised by Wieland. In addition, it seems that when it comes to considering an issue which requires that action be taken,

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Curnoe allows his pragmatism to supercede his principles. This pragmatism is an aspect of the artist upon which many writers have commented, observing that theories and systems play a much less important role for Curnoe than making and
18
doing.

A work by Curnoe which has been called an "ironic comment on pan-Canadian nationalism" is True North Strong and Free, Nos. 1-5 (1968; figure 37).
19
It consists of five panels, each containing a slogan stamped and lettered with stamp pad ink and polyurethane on plywood. The five slogans read: "CANADA FEEDS THE BRAIN! G.C.", "CLOSE THE 49TH PARALLEL ETC", "CAN. COSTS LESS THAN DRUGS", "CANADA ALWAYS LOSES!" and "DID CHARTIER DIE IN VAIN??". The first thing that is striking about this work is that it consists only of these letters, words and sentences against a series of coloured grounds. The statements and question are clearly communicated verbally and cannot be ignored or overlooked. Curnoe uses words in much of his art, including most of his works with political subject matter. Text allows him to raise political questions and express political opinions fairly explicitly, although he does often incorporate some ambiguity of meaning into what he writes. The question of ambiguity in both Curnoe's and Wieland's work will be examined in Chapter IV. Curnoe acknowledges that some things can only be said in words; hence their
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irreplaceability in some instances. His paintings which consist of text only and no pictorial elements are striking

not only for their content, but also for their implication that words are as legitimate a means of expression in painting as are images.

In The True North Strong and Free, the five panels are either red or blue, both of which are symbolic colours for the United States, and one of which, red, is a national colour for Canada. Another significant feature for our purposes is the title, which consists of a phrase from the national anthem. We have seen that Wieland adopted the words, "True Patriot Love" from the same source as the title of her exhibition of 1971. In addition, she used the anthem as the basis of her "O Canada" lithographic and cloth works of 1970-71 (figures 14 and 21). It is tempting to see a connection between the two artists' use of lyrics from the Canadian anthem. Curnoe's work was executed three years before Wieland's exhibition took place. Could it have influenced Wieland in her artistic adaptations of the anthem? It is impossible to give a definitive answer. One might speculate that Wieland, who may have been aware of the work by Curnoe, decided to use the anthem primarily because "O Canada" is such a well-known nationalist symbol in its own right. Moreover, Wieland's exhibition and "O Canada" works were largely celebratory. She presented Canada and its symbols as sources of genuine national pride. Curnoe, on the other hand, uses the phrase "true north strong and free" in an ironically humorous way, as will become clear in the examinations of the five statements in the work. Thus,

if Wieland was aware of Curnoe's True North Strong and Free, and decided to use words from the anthem as a comment on his use of them, she imbued "True Patriot Love" with authentically nationalist sentiment, in marked contrast to his implicitly critical stance.

In Curnoe's work, two of the three sentences which are explicitly about Canada are positive, but in a seemingly irrelevant or incongruous way. "CANADA FEEDS THE BRAIN! G.C." and "CAN. COSTS LESS THAN DRUGS" invite us to view the country as an intellectual stimulant and/or hallucinogenic agent. The general tone of the two statements seems to parody advertising slogans, which try to sell products as having either miraculous effects or irresistible prices. The reference to Canada costing less than drugs and the word "free" in the work's title may also be a comment on foreign ownership in the country. The implication is that the Americans have either purchased Canada's economy at low cost, or simply crossed the border and taken control at will. Despite this darker allusion, these two generalized, enthusiastic endorsements seem flippant and out of place when considering what Canada actually encompasses or what it may mean to its population. Curnoe has elsewhere denigrated the idea that just because one is Canadian and positive about one's country, one must always think Canada is best or first or most important:

...being a Canada firster...is equally stupid....It's a very humiliating way to look at yourself, to look at where you come from: "If it's Canadian, it must be good." It immediately downvalues anything successful

about Canada, because people accept it no matter what.

Curnoe seems to advocate the critical examination of the country by its citizens, so that we may strengthen our true self-image, which may not be a nationalistically-oriented one, appreciate our actual accomplishments and reverse any negative trends, such as too much American influence.

In contrast, the panel which reads "CANADA ALWAYS LOSES!" seems to relate to Curnoe's contention that Canadians often undervalue their country and assume that Canada and Canadians are incapable of success. He verbalizes this view as follows:

We are on the margins of western civilization.... Arguments can be made that we are a third-world country. We're on the margins; we don't count; nobody hears about us; nobody thinks about us. We are out in the sticks. We are receivers of culture, rather than senders. We are receivers of ideas, rather than senders of ideas. We don't originate anything.... I'm not saying this is true. I'm saying this is something that is said. 22

Curnoe believes this attitude is as damaging as the mindlessly positive one, for both overlook the actual potential of Canada and its regions.

The phrase "CLOSE THE 49TH PARALLEL ETC" communicates Curnoe's anti-Americanism. It specifically refers to the blocking out of American influence, with the "etc." acting as a catch-all for any other anti-American sentiments that could be expressed and/or any methods that could be adopted to achieve the goal. If the border were to be closed, one assumes that Canada would stop receiving the overwhelming cultural influences which Curnoe believes now tend to stifle

it. Yet there may be irony even here. The Canada-U.S. border follows the forty-ninth parallel for only part of its length. As a phrase, however "the 49th parallel" is often synonymous with the entire border. If taken this way, Curnoe's statement seems relatively straightforward. Pierre Th  berge has pointed out, however, that because the forty-ninth parallel does not constitute the border in Ontario, most of the population of the province, including Curnoe's hometown, London, is actually located south of this latitude.²³ Thus Curnoe may be simultaneously advocating the elimination of U.S. influence and admitting the impossibility of such a scenario, due to the inescapable geographical proximity of the two nations and the fact that they have become inextricably linked, both territorially and culturally.

The last panel, stamped "DID CHARTIER DIE IN VAIN??", refers to Paul Joseph Chartier, who, in 1968, attempted to bomb the House of Commons, but succeeded only in blowing himself up in a washroom in the Parliament Buildings. Chartier was a loner, affiliated with no political group, whose criticisms involved corruption in government, Parliament's neglect of both the poor and working people, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few powerful businessmen, unconstructive in-fighting among the political parties, and government mismanagement of tax revenue. These points were covered in a manifesto written by Chartier and included by Curnoe in another work, Family Painting No. 4:

For the Mad Bomber (His Infernal Machine) (1966; figure 38).

The bombing incident seemed to strike Curnoe as interesting and ultimately positive, despite Chartier's death. He seemed to see it as an example of black humour in a

²⁴ political context. The artist's anti-centralist stance has been referred to above. It seems reasonable to suppose that with it goes an anti-statist bias. Curnoe's suspicion of central government is substantiated by his anarchism, which, as the paper explains below, is a political philosophy advocating government by the free and equal

association of individuals. The artist has said that he remembers feeling critical of Parliament at the time of Chartier's escapade, and he was presumably glad to see the Members receive both a shock and a warning that not all Canadians were happy with their performance in the

²⁵ Commons. ²⁸ Yet, Curnoe is basically a pacifist, and so preferred an outcome which involved only the death of the perpetrator, rather than the murder of hundreds. The Chartier panel implies that the bomber's action could have had an effect on Parliament, but that two years later it appeared to Curnoe that it had not. Curnoe may be indirectly criticizing what he saw as recent failures of the government to uphold Canada's best interests. It may be fair to say that the True North was not as Strong and Free in 1968 as Curnoe would have liked, and that he believed the solution lay in a critical examination of ourselves and our institutions, rather than in what he regards as unthinking

nationalistic positivism.

So far several distinctions between the attitudes of Wieland and Curnoe on the subject of nationalism have been noted. In the 60s and 70s, Wieland was a strong Canadian nationalist, with an intuitive and emotional interest in strengthening Canada's sense of unity and identity. Nationalism for her was a way Canada could fortify itself against encroachment by the United States. Curnoe, however, believes that a nationalist conception of Canada is inaccurate, because the country is composed of discrete regions. Further, as an ideal it is unhelpful. For Curnoe, unity is impossible and undesirable, and identity comes from local surroundings rather than from either a central authority or an overall philosophy of nationhood. He feels the threats posed by the United States as keenly as Wieland did, but does not see nationalism as the answer. Instead he thinks that Canadians must be critical of themselves and their country in order to find solutions for such problems. It should be emphasized that Wieland's embrace of nationalism was a consciously-adopted strategy through which to communicate a message she felt Canadians urgently needed to hear. The nationalist message of her "True Patriot Love" show was designed to alert Canadians to the dangers which faced them. Such a crisis-mentality has rarely been part of Curnoe's art. Although he has always felt that Canada's problems were severe, he has tended to be less evangelical in intent, tone and message than has Wieland.

Curnoe's anti-Americanism has always been an important aspect of his art and his writings. One of his early works which contains anti-American content is Untitled (1962; figure 39). This is a lettered work which has been called a parody of patriotic sentiments.²⁷ Some of the phrases read as follows: "O WORSHIP YE ST USA", "FREEDOM FOR ALL ONLY 10c IN COIN", "AMERICA OUR NATIVE LAND", "AT THY SERVICE O LAND OF THE FREE OF CANADA LIMITED" and "ONLY 4 98, IN CANADA \$500.13". These words are accompanied by the Coca-Cola trademark, which the artist has glued front and centre. The work can be said to make two major points. It ridicules the tenor of patriotic sentiments which are often specifically associated with Americans, such as willingness to die for one's homeland, belief in national freedom and duty, and trust in God and country. It also comments on what the artist sees as Canada's subservience, paying lip service to American patriotic ideals, while losing its own economic independence. Curnoe's expression of anti-American views did not stop with this work. He continued to make his opinions known throughout the sixties and seventies. The 1978 article which he wrote for The Canadian Forum, entitled "Feet of Clay Planted Firm in the USA",²⁸ is one of his strongest statements. When asked in 1986 whether he still felt as negatively about the United States as he had in the past, he replied, "Absolutely".²⁹

The anti-American stance that Curnoe has displayed is said to be "specifically directed at political and cultural

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imperialism". This would seem to imply that he rejects the U.S. primarily for its domination of other countries. Yet, in 1968 he wrote: "all art being produced in the United States is seriously compromised by the fact that it is
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American". This statement would appear to be an absolute condemnation of the U.S., without reference to any other nation. It is important to note, however, that he raised the issue in a letter to Artforum, in response to a critic who had written on contemporary Canadian art, using American standards with which to judge it. Curnoe has continuously reiterated his extremely negative feelings about American influence in Canada. He has said that if he were a politician seeking election, he would run on an exclusively anti-American campaign "to kick them out. That would have
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been my campaign[,] period." Just kick them out". One of his most blatantly anti-American works is a mural commissioned by Benson and Hedges, which the company ultimately refused to purchase. Curnoe knew they would repudiate the work and planned it that way. He used the opportunity of making art for an American corporate customer to include several strong anti-American slogans, such as "Do
33
not accept American money in your change" and "Fight
34
pollution -- Tell an American to go home today".

One of the aspects of American influence in Canada which most disturbs Curnoe is that we see the world through American eyes. He has said: "It is very clear that Canada is being interpreted by the U.S.A. almost totally now. The

amount of American interpretation we have, and the amount that we see other countries through the American media is ridiculous. We have an American perspective on the rest of the world".³⁵ Similarly, Curnoe has elsewhere asked the question, "are we to see recent European history only through American eyes -- what a frightening prospect".³⁶ It is not that Curnoe wishes to insulate Canada from all contacts and influences. In fact, he welcomes our experiencing and learning from the world beyond the U.S. as much as we can:

I think it's great to get more Europeans and English people in here running things. I think it's terrific as long as they're not American. It was always for me just anti-American. I have no problem with people coming in from the rest of the world, but I really feel it's important in this country to have these other influences to offset the predominant one.³⁷

A work by Curnoe which encompasses these issues is It Was Perfectly Normal (1980; figure 40), from a series of illustrations for a book by David McFadden entitled Animal Spirits. This drawing is divided into two parts. The upper section shows a page from a book headed "Canadian History for Ontario Public Schools Chapter 1". This is juxtaposed with an illustration of two schoolchildren saluting the American flag. The suggestion is clear that Canadians are not taught about their own country, but indoctrinated at an early age into American-oriented perceptions and behaviour. The lower section of the drawing shows a diagram labelled "Art History -- Chart Three" from what is called the "Ontario University Fine Art Teachers [sic] Manual". The

copyright designation indicates that the manufacturer is "Global Teaching Aids" of Des Moines, Iowa. The drawing contains a centrally-placed, irregularly-shaped oval labelled "Brain of Ontario Student". It is being subjected to input from all over the world, indicated by the names of cities with arrows linking them to the "brain". That which is received from American centres, most prominently New York, is termed "International Awareness". Influences coming from Canadian and non-American sources are labelled "Provincialism". This is the opposite of how Curnoe really views such contacts. He is actually in favour of Canadians receiving ideas from other parts of Canada and from places other than the United States. The labelling in the diagram reflects how he thinks the Teaching Aids company in Des Moines would rank the relative importance of ideas emanating from the United States, Canada and countries across the ocean, and, of course, how he sees American values being surreptitiously inculcated in educational material used in Canada. Curnoe has elsewhere implicitly linked American influence to provincialism. Provincialism, "the uncritical application by creative people of 'imported' criteria",³⁸ is, for Curnoe, a by-product of American influence and the single biggest threat to the kind of culture he feels has naturally arisen in Canada, namely regionalism.

What has been interpreted as Curnoe's strongest anti-American work is the Dorval mural or, to use its official title, R-34 (1967-68; figures 41-43). This piece consists

of oil on twenty-six panels with a combined length of over forty-five meters. It resembles a dirigible in shape and in some of its details, which consist of the parts of an airship painstakingly depicted and labelled. The title indicates that it represents a particular dirigible, namely the British-built R-34, which was the first such craft successfully to cross the Atlantic Ocean in 1919. The depiction of a vehicle which was a pioneer of aviation is an appropriate choice for an airport mural.

Portholes along the length of the work contain the faces of Curnoe's family, friends and acquaintances from London, Ontario. In addition, there is an aerial view of the Richmond Street Federal Building in the artist's hometown (figure 42). Other faces and figures include those of Louis Riel, Paul Joseph Chartier (figure 42) and Kapitanleutnant Heinrich Mathy (figure 41), who was a German bomber pilot in World War I. It is typical for Curnoe to include personal and regional references in works about any subject. But these figures, including Riel, Chartier and Mathy, all have an extra significance. They relate to the military overtones of the work which will become more apparent when we examine the texts which Curnoe has included.

These prose excerpts are placed at various points along the work, usually below the figures. Three texts describe air and sea battles. Two more involve lyrics from a song entitled "Toujours l'R-100" (figures 42 and 43) about

another airship which made the Atlantic crossing in 1930.

In addition, there are accounts of three separate events: a trip Curnoe once took to Buffalo, N.Y., the removal of boxer Cassius Clay's World Heavyweight title allegedly for refusing to fight in Vietnam (figure 41), and a bombing raid on a school during the First World War in which many young children died (figure 42).

The overall theme of the work seems to be an indictment of war. One of the texts is an excerpt from the diary of a German pilot who made several raids on London, England in World War I. It includes the sentence: "It is the heart of London that must be hit...!!!" (figure 41). This excerpt together with the graphic account of children dying in war must be seen in the context of the figures in the painting. A link can be made between the images of happy London, Ontario children and the references to dead and dying children in London, England. Curnoe may be saying that everyone is at risk of being involved in war, including those closest to us. The implications are that war does not confine itself to faraway places like England and Germany, and that the First World War, although called "the war to end wars", was in fact the prelude to a long series of national and international conflicts in this century. The three figures of Riel, Chartier and Mathy require further analysis. The inclusion of Mathy as a participant in World War I seems understandable in the context of the other First World War references. With Riel, Curnoe may be raising one

of the moral dilemmas associated with war: is violence justified if it is perpetrated in a just cause? In addition, he may be showing Riel as a victim of war, as a man who lost his fight and was subsequently executed by the victors. Chartier also believed in his mission, and was ultimately both a would-be perpetrator and a victim. It was his intention to carry out a war-like act against Parliament, but instead he was destroyed by his own violence.

The history of the Dorval mural is as significant as its iconography. It was commissioned by the Department of Transport in 1967 as part of the government's program to put works by Canadian artists into Canadian airports. Curnoe's work was intended for the international arrivals concourse at Dorval Airport near Montreal. While Curnoe was installing it in March 1968, two American customs officials complained to the R.C.M.P. and subsequently to Departmental officials about what they viewed as anti-American content in the work.³⁹ Many people became involved in the controversy, including several Departmental representatives and Jean Sutherland Boggs, who was both Director of the National Gallery of Canada and one of the members of the committee which had selected the artists for the airport commissions. After some deliberation, these authorities decided that the work was offensive, and the Department of Transport gave Curnoe an ultimatum: either he must repaint four panels, or the work would be removed from the airport.

Curnoe refused to rework his original conception of the mural, but offered instead to letter the word "censored" over the disputed sections. The Department did not agree to this proposal and did in fact disassemble and remove the work. It went into storage at the National Gallery.

The parts of the mural that were deemed anti-American were three in number. A fourth section was thought to be offensive, although not specifically insulting to the United States. The first anti-American reference was Curnoe's account of his trip to Buffalo to hear a concert (figure 41). He related that the Americans sitting behind him laughed at the performer, and he said he was subsequently glad to return to Canada. The second was the excerpt from Freedom Anarchist Weekly which charged the American government with stripping Clay of his title for refusing the draft (figure 41). The third was a figure labelled by Curnoe as "Mr. Jack Kelly, Assistant Warehouse Superintendant", whose face resembled that of President Johnson, having his hand severed by the dirigible's propeller (figure 43). The fourth offensive section was the account of young children dying under air attack (figure 42).

Curnoe has not confirmed or denied the presence of a reference to Johnson in the work. The face does resemble Johnson, despite the labelling to the contrary. The severing of the hand can be seen as Johnson bespattered with blood and hence implicated in the perpetration of violence,

or as the President being destroyed by his own misguided policy. An anti-Vietnam reading of this work does seem valid in light of the visual evidence provided by the Johnson and Clay references and the general anti-war theme. In discussing this work in an article he wrote for La Presse, Curnoe confirms the anti-war and anti-violence messages: "Ce que j'essais de montrer, c'est que je suis contre la violence. Je déteste les gens qui tuent. Qui peut me quereller pour cela?"⁴⁰ In addition, Curnoe has always made his negative views about the United States clear, and he included an explicit anti-Johnson reference in another exactly contemporary work, Kamikaze (1967-68; figure 44), discussed below under Curnoe's nihilist and anarchist interests.

The question of whether this work with political subject matter was a success or a failure is a fascinating issue. It was on display at Dorval for less than two weeks and for most of that time, the disputed sections were covered with paper to conceal the message. This would seem to suggest that the work's impact must have been severely blunted. On the contrary, the work was discussed on the editorial pages of newspapers across Canada. Despite the short period of time in which the work remained in the public eye, the strength of its impact was such that it can be termed a success in getting attention focussed on those issues which the artist sought to raise.

There may be a more profound Canadian dimension to this

work than the mere presence of the Canadians who are depicted. In fact, Curnoe's anti-Americanism in general is closely linked to a certain critical stance he has taken with respect to Canada. He has repeatedly deplored the fact that Canadians are unable to resist American dominance. In the case of the Dorval mural, Curnoe may have felt that Canada was not resisting American foreign policy, that our involvement in the Vietnam War was deepening, and hence that the risk to ourselves and our children was becoming more acute.⁴¹ If the Johnson figure is any indication, Curnoe feels that those who commit violence die violently. The crowning irony, of course, is the fact that Canada's weakness in the face of American pressure is not only suggested by the subject matter of the Dorval mural, but was actually played out in the fate of the work, which saw Canadian authorities repress it in response to American complaints.

Nowhere is Curnoe's belief in Canadian responsibility for its own weakness in the face of American cultural and political pressure⁴² more explicitly stated than in his Canadian Forum article. This piece points out the extent to which Canadians have allowed Americans to run this country's public art institutions, university art departments and, the particular focus of the article, Artscanada, which was the major Canadian art periodical of the day.⁴³ Curnoe thought that these organizations had become dominated by Americans to the point where they no longer reflected Canadian

aspirations and accomplishments. "We have no respect for our culture", Curnoe has said, and has further wondered why we repeatedly say to the Americans "'please show us how',⁴⁴ 'please show us where we are going wrong'..."

A work which combines Curnoe's anti-American bias with his criticism of Canadian cultural and political passivity in relation to the United States even more explicitly than does the Dorval mural is For Ben Bella (1964; figure 45). This painting depicts Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King seated in a chair. His face is realistically portrayed and thoroughly recognizable; it is an image from an election poster. King is receiving a charge from an electric vibrator held by a figure labelled "Ebert", who is largely unseen. Only Ebert's arm and hand holding the vibrator are visible to us. The identity and significance of this figure are problematic. Barry Lord identifies Ebert as "a friend⁴⁵ of Curnoe." If this designation is accurate, Curnoe has typically inserted a personal, regional reference into a work about a larger political issue. There is another possibility, however, as to the identity of Ebert. Henry Albert (Bert) Harper was a university friend of King, whom he met in the mid-1890s and with whom he lived for slightly over a year in 1900-1901 until Harper's death. C.P. Stacey calls King's friendship with Bert one of the three most⁴⁶ significant in the Prime Minister's life. Although Stacey dismisses the idea that the relationship was a homosexual one, he calls it "a consciously romantic and affectionate

friendship." If the Ebert of Curnoe's painting does refer to Bert Harper, the artist may be positing the existence of a physical relationship between King and Bert, and thus attempting to cast aspersions on King on the basis of his private life.

In any case, in the painting King accepts Ebert's ministrations passively. The fact that the Prime Minister is receiving physical stimulation from a figure situated almost entirely outside the frame has a connection to the stamped messages around the perimeter of the painting. These sentences make reference to the Liberals' role in Canada's increasing dependence on the U.S. Reference to the Liberal Party undoubtedly includes its leader, King. The other major Canadian political parties are also implicated as having contributed to the weakening of the country. Canada's death is even predicted, as is its eventual union with the United States, a country which is described facetiously as modest and self-effacing. Clearly King's submission to Ebert is likened to the Liberals' submission to the United States. The message "CANADIAN \$ ACCEPTED AT PAR FOR THIS OBJECT" is a specific reference to Canada's economic inferiority to the U.S. Along two edges, Curnoe has stamped the names of several international champions of nationalist movements, including the Algerian, Ahmed ben Bella, after whom the painting is titled. Clearly, American domination of Canada and Canadian responsibility for its own situation are at the core of the work's message.

The sexual connotations of the vibrator may involve King's and the Liberals' impotence in resisting pressure by the United States. Likewise, the device may be read as an instrument of torture wielded by the United States to ensure that Canada behaves as its southern neighbour would prefer.

A noticeable feature of For Ben Bella is the fact that it is not a two-dimensional painting, but a two-panel construction with a curved metal bar on either side. There may be several reasons why the artist chose this format rather than a more conventional rectangular canvas. The three-dimensionality of the piece, with its forceful projection into the viewer's space, tends both to command attention and to suggest that the concerns expressed are not, esoterica to be hung on a wall, but concrete facts of our lives. The metal bars suggest a trap or a prison. King looks confined in his chair, as physically in a cage or mentally in an insoluble dilemma. Moreover, the bars may suggest the kind of aids from which handicapped people receive assistance, implying that King was handicapped by his own powerlessness or an inability to understand the consequences of his actions in dealing with the United States. In addition, there may be a connection between the bars and the vibrator, in that all suggest impotence, either sexual or more generally physical. Barry Lord has further observed that they can all be read as hard, unyielding, "de-
48
humanizing", which would impart a sordid undercurrent to the piece.

An important aspect of both For Ben Bella and the Dorval mural is their affinity in style and format to American Pop Art. We have already noted in the present work its combination of painted and sculptural elements. Its three-dimensionality and mixed materials give it the look of a Pop construction. In addition, it has flat, bright colours, hard-edged shapes, verbal messages and a collaged photograph, all elements associated with Pop Art. Many of the same features are to be found in R-34 and in a series of seemingly Pop-inspired images which Curnoe produced in the period from the early 1960s to the early 1970s. Barry Lord has commented on the similarity between Curnoe's work of the mid-1960s and the paintings of a well-known American Pop artist: "Neither [Curnoe nor Chambers] is completely free of American influences: a painting like Curnoe's The Heart of London of 1966 (figure 46), for instance, is comparable in style to the Great American Nude series of American pop artist Tom Wesselmann. Both are comic-strip nudes in movieland settings".

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Elison Brock has taken the comparison between Curnoe's work and Pop even farther:

Despite his protestations, Curnoe's art continued with good reason to be confused with American pop art of the 60's. Apparent stylistic comparisons were stimulated by Curnoe's use of a comic book aesthetic, but content similarities are also manifested.... Both Curnoe's art and pop art reach the same operant level: the promotion and maintenance of the directions technology and society have taken. 50

On the face of it, it appears surprising that an artist with such pronounced anti-American views should work within what seems to be a contemporary U.S. art style. What is the

explanation?

First of all, it should be borne in mind that through all his unremittingly negative comments on the United States, Curnoe maintains an interest in, even an engagement with, American culture. He has said that American influence in Canada is completely understandable, presumably given the proximity of the two nations and the strength of the one.⁵¹ He was acutely aware of the attraction of New York for young Canadian artists in the 1960s, and he even said that going to the U.S. was a legitimate alternative to staying home and exploring your own background, as he chose to do : "you either go to the source of the main influences or to the roots of your own experience"⁵² Curnoe has acknowledged the fascination he feels for American culture while, at the same time, emphasizing its foreign character. He has stated:⁵³ "anything American is exotic". Exploring Curnoe's relationship with the U.S. in more detail, Pierre Théberge has written:

Curnoe still maintains the value of American culture; he was the first to acknowledge its great importance to him. His "Radio Journal", published from 1968 to 1970 is virtually a catalogue of aspects of that culture that were then having considerable influence on him.⁵⁴

If Curnoe is a Pop artist in some measure, it is not simply a matter of aping an American cultural phenomenon. David Thompson and John Noel Chandler have said that the Pop Art elements in his paintings⁵⁵ are closer to British Pop than to American. There are evident links between Curnoe's

work and the art of people involved in European Dada, such as Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters and Francis Picabia, connections which will be examined in more depth in a discussion of Curnoe's interest in nihilism below. Curnoe himself has listed several other continental European and English artists as significant influences: Stanley Spencer, Otto Dix, George Grosz, Lucien Freud, E.L. Kirchner, Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele and Arnold Schoenberg.⁵⁸

Curnoe says he began to do similar experiments at the same time or earlier than Pop Artists in New York. The question of timing, who began to work in a Pop idiom first, is difficult to resolve. Certainly the British Pop artists had begun their work by the mid-fifties, with Richard Hamilton's seminal collage Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing? dating from 1958 (figure 47). Curnoe admits he was aware of Johns and Rauschenberg in the fifties, the pre-Pop era of American art, but argues that in the sixties his work developed in tandem with that of the major American Pop artists.⁵⁷ It is fair to say that Pop-related images appear in Curnoe's work as early as 1960 in How Does One Get To Meet You? (1960; figure 48), a female figure executed in Dayglo paint on illustration board, and in Hillcrest Dairy (c.1960), a watercolour which depicts the sign on the side of a barn. The bulk of American Pop Art was produced after 1960, at a time when Curnoe was already working in a similar idiom. Once the American images were produced they began to be

disseminated through reproduction, so Curnoe must have seen them throughout the sixties. Thus, Curnoe may not have seen American Pop Art proper before he began his Pop-like experiments in 1980, but he must have become aware of it shortly afterwards, and he undoubtedly continued to see it throughout the decade. The originality of Curnoe's work of the early 1980s may be unquestionable, but it does not preclude a later Pop influence.

Given that to some degree an American Pop Art influence is present in Curnoe's work, there may be a further reason for his use of the style. It provides him with an opportunity to parody a recognizably American means of expression and hence to be critical of the United States in a particularly sharp and biting way. There is arguably more power in presenting a highly unflattering portrayal of U.S. President Johnson in a style with recognizable links to American Pop Art, than there would be in depicting him in a neutral, naturalistic manner. This is particularly so when the artist making the image is Canadian. It is a double blow through both iconographical and formal means, and an implied double criticism of both an individual politician and the culture as a whole.

Curnoe has a tremendous interest in popular culture, of which American culture is only one part. A variety of popular subject matter appears in his work, including people and objects from the culture at large and from his own personal life. Curnoe lettered the names of sports figures,

musicians and political activists in many works. He drew and painted individuals, such as boxers (Tommy Burns, Jack Johnson and Jimmy McLarnin [figure 49]), politicians (William Lyon Mackenzie King [figure 45] and John Robarts) and singers (Stompin' Tom Connors; figure 50). He included objects from everyday life, such as the found objects in his assemblages, collages and monoprints of the early 1980s (figure 51), and the bicycle portraits of more recent years. He includes among his work, seemingly equal in importance to his paintings and drawings, such things as journals containing information about his daily activities and trips he has taken, and notebooks with measurements of distances walked and times required to bicycle from one point to another (figure 52). The caricature/cartoon aspects of his work are to be found in his frequent juxtapositions of word and image, and in many of his drawings, such as the illustrations for The Great Canadian Sonnet (1970; figure 53) and Animal Spirits (1979-80; figure 40), his portraits of McLarnin and Connors (figures 49 and 50) and his Map of North America (figure 54).

Curnoe is always at pains to specify the subject matter of all his works, even those which seem most closely to resemble Pop Art. We have already examined some of the specific references in For Ben Bella (figure 45). His View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series (1969-71; figure 55) is obsessive in its detailed documentation of one hundred and twenty separate points on the canvas. Such accumulation of

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1.0

28 25

22

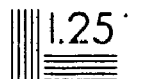


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1.6

MicroD

detail is also a major feature of his other views of and through his studio windows. The Heart of London (1966-67; figure 46), compared above to Wesselmann, is likewise full of London landmarks, as Barry Lord went on to explain.⁵⁸ The series of Family Paintings (1966; figures 38 and 56) contains specific information about the activities of Curnoe's own family, including dates, times and the coincidence of other events which happened elsewhere simultaneously. There are many other examples of such precise delineation of subject matter in his oeuvre. It seems safe to say that despite Curnoe's adaptation of certain Pop Art elements, the specific, personal and local aspects of his subject matter do differentiate his work from mainstream Pop.

Curnoe himself has addressed the subject of the relationship between his work and American Pop Art. He pointed out the extent to which his work encompasses his own environment. In fact, he has even denied the existence of boundaries between art and life.⁵⁹ Moreover, Curnoe does not deny American stylistic and thematic constituents in his work, but feels there is nothing wrong with them per se, because they are combined with other equally important elements. He also thinks it is not entirely accurate to say that he has been influenced by American Pop Art, because, as we have seen, he says that he began to do similar experiments at the same time as, or even earlier than, the Pop artists in New York. Finally, he feels that there is a

good reason for the presence of those American elements which do inform his work. The artist has pointed out that as a member of the English-speaking Western world at a time of mass communication, he is bound to be aware of and surrounded by a host of associations which have become a legitimate part of his own environment.

I don't think there's anything wrong with being influenced by another country's culture. There is something wrong with only being influenced by that country's culture. I think there's a case that can be made in my work that it's been influenced more by my own environment than it has been by cultures from other countries.... I'm in a very similar position in some ways to Guido Molinari. There have been people who've said about him that he was too influenced by Gene Davis, when in fact he was doing his formative work at the same time. That's the case with my work, too. So that anything that can be called a Pop influence -- I did it first! I was doing it in 1960, before anything was said about Pop Art.... The mix of popular culture that I come from is similar to popular culture in England and in the States, but different.... The popular culture I come from has other sources, but it does have some in common. Just as an English child would know about Superman and an American child would, I would.... We're talking about popular culture in the English-speaking world, so there's bound to be some stuff in common. 80

One might try to find a distinction between Curnoe's work and American Pop Art by stressing that his is critical while the latter is not. Arnason has emphasized the Pop artists' neutrality by stating: "They do not comment on the scene or attack it like social realists, nor do they exalt" it like ad men".⁸¹ This contention is debatable in the case of Warhol's car crashes, suicides and electric chairs. Moreover, the sheer size of many Pop representations of the banal makes the objects portrayed seem ridiculous or disgusting. The result is that, by extension, the works in

which these things abound, seem likewise absurd or sordid. This implicit criticism may be present in Wesselmann's nudes, Rosenquist's images adapted from advertising and Oldenburg's giant hamburgers and toilets. Curnoe, too, is critical in many of his Pop-related works. In addition to For Ben Bella (figure 45), the Family Paintings, particularly numbers 2 and 4 (figures 56 and 38), reproduce much of Paul Joseph Chartier's manifesto, including his criticism of the government. View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series (figure 55) includes an American plane being shot down by Canadian small arms fire. The Dorval mural (figures 41-43) comments on war and its consequences in a Pop-oriented idiom.

What conclusions can one draw about the relationship between Curnoe's work and Pop Art? One cannot deny the Pop aspects of much of Curnoe's art, but it is at least as important to stress the differences between his work and that of the American Pop artists. Certainly this is not the key to understanding his work generally, let alone its social and political subject matter.

Anti-Americanism has been present in both Wieland's and Curnoe's work, although each artist has given it a slightly different emphasis. Wieland's objection to the United States has centred on her dread of action which she thought the Americans were either taking or threatening to take against Canada: a political takeover of our government, economic moves to control our resources and cultural

interference in our universities and art galleries. Curnoe, on the other hand, while also deploring the preceding scenarios, has been more concerned with the general cultural influence of the United States upon Canada. This does not involve particular action on the Americans' part; it is merely what he sees as a matter-of-fact, daily undermining of the validity of Canadian culture due to our proximity to the United States' powerful cultural and communications industries. Hence, Curnoe's use of a style like Pop Art seems potentially more problematic than does Wieland's. By using American art styles Wieland is not hastening the takeover of the Canadian government, but in adopting those same American means of expression Curnoe might be contributing to the weakening of Canadian culture. It has been shown, however, that it is a misapprehension to see Curnoe's work as a simple reflection of American Pop, because of the distinctions between them, the strategies involved in Curnoe's use of the style and his involvement in other influences from both art and life.

Another interesting point of comparison between Wieland and Curnoe involves their use of words in their political and social subject matter. It has been suggested that the letters in Wieland's art are soft, subjective and home-made as opposed to the flat, mechanical-looking type favoured by Curnoe.⁶² Beyond this distinction, Wieland tends to favour quotations which are evocative and romantic, either about nature or about nation. Eskimo Song -- The Great Sea

(figure 5), O Canada quilt (figure 21), Laura Secord (figure 23) and Indian Summer are either poems or songs with a sensitive evocation of the beauty of the natural world or the idealism of a young nation. The Last Letters (figure 2) evoke a historical era now long gone. Even Reason over Passion (figure 4) and Man Has Reached Out And Touched The Tranquil Moon (1970; figure 57), both quotations from Pierre Trudeau which the artist may have had a critical intent in using, resonate imaginatively in the viewer's mind. The phrase I Love Canada -- J'aime Canada (figure 3), presumably originated by Wieland, also has a romantic quality. Much rarer is a more severe edict such as Défendez la Terre/Defend the Earth (figure 25), but even it is softened visually by the flowing shapes of the letters and the whimsy of the flowers which surround it. The Water Quilt (figure 8) displays Wieland's most rigorous use of words in a political context. The printed pages provide a distinct contrast to the embroidered plants which surround them. Even here, however, the work is usually displayed with many of the printed panels covered by the embroidered flaps, so the text is only partially visible. Words for Wieland are not blatant or intrusive message-carriers. Their main function is to get the spectator both feeling and thinking along certain lines.

Words in Curnoe are more complex, yet less evocative or poetic. Unlike Wieland, he usually composes his own text. A straightforward use to which Curnoe often puts words is to

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label objects and identify people. But beyond this, True North Strong and Free (figure 37) and National Referendum Question (1977; figure 58) contain complex, critical questions and statements about Canada and the United States. Humour and wit are also present, and in some works, generally not his most political, the comic dominates. But in most of his political and social subject matter it is a lesser element, belied by the mechanical look of the type, which gives the texts the serious authority of the printed word. Words in Curnoe's work are often extremely hard-hitting. The graphic description of the deaths of children in the Dorval mural, the bitter sarcasm of It Was Perfectly Normal (figure 40), even the negative judgements on Canadian political parties in For Ben Bella (figure 45) constitute severe criticism of several aspects of our world.

The central focus of Curnoe's work is regionalism. Curnoe's regionalism has always had an outward-looking dimension. He does not wish to cut himself off from the world beyond London, yet neither does he want uncritically to copy in his own work the world's ideas or accepted ways of doing things. The distinction he has always made in this connection is between provincialism and regionalism, both of which he defines in the following quotation:

Provincialism is what people do when they live, as they think, 'out in the sticks', and they try to imitate what they think is hip in the big centres. Regionalism is simply what people do when they are integrated people, when they are at ease with themselves in their own environment and are at ease with other people from other environments. 63

The term "oregional", which has been applied specifically to the creative community in London, grew out of the two concepts, "regional" and "original". "To be true to one's region was of necessity to be intrinsically different from all other regions".⁶⁴ Curnoe emphasizes that he does not work from a theoretical notion of regionalism; rather, he maintains that having a regional base and a regional perspective are natural to his way of living and working.⁶⁵

As stated above, Curnoe has said that he thinks regional cultures are natural to all of Canada, not just to himself or his own region. In this regard, a small incident serves to shed light on Curnoe's conception of Canada. He once sent a letter to himself from Pelee Island, Ontario, the most southerly post office in Canada. He addressed it to Alert, N.W.T., the most northerly post office. The letter was returned to him in London, covered with postmarks and stamped "Unknown". Unknown is how Curnoe feels most regions of Canada are to most other regions. We are a naturally fragmented country, with strong local cultures and traditions. These regions know less of each other than is desirable, because of the vast distances which separate them.

Some aspects of regional culture in which Curnoe has been interested include country music, folk art, small industry and local agriculture. In 1972, he and Pierre Théberge founded the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada. This Association

held an exhibition at the London Public Library and Art Museum in 1974-75 and published an issue of its Review to accompany the show. The manifesto of the Association reads as follows:

Founded in St-Éleuthère Kam. 8 August 1972, the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada aims at documenting what we feel to be the innate sensibility of people in Canada and spreading knowledge about it. The Association is not interested in integrating these manifestations of innate sensibility into any kind of system of "higher" cultural values. We only want to point out the importance of these manifestations for all people in Canada and thus blur the artificial border between the "fine" arts and culture. 88

This statement underlines Curnoe's belief in the existence and value of regional cultural expression, and his interest in popular culture. The organization sought out folk artists in various parts of the country, interviewed them and photographed their work.

Curnoe has been interested in local soft drink manufacturers for many years, and owns a large collection of bottles, some of which have appeared in his paintings. View from the Most Northerly Window on the West Wall (1970-71; figure 59) shows a row of bottles, standing on a window sill, with the date and city in which each was acquired printed above it.

Curnoe is interested in Canadian country music as an authentic expression of the creativity and self-image of people in various parts of Canada. He feels that singers like Stompin' Tom Connors and Robert Charlebois, although

loved in their native regions of Prince Edward Island and Quebec respectively, developed followings in other areas of Canada due to the fact that they sang about regions other⁶⁷ than their own. This, to Curnoe, is a healthy example of regions communicating with one another Connors, in particular, with his songs about such places as Leamington, Tillsonburg, Timmins and Sudbury, grasped what is important and genuine to the people of all these places. Curnoe's portrait of Stompin' Tom Connors (figure 50) is a line drawing which shows a three-quarter to full-face view of the man, with his characteristic cowboy hat and bandana. His narrow eyes look out of a long, lean, slightly smiling face. The drawing is simple, straightforward, and shows its subject much the way he appeared on television and in photographs at the time he was performing across the country. The words "Stompin' Tom" are lettered across the lower portion of the drawing. This work was one of a series commissioned to illustrate poet Milton Acorn's More Poems for People. The drawings were ultimately not used by the publisher, who thought they were too populist and not political enough.

A charge that has been levelled at Curnoe's interest in both small soft drink manufacturers and Canadian country musicians like Tom Connors, is that what the artist is terming regionalism is not authentically Canadian, but⁶⁸ derived from American prototypes. This is a point of view which Curnoe repudiates vehemently. To Curnoe, if an

activity has become part of Canadian culture over time, no matter what its ultimate origin, it is a bona fide Canadian activity. After all, all Canadians, with the important exception of the aboriginal peoples, are newcomers, with backgrounds comprising nationality, customs and beliefs, which originated elsewhere. With time and continued practice of traditional customs, however, the Canadian-ness of the people has superceded the non-Canadian roots of their customs. To say that Stompin' Tom Connors sounded just like Johnny Cash is, for Curnoe, to be blind and deaf to the facts.⁸⁹ Connors' music developed at least partially out of Maritime folk music, which, in turn, has roots across the Atlantic. Moreover, Connors sang about Canadian people and places. If there is some American country music influence admixed, Curnoe maintains that this did not undermine Connors' fundamentally Canadian quality. The singer was simply picking and choosing from the creative options open to him as someone who was aware of the international music scene, as does Curnoe in his art, as a person well-informed about both art history and the contemporary art world. Likewise, it is correct to say that soft drinks originated in the United States and now have international distribution. The particular taste, packaging and advertising of local brands, however, can be one of the things which makes a region distinctive. Moreover, the economic importance of local bottlers as employers, social centres and hubs of commercial activity in the communities

in which they are situated means that the products and their manufacturers have often played an important role in the history and development of regions all over Canada.

One could discuss a large number of works as examples of Curnoe's frequent focus on his own region. Richmond St. Papers (1961; figure 51), Thorndale No. 9 (1962), Sunday Lacrosse at Talbot School (1964), Spring on the Ridgeway (1964), Hockey Stick Blades from West Lions Park, London (1965), The Heart of London (figure 46), View of Victoria Hospital, First Series (1968-69), Device for Measuring . London, Ontario (1971), Popular Hill (1975), 1 Iron, First Hole, Thames Valley G.C., with Delaunay Sky (1971-78), And Was Looking at the Latest Issue of the R.M. Bucke Memorial Newsletter (1980), constitute a small sample of works which include some aspect of London and environs beyond Curnoe himself and his immediate family. Another such work is View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series (figure 55), which is a monumental pictorial representation of an important London landmark. The hospital is well-known to residents of London, and is of particular importance to Curnoe personally, as the birthplace of himself and his family. Besides the main subject, the work contains specific references to many parts of the panoramic cityscape of London which is shown. The notebook which accompanies the picture includes among its numbered entries mention of Blackwood Lodge, the city's heating plant, Colborne Street, an apartment building and a red brick building near the

hospital, the fairgrounds and an L.T.O. bus. These references indicate that the work depicts the city of London. Curnoe has also included, as number 24, "American B58A Hustler Shot Down by Canadian Small Arms Fire, June 18 -- 12:30 p.m.". This event did not actually happen at all, let alone in the London area. The fact that Curnoe would include such a reference indicates that he does not feel constrained by the geographical or physical limits of his region. Curnoe believes that regionalism includes openness to ideas from anywhere, filtered through both one's own consciousness and the perspective one has gained from the particular region to which one belongs. Thus he can include some imaginative thinking based on his own political convictions, even in such an explicitly regional subject as Victoria Hospital.

In his work one often finds such a combination of regional and wide-ranging interests, along with juxtapositions of the real and the imaginary. The Vision of Dr. Bucke (1964) is a work which is largely based on people whom Curnoe considers to have been interesting characters from the London area. In addition, it contains mystical ideas which had international influence. Dr. Bucke was an M.D. who lived in London in the nineteenth century and was superintendent of the insane asylum. He had a mystical experience during which he became aware of the mental state which he subsequently called "cosmic consciousness". Later he wrote a book entitled Cosmic Consciousness, which was

widely read in Theosophical circles. The major image in Curnoe's work is a large painted profile of Dr. Bucke. Photographs attached to the right side of the painting show Kate Taylor Cumming, another London mystic whom Curnoe knew; Curnoe's mother; John Robarts, then Premier of Ontario and a resident of London; Dr. Bucke; and Walt Whitman, the American poet, who was a close friend of Bucke and occasionally came to London to visit him. Bucke believed that Whitman, too, had experienced cosmic consciousness

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All these people have a connection with London. In addition, Curnoe has included photographs of Madame Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical movement, and Charlie Watts, drummer of the rock band, The Rolling Stones.

Blavatsky's connection with the subject of the painting is clear in that she was a mystic, but Watts' presence is more difficult to explain. Perhaps he was included as a drug-user who may have had visionary experiences similar to cosmic consciousness. It is well-known that, even among rock groups, The Rolling Stones were notorious for their drug use. Bucke discussed in his book the possibility of achieving the state of cosmic consciousness through artificial means, and concluded that it was possible to experience a similar state through the use of chloroform.

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Thus Watts may be a representative of hallucinogenic drug-users, who sometimes get high in an attempt to experience visionary consciousness.

It has been said of Curnoe that he "has always had a

profound mistrust of mysticism";⁷³ hence, it is interesting that he has chosen a subject with so much spiritual content. When asked specifically about this work, Curnoe stressed the local aspect of it. He said that it is about "the whole mystical thing and its presence in London", expressing more of a fascination for the regional aspect than for details of the mystical experiences of Bucke, Whitman and Blavatsky, or the international interest they awakened.⁷⁴ Though the local emphasis is clearly crucial for Curnoe, the painting does have wider significance for him as well. The links between this work and Curnoe's interest in anarchism and nihilism will be explored below.

Curnoe has commented on the international dimension of his regional orientation:

My consciousness of regionalism is breaking down still further to my basic consciousness which is 75 Langarth St. E. and most recently 38 Weston St. and only after that: street, block, neighbourhood, city, township, county, province, dominion, world, solar system, cosmos, all of which become larger and more complicated. But because of mass media, I can sit in my house and an image of Egypt is on T.V., Cuba is on the radio, and Edinburgh is on the 'phone. Are we always in balance between the macrocosm and the microcosm? 75

As Barry Lord pointed out in 1969, Curnoe and the rest of the London art community "[are] perhaps among the first global villagers".⁷⁶ Curnoe has produced many works with no explicit connection to either London or himself. A work such as Blue Book, No. 1 (1964; figure 61), with its lists of European political activists, is but one example of his international awareness.

Curnoe's regionalism itself has been called political. Diana Nemiroff has made the point that in choosing subject matter out of his own life and region, Curnoe rejects the commonly-accepted definitions of art and culture⁷⁷ In accordance with these definitions which, she says, are imposed by the international art world and find expression in every country, some artists and their work are rewarded, while others, who may be of equal merit, sink into oblivion. Curnoe's concept of regionalism is linked to a culture which arises from the grass roots and in which people's creativity is integrated with the other aspects of their lives. This is the "innate sensibility" referred to in the manifesto of the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada, quoted above. Nemiroff has written:

...to refuse to make distinctions between them [popular culture and "high" art] is to refuse to acknowledge the power of the cultural elite.

Curnoe's stand for the specific and local, his desire to make art out of the material of his own life rather than elevate formal problems to the status of subject matter, in short, his regionalism, is therefore a political as well as an aesthetic choice... 78

Nemiroff goes on to connect Curnoe's anti-Americanism to this aspect of his regionalism, stating that both are directed "against the institutionalizing of the American perspective on 'high' culture, the culture of the few, by Canadian organs of power"⁷⁹ This interpretation is consistent with Curnoe's Canadian Forum article, cited above, which criticized much of Canada's artistic establishment on the grounds that it suppressed genuinely

Canadian artistic talent and achievement in order to follow the latest artistic fashions from the United States.

Curnoe has pointed out another way in which his regionalism has been seen as revolutionary. He says that in 1960, when he decided to return to London and devote himself to making regionally-oriented art, such a non-avant-garde course of action was very unusual for a young artist who planned to make art his or her career. "One of the strongest oppositional points of view you could take in 1960 was to have talked about the values of where I came from. To be critical of them, but to reflect them, because nobody was doing that".
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Two strains of political ideas in Curnoe's art have not been discussed thus far. They are nihilism and anarchism. Brock has pointed out that it is not always possible to separate these two political philosophies in the artist's work because they often appear in combination.
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The Compact Edition of the Oxford Dictionary defines nihilism as "negative doctrines in religion or morals; total rejection of current religious beliefs or moral principles." In addition, it identifies nihilism with "the doctrines or principles of the Russian Nihilists".
82 Thus the term both encompasses general notions of negativism and rejection of the status quo, and refers specifically to a revolutionary group which operated in Russia in the early twentieth century. Curnoe is mainly interested in nihilism in the first sense of the term. Anarchism is a word which

originated during the French Revolution. It derives from two Greek words: anarchos, which means "without head or chief", and anarchia, or "the condition of people without government".⁸³

Anarchism is thus a radical political philosophy based on the principle of the establishment of a society with no central authority. It, like nihilism, has both a general connotation and an application to specific historical individuals and groups.

Curnoe's involvement with nihilism has manifested itself in activities both outside and inside the studio. He is a co-founder of the Nihilist Party of London. He also helped to establish a musical group known as the Nihilist Spasm Band, which has been performing both in London and abroad since the 1960s. The Spasm Band uses home-made instruments to produce cacophonous music, which is punctuated by words, sentences, shouts and groans. It has been called "the squawking mouthpiece of the Nihilist Party".⁸⁴

In general, neither the Party nor the Band seeks to communicate a constructive message. Apart from its rejection of the status quo, the Party has little in the way of a platform and takes only sporadic action, except for the holding of an annual picnic. In the 1963 provincial election campaign, Party members pasted posters around London. These were woodcuts which read "Vote Nihilist Destroy Your Ballot" (figure 82). They were designed by Curnoe.

Nihilist activity has become part of Curnoe's art on other occasions. The text of a speech given at a Nihilist

Party picnic is a major component of Kamikaze (figure 44). This piece is an eight-foot-high plywood construction, shaped, as Chandler has said, like a public privy.⁸⁵ The exterior is covered with painted portraits of members of the Nihilist Spasm Band. The interior contains the speech, lettered around the walls. The structure is large enough to accommodate a spectator, who can close the door, sit on a stool and read the text. The speech contains much anti-American rhetoric. It proposes the dropping of bags of excrement on the White House and its tenant of the day, Lyndon Johnson. Clearly, the structure's resemblance to an outhouse is connected to this image in the speech, and to the more general anti-social aspect of nihilism.

Curnoe's interest in nihilism may be connected with his long-standing fascination with Dada. He produced many works, particularly early in his career, with recognizable debts to the Dada artists Marcel Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters. Curnoe's found objects, such as Drawer Full of Stuff (1961; figure 63), his watercolour versions of Duchamp's Bicycle Wheel, for example Sanouillet No. 1 (1979; figure 64), and his many collages of photographs, newspaper clippings and other printed material attest to the influence of both these artists. In addition, it is tempting to see a link between Curnoe's portraits of bicycles and bicycle parts and the mechanical devices included by Picabia in his works of the 1910s and 20s. Moreover, it has been claimed that beginning in the early formative stage of Curnoe's

career, he found in Dada a reflection of much of what he
intuitively felt and what interested him. ⁸⁶ Curnoe's
enthusiasm for Dada extends beyond a fascination with its
artistic manifestations. The negative, anarchic,
destructive and pessimistic character of Dada ⁸⁷ would seem
to have a general connection to the political negativism
shown by the Nihilist Party. Examples of this attitude are
to be found both in the Party's actions during the 1983
election and in its refusal to do much to improve what it
sees as undesirable in society. In addition, the Nihilist
Spasm Band seems to be a direct descendant of the Dada
bruitism or noise-music performances held in Zurich's
Cabaret Voltaire in the late 1910s.

Curnoe's nihilism has been called "tongue-in-cheek". ⁸⁸
This interpretation has some validity, but overlooks the
sincerity of Curnoe's intellectual interest in nihilism as a
political philosophy and his commitments to the Nihilist
Party and Spasm Band. When asked in 1988 how seriously he
takes his involvement in the Party, Curnoe replied that he
sees in it elements of seriousness, parody and fun. "It is
a parody.... But it is in opposition to things". ⁸⁹ Curnoe's
serious study of nihilism is evidenced by his awareness of
several historical periods of Nihilist activity. Apart from
Dada, his interests include the pre-Revolutionary Russian
Nihilists, who were members of the political-activist wing
of the Social Democratic Party. He cannot condone the
violence of their tactics, such as political assassinations.

but he does recognize the morality of their actions, in that they stayed at the scene of their terrorist acts, took full responsibility for them and allowed the authorities to
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arrest them.

There is an obvious merging of Curnoe's nihilism and anarchism in his view of the organization of the Nihilist Spasm Band. He has described the group as follows:

We are eight people with divergent attitudes making sounds. It reinforces all my political dreams to be part of a free co-operation. If you use the word anarchy it only makes people think of the 1890s or feel threatened, but that's what it is. Each member has a certain role, and the real power is evenly spread out. 91

Recently he elaborated on the political nature of the Band:

There's a very strong sense of a group of equals improvising. And that's a political statement. It's very close to...anarcho-syndicalism, or that whole idea of communist anarchism, where people come together as free individuals to make things. 92

This idea of individuals coming together in a free co-operation resembles the Russian anarchist Michael Bakunin's concept of government by voluntary co-operation in loose
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federations. Bakunin supported the abolition of the state and believed in extreme individualism. He favoured Rousseau's idea that humanity is inherently virtuous if
94
unperverted by social or political authority. These ideas seem extremely close to Curnoe's anti-centralist views, cited near the beginning of the chapter.

An anarchist for whom Curnoe has expressed admiration is Peter Kropotkin, who was active in Europe in the late
95
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This man

believed that art would be an important part of life in the

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ideal anarchist society. He further stated that leisure

activities are the most important part of humanity's

endeavour, after the procuring of food and shelter. As

Kropotkin's biographers have explained, "by leisure he means

the facilities for each man to follow, in the time free from

essential work, all those individual inclinations which

97

produce art, literature and science". Curnoe works in a

way which seems very like Kropotkin's conception of leisure.

The artist has said many times that he does what interests

98

him. All the activities that he finds interesting -- all

his "individual inclinations" in Kropotkin's terms, from

reading to cycling to measuring distances to keeping

journals to painting -- result in his art.

There are several other aspects of anarchism upon which

Curnoe himself has commented, or which others have related

to him. Curnoe rejects the suggestion that to favour

anarchism one must support violence. He is sympathetic to

the pacifist strain of anarchism, which believes in the

99

freedom of everyone. The fact that Curnoe uses his family

as subject matter in a significant proportion of his works

has been linked to a basic tenet of anarchism, the upholding

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of the family. Even Curnoe's interest in cycling and his

use of bicycles in his paintings and drawings have been

connected to his anarchist leanings. Théberge has pointed

out that cycling, painting and drawing are individualist

activities, with the cyclist and artist being in complete

and sole control. The rise of the bicycle in North America in the seventies "tended to reinforce [Curnoe's] conservatism, his populism, and at the same time his individuality as a classic anarchist".¹⁰¹ 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. Among his pictures, his Family Paintings (figures 38 and 56) reflect these two tendencies most clearly. The central pictorial images in these works are of mother, children, pets and toys. Placed next to them are transcriptions of the manifesto of Paul Joseph Chartier, the would-be bomber of Parliament.

The works by Curnoe which most clearly exemplify his nihilist and anarchist interests are the three paintings which comprise The Nihilist Party Trilogy. They are: The Vision of Dr. Bucke (figure 60), treated above in the discussion of regionalism, Looking at Three Members of the Student Wing of the Nihilist Party through Blue Glasses (1964-65; figure 65) and Art Is the Complement of a Weak Mind (1964-65; figure 66). All three contain the Nihilist Party colours, black and red. The prominent appearance of these colours in the three paintings constitutes a readily graspable connection between the works and the Party. It must be stressed, however, that in keeping with the non-constructive element of nihilism, the works do not explicitly address political and social questions or offer clear solutions. They merely contain hints and suggestions.

leaving the viewer to draw his or her own conclusions.

The mystic content of The Vision of Dr. Bucke has been mentioned above in general terms. There may, however, be a more specific relationship between Bucke's experience of cosmic consciousness and Curnoe's political interests.

Describing his enlightenment, Bucke wrote that he learned "that without any peradventure all things work together for

102

the good of each and all". This utopian vision is connected to the concept of the ideal society, a notion which was a part of many politically radical movements, including anarchism. In fact, in his book Bucke commented specifically on society, acknowledging the importance of social and political revolutions in improving the material conditions of life and generally uplifting humanity.

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Curnoe has demonstrated his interest in the relationship between Bucke's ideas and society. In 1989, in the Sao Paulo Biennial catalogue, he wrote: "will the constant and accelerating addition of facts and connections to our cultures lead to Dr. Bucke's 'Cosmic Consciousness'?"

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Curnoe's question implies the belief that cosmic consciousness is a desirable state, achievable in our world, resulting in the harmony of free, co-operative association. This is clearly a goal for which anarchists, including himself, are still striving.

The second work in the trilogy is Looking at Three Members of the Student Wing of the Nihilist Party Through Blue Glasses (figure 65). The element of looking or vision

NOTES

- 1 Curnoe, Greg, Personal interview, Appendix II,
p. 192.
- 2 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 201.
- 3 Kidd, Bruce, "Bruce Kidd Interviews Greg Curnoe," The Canadian Forum, LIII:631, Aug. 1973, p. 24.
- 4 Curnoe quoted in Pierre Théberge, Greg Curnoe Retrospective (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1982),
p. 24.
- 5 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 192.
- 6 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 182.
- 7 Weiler, Merike, "London: An Interview with Greg Curnoe, Viewing What Comes Naturally," Artmagazine, VIII:3, May-June 1977, p. 14.
- 8 Brock, Elison, "Political Implications in the Work of Greg Curnoe," Unpublished term paper, Course 11:506*, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1982, p. 14.
- 9 Chandler, John Noel, "More Words on Curnoe's Wordly World," Artscanada, XXVI:2, Apr. 1969, p. 8.
- 10 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," p. 24.
- 11 Curnoe quoted in "Ten Artists in Search of Canadian Art," Canadian Art, XXIII:1, Jan. 1966, p. 64.
- 12 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," p. 24.
- 13 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," p. 24.
- 14 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 192.
- 15 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," p. 27.
- 16 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 192.
- 17 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," p. 26.
- 18 For example, Pierre Théberge in Canada: Greg Curnoe: XXXVII International Biennial Exhibition of Art, Venice (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), pp. 128-129.
- 19 Théberge, Greg Curnoe Retrospective, p. 23.

kind of universal harmony which anarchism upholds as a political ideal, and which cosmic consciousness reveals as the fundamental state of grace attainable by humanity. Curnoe's vision, as portrayed in this work, is not a mystical experience. It shows him that the goals he seeks must be pursued in the here and now in co-operation with his colleagues in the Party. In addition, there is the suggestion that the painting is about his own relationship to the Nihilist Party. More specifically, it suggests that he sees himself in the role of showing the Nihilist Party to others through art. By looking at these three members, and painting what he sees, he allows us to see them as well.

An alternative interpretation of the work also involves the explicit presentation of the scene as something perceived by the artist. This manner of depiction brings to mind Nietzsche's theory of perspectivism. This idea is that objective reality and absolute truth do not exist apart from human interpretations.¹⁰⁶ Instead, Nietzsche thought that individual perception was the way each human being constructs reality for him- or herself. Thus, he thought the senses are very important in that they reveal "becoming, passing away, change".¹⁰⁷ Curnoe's work may reflect this view in that it shows the scene as the product of the senses of one individual. This seems like a possible stance for Curnoe to take, because it has an affinity with the extreme individualism of the anarchist view. In this interpretation it is fruitless to look for an ultimate meaning for the

work, because, following Nietzsche, it could not exist.

The final work in The Nihilist Party Trilogy is Art Is the Complement of a Weak Mind (figure 66). There are at least two possible interpretations of the title. It may be a humorous insult directed at high art, echoing the anti-art attitude of Dada. Alternatively, it may suggest that art is more closely connected to the intuitive, spiritual sphere, than to the cognitive dimensions of the mind. Curnoe's interest in the cartoon tradition is evident in the simplified outlines of the figures. The painting shows three nude figures, two males and one female, in varying states of sexual arousal. The work tells us that each figure is wearing "The Sanden Electric Herculex No. 7 Belt", which seems to be a factor in their sexual excitement. The device is named in the upper-right section of the painting, and a printed advertisement for it is glued to the canvas at the lower right. The painting seems to present artificially-stimulated sex as an activity for our consideration. How are we to view the scene which is placed before us?

Because of the work's inclusion in the Nihilist Party Trilogy, one is tempted to view it as one of three things: a comment on our own society, a revelation of the ideal society or a suggestion of how to achieve utopia. As a critique of our society, the work could be a condemnation of unnaturally-induced sex, commercial exploitation of the sexual impulse or withdrawal from genuine sexual encounters.

It seems doubtful that the painting is an attempt to portray ideal society, because of the inequality among the three figures. The male at the left is unaroused despite his belt, and the rays emanating from the collar around his neck may suggest pain and constriction rather than pleasure. Likewise, if the work can be seen as positing the attainment of utopia through sex, it would seem that only some will be able to achieve it. As stated previously, Dr. Bucke discussed the possibility of attaining cosmic consciousness by means of drugs. He concluded that although one could achieve a similar state through artificial means, one could only experience full revelation through spontaneously-occurring cosmic consciousness. Thus the three protagonists of the painting would seem unable either to have a mutually satisfying sexual experience or to find spiritual and social harmony through artificial sex.

A final point of comparison between Wieland and Curnoe involves the mysticism and spirituality in their works with political subject matter. We have seen that Wieland's spiritual sensibility is tied to Canadian nationalism through nature and the Arctic, in a manner reminiscent of Harris' formulations of these ideas fifty years ago. Curnoe's mystical interests, on the other hand, seem more related to international ideas which link theosophy, anarchism and the concept of the ideal society. The spiritual dimensions of both artists' works need to be studied further to establish the precise connection between

spirituality and the political and social subject matter in their art

To summarize the political and social subject matter in the work of Greg Curnoe, it is primarily involved with his critique of Canadian nationalism; his anti-Americanism, particularly his opposition to American cultural influence in Canada, his regional conception of this country; and his interest in nihilism and anarchism. A summary of the comparisons which have been made between the work of Wieland and Curnoe reveals that unlike Curnoe, Wieland has been a strong Canadian nationalist because of her belief in the importance of finding the key to national unity and identity, which can assist in strengthening Canada against foreign domination. Wieland, like Curnoe, has displayed anti-American attitudes in her work, but they have been more specifically tied to the actions which she believed the United States has been taking against Canada, rather than being related to ongoing American cultural influence in Canada, upon which Curnoe has focussed. Both artists have demonstrated an affinity with Pop Art, but both have modified the style by personalizing it and using it to bear particular messages. Words are used evocatively and poetically by Wieland, who employs them to express a love of country, to make understated critical positions and to awaken the spectators' minds and emotions. Words are used in a more rigorous manner by Curnoe: the thoughts expressed are often complex and blatantly critical with a more fully-

developed intellectual dimension than is seen in the texts used by Wieland. Finally, both artists have alluded to mystic thought in their political works: Wieland in relation to her nationalism and Curnoe as a complement to his anarchistic utopianism.

NOTES

- 1 Curnoe, Greg, Personal interview, Appendix II,
p. 192.
- 2 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 201.
- 3 Kidd, Bruce, "Bruce Kidd Interviews Greg Curnoe," The Canadian Forum, LIII:631, Aug. 1973, p. 24.
- 4 Curnoe quoted in Pierre Théberge, Greg Curnoe Retrospective (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1982),
p. 24.
- 5 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 192.
- 6 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 182.
- 7 Weiler, Merike, "London: An Interview with Greg Curnoe, Viewing What Comes Naturally," Artmagazine, VIII:3, May-June 1977, p. 14.
- 8 Brock, Elison, "Political Implications in the Work of Greg Curnoe," Unpublished term paper, Course 11:506*, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1982, p. 14.
- 9 Chandler, John Noel, "More Words on Curnoe's Wordly World," Artscanada, XXVI:2, Apr. 1969, p. 8.
- 10 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," p. 24.
- 11 Curnoe quoted in "Ten Artists in Search of Canadian Art," Canadian Art, XXIII:1, Jan. 1966, p. 84.
- 12 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," p. 24.
- 13 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," p. 24.
- 14 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 192.
- 15 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," p. 27.
- 16 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 192.
- 17 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," p. 26.
- 18 For example, Pierre Théberge in Canada: Greg Curnoe: XXXVII International Biennial Exhibition of Art, Venice (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), pp. 128-129.
- 19 Théberge, Greg Curnoe Retrospective, p. 23.

- 20 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 197.
- 21 Weiler, "An Interview with Greg Curnoe." p. 13.
- 22 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 185.
- 23 Théberge, Greg Curnoe Retrospective, p. 23.
- 24 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 196.
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- 26 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 194.
- 27 Théberge, Greg Curnoe Retrospective, p. 74.
- 28 Curnoe, Greg, "Feet of Clay Planted Firm in the USA," The Canadian Forum, LVI:681, May 1976, pp. 9-11.
- 29 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 181.
- 30 Théberge, Greg Curnoe Retrospective, p. 50.
- 31 Curnoe, Greg, Letter to the editor, Artforum, VII:3, Nov. 1968, p. 4.
- 32 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," p. 26.
- 33 Curnoe interview, Appendix II, p. 202.
- 34 Lord, The History of Painting in Canada, p. 233.
- 35 Kidd, "Kidd Interviews Curnoe," pp. 23 and 27-28.
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- 38 Théberge, Greg Curnoe Retrospective, p. 18.
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- 40 Curnoe quoted in Robillard, "L'affaire de la murale de l'aéroport," p. 44.
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- 52 Curnoe quoted in "Ten Artists," p. 64.
- 53 Curnoe quoted in Théberge, Greg Curnoe Retrospective, p. 10.
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CHAPTER IV

THE INTERPRETATION AND EVALUATION OF THE WORK OF JOYCE WIELAND AND GREG CURNOE IN LIGHT OF MARXIST ART THEORY

Marxist aestheticians have always been interested in the relationship between art and society. Other radical philosophies have also dealt with this relationship, but in Marxist aesthetics the issues involved have been most hotly debated. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to examine the work of two artists explicitly concerned with social and political subject matter, in light of questions which the Marxists have raised and the often conflicting answers they have given.

Marxist aesthetic philosophy has been particularly concerned with the problem of the interpretation of works of art. Should art be viewed as a reflection of the society in which it is produced or as an autonomous system of laws and relationships, unconnected to social conditions? Conservative Marxists have taken the first view, pointing to Marx's basic statements of historical materialism, emphasizing that the cultural superstructure is completely determined by the material and economic substructure. Interpreting a work of art is simply a matter of setting it in its cultural context and bringing out the causal links. On the other hand, some Marxists have claimed that art has a certain autonomy, and have acknowledged the need to incorporate in the study of art an interpretation in terms

of its aesthetic character. Leon Trotsky saw both aspects in art. He wrote:

To a materialist, religion, law, morals and art represent separate aspects of one and the same process of social development. Though they differentiate themselves from their industrial basis, become complex, strengthen and develop their special characteristics in detail, politics, religion, law, ethics and aesthetics remain, none the less, functions of social man and obey the laws of his social organization. 1

At the same time, he emphasized the aesthetic nature of artistic creation by calling it "a changing and a transformation of reality, in accordance with the peculiar laws of art".² Arnold Hauser, in addressing the question of the utility of the sociological approach to art, stated:

...the sociology of art also has internal limitations. All art is socially conditioned, but not everything in art is definable in sociological terms. Above all, artistic excellence is not so definable; it has no sociological equivalent....All that sociology can do is to account in terms of its actual origin for the outlook on life manifested in a work of art, whereas for an appreciation of its quality everything depends upon the creative handling and the mutual relations of the elements expressing that outlook. 3

Obviously the work of Wieland and Curnoe is closely connected to problems and interests in Canadian society during the 60s and 70s. This was a period when several issues were being vigorously discussed. Given the wide differences between different parts of Canada, especially, although not exclusively, between French and English, should Canada remain a single whole or should it be divided? If it remained a single political entity, what should its character be? To what extent was Canada dominated by

American influences? Were they harmful or beneficial? Should Canada become economically nationalist? How could Canada's air, water, soil, flora and fauna be saved from the growing environmental threat posed by steadily-growing resource exploitation and industry? In light of the issues being raised by the Women's Movement, should the role of women in Canadian society change? If so, how?

As already noted, Wieland proclaims a vision of Canada as sharing natural and cultural aspects from coast to coast. Curnoe, on the other hand, sees Canada as a series of autonomous regional cultures. Both artists explore the relationship between Canada and the United States in their work. Wieland's art raises ecological issues and displays an interest in feminist concerns. Curnoe's work includes aspects of nihilist and anarchist philosophy, which, while not part of Canada's political debates of the time, demonstrates his interest in wide-ranging political issues.

For example, Wieland's Water Quilt (figure 8) makes direct reference to two of the issues mentioned above: Canada's economic and political sovereignty in light of American interest in our resources, and the imperiled state of the northern ecology. The work is thus informed by issues arising from some of the major political debates in Canada at the time of its creation. Curnoe's For Ben Bella (figure 45) displays a similarly strong engagement with contemporary political issues. It both refers to W.L.M. King, who was Prime Minister of Canada for various periods

in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, and to the political situation in Canada during the sixties. Whether the country would survive as an independent entity or whether it would become part of the United States is the central issue raised.

One must say, then, that fully to appreciate the work of Wieland and Curnoe much of it must be placed against the background of the political, social and moral concerns of their day. In explaining the work of these artists, art historians of the future will be obliged to identify the major themes and questions of the sixties and seventies in Canada, which today most of us still take for granted. Both artists are deeply concerned with these issues and without knowledge of this context a crucial element of their work would be lost.

At the same time, it would be a serious mistake to see their works as fully and completely interpretable in these terms. Their work has an autonomous aesthetic dimension. Wieland's Water Quilt (figure 8) explores materials, techniques and visual patterning which contribute to the character of the work, beyond its political interests. The work is arranged as a pattern of white cotton squares, eight wide by eight long, laced together to form a grid. Each square accommodates both an embroidered design and a block of words printed on cotton. The properties of cotton and thread and the techniques of sewing, embroidery and printmaking are utilized to construct a visually varied and

aesthetically interesting object. Curnoe's For Ben Bella contains not only political subject matter, but also elements of the Pop Art style, to which previous reference has been made. Curnoe's interest in colour, particularly the ways it can be applied, blended and juxtaposed, is an obvious aesthetic component of the work. Also important are the use of collage, the combination of image and text, and the integration of painted and three-dimensional elements. If it is true that the work of Wieland and Curnoe must be interpreted against the background of the contemporary social and political situation, it is also true that it must be seen, as shown above, against the background of such art movements as Dada, Abstract Expressionism and Pop.

Marxists have energetically debated another question which, though it plays a more peripheral role in understanding Wieland's and Curnoe's art, sets the stage for what follows. The question is: can art bring about political or social change? The form in which it has been most debated, particularly in the late 20s and early 30s in Russia is: must art be censored? On the one hand, if art is part of the ideologically and ultimately materially conditioned part of the superstructure, then no censorship should be needed since inevitably art reflects these conditioning factors. Art will change as culture and, more fundamentally, the economic situation changes. On the other hand, if ideas are effective, then art must be recognized as an ideological weapon of great power and hence subject to

direction. These are large questions, not easily and briefly answered. It seems to have been Marx's view that, in fact, art is a model for humanity's creative activity.⁴ Here he seems to have been influenced by Schiller's⁵ conception of art as play.

Joyce Wieland believes that art does have a role in bringing about changes in politics and society. She emphasized in the early 1970s that she felt a sense of responsibility specifically through art for the survival of Canada.⁶ She acted on this to produce her "True Patriot Love" exhibition, which sought both to inculcate a love of Canada in the spectators and to point out some of the dangers which threatened the survival of the country. More generally, Wieland's convictions about the vital contribution which the artist can make in expressing a country's nationalism have been mentioned in Chapter II.

In addition, Wieland has said that she conceived of her artistic activity in the late 1960s as commenting on what the Canadian government and Prime Minister were doing.⁷ Her "Reason over Passion" quilts (figure 4) and film (figures 7 and 27) were part of this commentary. These works all featured Pierre Trudeau and may have suggested a contrast between his intellectual and rational approach on the one hand and the wildness of the Canadian landscape on the other. While living in New York, Wieland founded an organization called "Les Activistes Culturelles Canadiennes", which was primarily comprised of Canadian ex-

patriots in the artistic community. The group staged various activities to make fun of Trudeau, Canadian authorities and American views of Canada. Les Activistes presented Trudeau with the La raison avant la passion quilt and, as a kind of humorous performance art, hired a Brooklyn native to dress as a Mountie and sing "Rose Marie" as a New Year's greeting to the Canadian Consulate. ⁸ Wieland has always used humour in her work, and thinks it provides an effective means with which to reach an audience. She once said: "The humour worked with a lot of the art. Humour got ⁹ people interested, and being radical isn't enough either".

When asked specifically if she thinks that art can and does change society, Wieland said she believes that art can have a role in social change at the level of the ¹⁰ individual. People can be affected by what they see and, particularly if they are artists or writers or involved in other creative activities, they can communicate these ideas in turn. She also thinks that art can liberate people from old conceptions, but acknowledges that art's effects on ¹¹ society are slow and impossible to measure. She thus sees art as having an effect at the level of consciousness, rather than being closely tied to political action.

Curnoe's creative activity has been identified with the "sense of the explicit role of art as the bearer of a living ¹² message". Curnoe, in fact, has used art to communicate a desire for political change in works like Untitled (1982; figure 39), discussed in Chapter III, with its references to

American domination of Canada; Vote Nihilist, Destroy Your Ballot (figure 62), which criticizes the democratic electoral system; Family Painting No. 4 (figure 38), which includes Chartier's manifesto; View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series (figure 55), with the reference to an American plane being shot down by Canadians; Map of North America (figure 54), which omits the United States completely; and It Was Perfectly Normal (figure 40), with its exposure of the Americanization of Canadian education.

Curnoe says that in his work he both simply reflects what is around him and expresses a desire for change. "My work does reflect a lot of what is available to me, but I do express political sentiments in my work which say how I would like things to be".¹³ In response to a question about whether or not art is capable of changing society, Curnoe said that he thinks art can either reinforce or undermine the culture of a country, using culture in its broadest sense to mean, as he said, "the sum of everything that goes on in a society".¹⁴ Art is the product of society, Curnoe says. If it genuinely reflects the society from which it comes

then it strengthens the culture. And that's how it can have an effect. But if it doesn't reflect the culture, if it's alienated and reflects things that it thinks are better from elsewhere, then that tends to tear down the culture. So that in that sense I think art can change society.¹⁵

In the most positive sense, then, art can strengthen a sense of self and belonging for people in a society and can assert

both the value and values of the society in which it was made.

Thus, although both Wieland and Curnoe believe that art does have an effect on society, they acknowledge that its ability to bring about change is limited. A recognition of art's limitations in this regard has caused the two artists to extend their activities from the production of art to involvement in other forms of action. This is consistent with the views of some Marxists. Egbert notes that in the Marxist view, the non-artistic activities of the artist are important because of the belief that all human activity is closely interrelated.¹⁶ Benjamin stated that what he called "the operating writer" has a "mission...not to report but to struggle; not to play the spectator but to intervene actively".¹⁷ The historical tendency of artists to establish their own revolutionary organizations outside of political parties has been noted.¹⁸

Various aspects of the activism of both Wieland and Curnoe have been mentioned previously. Both were active in the formative stages of Canadian Artists' Representation (CAR). Curnoe was one of the founding members, along with Jack Chambers. CAR established coalitions with such diverse groups as farm workers, athletes and native people in order to work through "coalitions for united action".¹⁹ The big rally at the St. Lawrence Centre to raise money for the Cree Indians was a CAR-sponsored activity. Wieland also worked with the Committee to Strengthen Canadian Culture, which was

formed out of CAR and Canadian Liberation Movement members. The organization was established to fight the appointment of American Richard Wattenmaker as Chief Curator at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1972. The Committee forced an unprecedented election of the Gallery's Board of Trustees, and Wieland was the one artist elected. Wieland was also active against Bluma Appel of the Secretary of State, who was working to get more American art into Canadian museums. Both Wieland and Curnoe fought against the establishment of the Henry Moore Wing at the AGO, supporting instead the idea of a Tom Thomson Wing. Wieland was also involved in the boycott of and demonstration against an exhibition at the AGO, sponsored by the Reed Paper Company, one of the major polluters of northern Ontario. In addition, she was concerned about the hiring of Americans at Canadian universities. Presently she is a member of the Committee of '94, which hopes to find a woman to become Prime Minister by that year. Wieland has said explicitly that she supports the notions of using social and political action in conjunction with art-making, and of involving the non-artistic community: "Making a statement in Art that will be political doesn't have to be through any standard way. It can be combined with action, making posters, wall pieces, etc. If you bring some creativity to the situation you can involve people, and get outside your own Art structure". 20

Beyond CAR and its activities, Curnoe's activism has been centered around the Association for the Documentation of

Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada and the Nihilist Party and Band activities. Dennis Reid has specifically commented:

His involvement in the Nihilist Party of London, Ont., which engages in various community efforts, such as family picnics, and which campaigns on a "destroy-your-ballot" ticket at every election, is central to this concern. The Nihilist Spasm Band, which plays every Monday night at the York Hotel, a local London beer hall, is another situation that he uses to reach, involve and be involved with a wider public. 21

Another question with which the Marxists have been much preoccupied concerns the role art should have in society

If one grants that art can have an important role in shaping attitudes, how should this role be played? Should art be explicitly propagandist or should it be, using the Marxist term, discreetly tendentious? Hauser thought that art can express its messages, which for him always equate to social aims, in either of these two ways: explicit avowal ("the frankly tendentious") or implication ("unconscious and

22 unacknowledged ideology"). In his view an explicit message was more effective the less blatantly it was expressed. Frederick Engels, too, supported disguised tendentiousness in art. In a letter to Margaret Harkness on the subject of her novel, City Girl, he wrote:

I am far from finding fault with your not having written a purely socialist novel, a Tendenzroman, as we Germans call it, to glorify the social and political views of the author. That is not at all what I mean. The more the author's views are concealed the better for the work of art. 23

There is no doubt that Wieland and Curnoe intend their work to play a political role in the sense that they wish to change attitudes and thus society. They have made their

aims clear both within their art and in writings and interviews. Many of Wieland's and Curnoe's works are frankly tendentious, with explicit partisan viewpoints. Wieland's quilt, Défendez la Terre/Defend the Earth (figure 25) and Curnoe's For Ben Bella (figure 45) signal the artists' opinions loudly and clearly. Not all of their works are so blatant, however. In some cases the complexity and subtlety of the work force the viewer to study it carefully before the political or social message becomes clear. An example in Curnoe's oeuvre is True North Strong and Free Nos. 1-5 (figure 37). It is immediately apparent that the statements and question are making suggestions about both internal aspects of Canada and its relationship to the United States. But further thought may be required in order to interpret the meaning or possible implications of the sentences. For example, the name "Chartier" might require a viewer who is unfamiliar with it to take steps to identify the reference.

In other cases, while there is obvious reference to a social or political issue, the message of the work is inescapably ambiguous. Wieland's "Reason over Passion" quilts (figure 4) have an ambiguous resonance in relation to her feelings about Pierre Trudeau. Likewise, Curnoe's Family Paintings (figures 38 and 56), with their juxtaposition of the attempted bombing of Parliament and family life at the cottage, are open to a variety of interpretations. All of these works contain text, but the

words do not necessarily make the message obvious or clear. Text can be used either to clarify or to obfuscate, depending upon the artist's intent. It should also be noted that Wieland and Curnoe are sometimes less transparent in their views than might be expected, perhaps because of their reluctance to support major political parties. Wieland has denied affiliation with any political party, and Curnoe, with his membership in the Nihilist Party, has chosen to ally himself with a group whose aims and beliefs seem deliberately to be kept little known and unclear.

Even in cases where the political or social message is quite explicit, it may be reinforced and strengthened by the context of the work in which it is set. An example in Wieland's oeuvre is The Water Quilt (figure 8). The excerpts from Laxer make very clear what would be the most likely political, economic and ecological results of an American takeover of Canadian Arctic resources. The text is lucid and didactic, although at a purely discursive level one could better assimilate the verbal communication by reading Laxer's book as a book. Yet the context which is provided for Laxer's texts by the rest of Wieland's work adds a poignant dimension which makes the message even stronger, even while it partially veils the texts. The white cotton pillows suggest the snows of the Arctic landscape. Their interconnected arrangement may refer to the interrelations of the northern eco-system. The delicate colours and fragile forms of the embroidered plants suggest

the preciousness of Arctic flora and emphasize that an invaluable legacy would be lost to Canadians if the American ambition to control Canadian resources were to be realized.

Curnoe's Dorval mural (figures 41-43) also displays political subject matter reinforced by aesthetic form. The Pop Art convention of juxtaposing text and pictorial representation assists in clarifying the work's anti-war theme. The account of children dying in an air raid placed next to images of happy, healthy children and parents reinforces the pathos of war. The choice of the dirigible shape, the inclusion of wire mesh and a propeller, and the careful drawing and labelling of many of the parts of an airship cause the work to resemble a flying machine. The three excerpts of text which involve the military use of aircraft are made more vivid by being incorporated into a work which itself looks like such a craft. The bright colours, vivid patterns, simplified shapes and cut-out forms of this work give it an apparent gaiety and light-heartedness. It looks at first glance like a work made specifically to appeal to children. The anti-war message is all the more poignant and urgent when couched in such aesthetic form.

Which of Wieland's and Curnoe's works with political subject matter are the most effective: the ones which are explicitly propagandistic or those with more discreetly expressed messages? It should be noted that a considerable number of Wieland's and Curnoe's politically-oriented works

contain some degree of ambiguity. Wieland's works involving Pierre Trudeau are among her most seemingly unresolved. The "Reason over Passion" quilts (figure 4) have been mentioned above. Her Reason over Passion film (figures 7 and 27) juxtaposes a sustained image of Trudeau, computer-scrambled versions of the title phrase and moving pictures of the Canadian landscape. It implicitly asks, but does not explicitly answer, the question of the relationship among these elements. Much discussion of Wieland's work among art critics centered upon her "Reason over Passion" works at the time of their creation, with many opinions offered as to her viewpoint. Thus, discussion was stimulated about Wieland's view of Trudeau's national leadership. Likewise, Wieland's national symbol works, including O Canada Animation (figure 14), Flag Arrangement (figure 16), O Canada lithograph and O Canada quilt (figure 21), seem to be about the anthem and the flag. Yet it is clear in each case that the artist has in some way distorted or re-formed the familiar symbols. The anthem is shown as a series of mouths or as cloth words which break arbitrarily at the ends of lines; each of the four flags is distorted in shape and proportion. Again, the question arises as to why a nationalist artist has thus depicted national symbols. The answer may involve Wieland's affection, hence the mouths, and her belief that Canada was imperiled, hence her use of distortion and arbitrary breaks. Moreover, Wieland's nature works often contain nothing more than pictures of plants and/or animals. Arctic Day (figure

6), 109 Views (figure 24) and Barren Ground Caribou (figure 26) "are examples of this direct pictorial approach. Yet the reverence the artist feels toward nature and her strong opinions about preserving it do make themselves apparent through colour, scale, shape and other elements of form. Wieland has acknowledged a desire to combine the political and aesthetic in her work by stating: "I wanted an art that could embrace these [political] concerns and also retain beauty, texture, humour and such. Then, there was either one or the other..."²⁴

Curnoe's For Ben Bella (figure 45), cited above as a blatantly partisan work, does contain ambiguity and humour which form an integral part of the painting and tend partially to mask the message. The question of the identity and significance of Ebert is bound to arise. In addition, although the reference to the Liberals selling out Canada to the Americans is very clear, the significance of some of the people named around the perimeter may initially elude the viewer. The black humour of the reference to King's dog, Pat, and the use of the vibrator itself also tend to conceal the central point which is made. One would not argue that the message is inaccessible, for it is made explicit by some features of the work. But some of the elements mentioned above tend to encourage the viewer to draw his or her own conclusions about the work.

It appears that even the most openly propagandist works by Wieland and Curnoe are complex; more typically the

message is either ambiguous or discernible only with some effort and attention. From this point of view, at least, Engels and Hauser would likely regard these works as effective.

Another aspect of this issue which has much concerned Marxists is the artist's choice of medium. Marx emphasized the utility of political cartoons, murals, great buildings, monumental sculpture, theatre, film, parades, pageants and posters, all of which produce objects or constitute events which are large, attention-getting or distributable.²⁵ Both Wieland and Curnoe have deliberately chosen media which enable their messages to reach a wider public. Political cartoons and drawings by Wieland were published in The Canadian Forum and Time Magazine in the late 1960s and early 1970s.²⁶ Her quilted hangings are installed in such public places as the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information in Ottawa and the Toronto subway. Her experimental films tend to receive limited exposure, but she made a feature film, The Far Shore, in an attempt to bring her message to a larger audience. Moreover, she was involved in the creation of posters sold in 1973 to help raise money for the Cree Indians of northern Quebec. Curnoe, too, in a more limited way, has attempted to work in such public media, although many of his submissions for public commissions have been rejected. These include the Dorval mural, the Benson and Hedges tobacco mural, designs for a stamp and an Olympic poster, and illustrations for

Milton Acorn's More Poems for People (figures 49 and 50). He did, however, produce illustrations for two volumes of stories by David McFadden, The Great Canadian Sonnet (figure 53) and Animal Spirits (figure 40); his Map of North America (figure 54) became the cover for the Winter 1973 issue of the Journal of Canadian Fiction; and his True North Strong and Free, Nos. 1-5 (figure 37) provided both the title and cover illustration for Ian Lumsden's Close the 49th parallel etc: The Americanization of Canada, published in 1970. It should be mentioned that both artists acknowledge cartoons and comic books as sources of artistic inspiration. Both drew cartoons as children, and both have incorporated cartoon imagery in their work with political subject matter. The mouths in Wieland's O Canada Animation (figure 14) have a cartoon-like quality, as do Curnoe's drawings for the McFadden books (figures 40 and 53). This connection reinforces both artists' interest in emulating popular formats with wide circulation.

Much of Wieland's and Curnoe's work is in neither ephemeral nor widely-distributed media, but rather in the more traditional formats of painting, sculpture and drawing. Some Marxists defend this choice in terms of political effectiveness. John Berger, a contemporary British Marxist, regards the established media of art as eminently suitable for engaged works. He distinguishes between works of art with short-term impact and those which have long-term effect.²⁷ He characterizes short-term works as those which

have an urgent, temporary, propaganda function, such as films, posters and cartoons. But he thinks that works with long-term effect are ultimately more valuable. These must be complex, expose contradictions and "define the totality in which ambiguities of reality exist".²⁸ In Berger's view, it is the traditional media of art -- painting and sculpture -- which provide the ideal vehicles for these long-term effects. These "media for permanence" can take their place with great works of the past and can speak with the authority of tradition.²⁹

Of the two artists being studied, Curnoe, in particular, has relied heavily on the traditions of painting, drawing and printmaking. Even the Dada-inspired assemblages of his early career aped forms which had become part of the canon of artistic creation fifty years after they first appeared. Wieland concentrated on painting only in the early 1960s and the 1980s. She experimented with other media in the late sixties and seventies, particularly textiles, as we have seen. Her textile pieces, although untraditional as fine art, do have a certain element in common with painting. They are hung and displayed in the same way and have been shown in the same contexts as paintings. In addition, like paintings, they will survive for centuries if properly conserved. They are treated like any large two-dimensional works of art, despite their derivation from another tradition.

Another of the concepts which is central to Marxist art

theory is realism. Whether their concerns are basically propagandistic or artistic, Marxists have been primarily interested in the relationship between art and society, and they have had a fundamental preoccupation with how external reality is perceived by humanity and the ways in which it is translated into art. Perhaps the best-known statement is by a Marxist whose ideas are nowadays described as "vulgar Marxism"³⁰ Andrei Zhdanov, writing to explain Stalinist Socialist Realism, stated that "it demands of the artist a true, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development".³¹

Several Marxists have drawn a distinction between realism and naturalism.³² Berger calls naturalism an unselective mode of representation, presenting the immediate scene with a high degree of believability. Its aim is to conceal the artistic medium in order to produce an illusionistic replica.³³ Hauser stressed naturalism's concern with superficial, ephemeral and nonessential external characteristics,³⁴ and Georg Lukács pejoratively identified naturalism with description: "stasis, inertia, lack of selectivity, preponderance of mere matter, abstract objectivity".³⁵ Realism, on the other hand, is selective according to Berger. It attempts to construct a totality,³⁶ using the medium as the artist's ordering consciousness. Likewise, Hauser commented on realism's connections with "life, substantiality, social and humanistic significance".³⁷ In short, naturalism is little more than

technical virtuosity, while realism attempts to encompass the total social reality, exploring the most significant aspects of our world.

Among concepts associated by Marxists with realism in art are the notions of insight and essence. Lukács believed that "literature not only represents social reality but should represent the very structure of society, provide an insight into its organization, and, with this insight, a feeling for the direction of its development...." ³⁸ Arvon, in analyzing Engels, raised the ideas of phenomenon and essence, which he clarified as follows: "According to Marxist doctrine, essence is the sum total of the principal internal aspects of a process, whereas phenomena are the immediate outward expression of the process" ³⁹ By linking surface reality and hidden reality, said Arvon, art enables us to acquire a more profound understanding of the world around us. ⁴⁰ Marcuse linked the concepts of essence and art very directly, stating that art reveals "the essence of reality...." ⁴¹

In the Marxist conception of the term, the work of Wieland and Curnoe is not naturalistic in that it does not contain unselected material or strive for trompe l'oeil effects. It does, however, fit the Marxists' view of realism, in its concern with revealing the essence of Canadian society and illuminating its problems.

Many critics have commented on Wieland's ability to reach the essence of her subjects. She has been called an

artist "who probes experience with such intuition and
 passion that she somehow breaks through the surface of
 things...."⁴² In a similar vein, her recent Portrait of
R.G.N. Laidlaw has been said to contain "hints of reality
 beyond appearances",⁴³ and Wieland herself has said that
 painting the portrait gave her "a chance to get the essence
 of that man".⁴⁴ More generally, Wieland has said that what
 she has striven to accomplish in her art is "a really
 sensitive combination of all areas of our life; Canadian
 independence, northern mysticism, organic farming, sex".⁴⁵
 It may well be that her greatest contribution has been her
 ability to combine such aspects of our reality, including
 nationalism, feminism and nature, in order to provide us
 with a more profound and complete understanding of the
 Canadian situation. Her film, Reason over Passion (figures
 7 and 27), has been characterized as an attempt to explore
 "the dichotomies between political appearance -- Trudeau's
 often contradictory position and goals -- and geographical
 reality, the literal immensity of Canada".⁴⁶ In forcing us
 to look at our country as a totality of political, natural,
 mystical and human elements, Wieland gives us insight into
 the reality of Canada. She posited a possible future for
 the country, which she envisioned as negative, in The Water
Quilt (figure 8). Even her recent works have been seen as
 explorations of the deepest levels of human reality: "the
 roots of human emotion".⁴⁷

Curnoe, too, has attempted to penetrate surface

appearances and reveal reality in his art. Not content just to show American domination in Canada, Curnoe has tried to illuminate its underlying causes, including Canada's complicity in the situation. In addition, he has explored the hidden implications of American influence, such as its homogenizing effect, which inhibits the development of a variety of cultures, and its imposition of American cultural standards in Canada. He supports a critical examination of the country in terms of its relationship with the United States and its own self-image. It has been said that in emphasizing the regional character of Canada, Curnoe exhibits a true understanding of the political, geographical, demographic and cultural reality of the

⁴⁸ country. In addition, by choosing to portray his region, Curnoe has been said to be "giving advice about the need to belong, about knowing where you are".⁴⁹

By attempting to break down barriers between art and life, Curnoe has tried to link art with various "unaesthetic" areas, such as society, politics and ethics.⁵⁰ Like Wieland, he has attempted a wide-ranging synthesis of concerns which affect Canadian, and indeed, human reality as a whole.

The problem of universality and historicity in art is an issue which has concerned many Marxist aestheticians. Marx's philosophy of history, "historical materialism", seems to imply that all values are relative to a particular class and a particular period. Nicos Hadjinicolaou explicitly accepted this view in stating that works of art

continually become the loci of new sets of values for new
observers as⁵¹ the social conditions change over time. On
the other hand, some much-quoted statements by Marx contain
a very different emphasis. In the Economic and
Philosophical Manuscripts, he stated that humans create
according to the laws of beauty, implying that the
principles of artistic creation are timeless and
universal.⁵² In the Introduction to the Contribution to the
Critique of Political Economy, he noted the universal
admiration for Greek art and puzzled over its apparently
timeless power:

...the difficulty is not in grasping the idea that
A Greek art and epos are bound up with certain forms
of social development. It rather lies in under-
standing why they still constitute with us a source
of aesthetic enjoyment and in certain respects pre-
vail as the standard and model beyond attainment. 53

Some contemporary Marxists have attempted to reconcile
the coexistence of universality and historicity in art.
Lukács recognized the presence of both universality and
"specificity",⁵⁴ and called art the "vox humana; the truth
of the historical moment for the life of man".⁵⁵ Fredric
Jameson wrote: "...there is in reality no contradiction
between the 'eternal' value of a work and its profound
historicity; on the contrary, the two are for Marxism
one."⁵⁶

In Wieland's work, the Canadian themes clearly relate
to the historical situation of Canada in the 1960s and
1970s. Indeed, the references to such events and situations

as Trudeau as Prime Minister, the first phases of the James Bay project and the American NAWAPA plan have already become dated. Nevertheless, the general issues of Canadian independence and development of the north are as much alive today as they were twenty years ago, when she first began to incorporate them into her art. The dimension of political subject matter which is most likely to survive in Wieland's art may be the general concerns which are identifiable apart from the specifics of Canada's problems in the late twentieth century. National self-determination, national unity, and respect for nature as an important part of one's affection for one's country are issues which will presumably always be significant in the life of this or any other country.

The expression of feminism in Wieland's art is rarely linked to a specific historicity. Wieland's recognition and adaptation of traditional female creativity in craft, and her contribution to the notion of women finding their own means of expression with which to enter history may also be considered of ultimate value. The feminist aspects of Wieland's art in part do reflect the rise of the Women's Movement in the last twenty years, but they primarily concern such timeless values as equality and dignity. Moreover, Wieland's early abstract paintings have been recognized as depictions of both women's reproductive organs and cycles, and expressionistic interpretations of sexual pleasure, aspects of human life which are universal and

timeless.

Wieland's paintings of the 1960s have also been seen as concerned with such sweeping concepts as time, motion,

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metamorphosis and transformation. Her most recent work

displays an interest in many of these issues and, according to Wieland herself, explores all-embracing themes such as nature, people -- more specifically the relations between

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men and women -- and cataclysms. In addition, there is a

spiritual element in Wieland's work which raises issues of humanity's relationship to both nature and the infinite.

While this does have a Canadian nationalist dimension, as discussed in Chapter II, it simultaneously has broader

significance. Wieland sees a connection between her work and Lawren Harris' landscapes, in which he was involved in

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"elucidat[ing] the spiritual path" through art. Some of

her paintings of the 1980s, such as Paint Phantom (1983-84; figure 67), have what she calls a shamanistic function,

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exploring deep recesses of the unconscious. This kind of spiritual and psychological sensibility is a universal phenomenon which transcends the specifics of time and place.

Curnoe, like Wieland, has commented on the current Canadian political situation through art. Underlying the specifics of his views, however, are issues of more general concern, such as the right of a country to define itself both politically and culturally. Curnoe has often narrowed his focus to one particular part of Canada, the London region. The specificity and extremely detailed nature of his subject

matter have been previously emphasized in several contexts.

These characteristics might seem to inhibit a strong universal element in his work, although there is a way in which all his art can be seen as containing universal

elements. It may exemplify Sanchez Vazquez' concept of⁶²

"universality...reached through the particular". Although

the artist's work reflects particular values and ideas, and

includes specific locations and objects, it can be universal

if it refers to values and ideas which some or all of society

may share, and resembles places and things with which other

people may be familiar. Curnoe himself resists any kind of

universal interpretation of his art. When asked how he would

react to someone seeing an object in one of his paintings and

being reminded of something in his or her own life, Curnoe

would not acknowledge such a process as common or natural.⁶³

He feels instead that it would be a blatant misreading or

overlooking of the well-defined subject matter which he had

Painted. In emphasizing his own region, however, Curnoe

stresses the regional character of Canada. He thus

introduces a general idea with broad application to human

beings' conception of their place in the world through a

particular manifestation of it. Brock even doubts whether to

the majority of spectators Curnoe's region, as depicted in

his paintings, is distinguishable from any other Canadian or

American region.⁶⁴ This view is not entirely justified,

because Curnoe almost invariably takes pains to point the

details out to the viewer, usually by means of explicit text.

It does suggest, however, that Curnoe's subject matter can strike chords of recognition and identification in his viewers, whether they are familiar with London or not. Although the topicality of Curnoe's political references will fade, his views on cultural sovereignty and the importance of regional culture in imparting a sense of belonging will likely retain their relevance for future spectators, as will his depictions of family, community and the objects and events of daily life.

Marxist art theorists have also been concerned about the relationship between the artist and the audience, both in general and specifically in capitalist society. Many Marxists advocated the elimination of barriers between the professional artist and the majority of people, who do not engage in artistic activity. In The German Ideology Marx and Engels wrote:

The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in a few individuals and its consequent suppression in the large masses is the result of the division of labour....the subordination of the individual to a given art so that he is exclusively a painter, a sculptor, etc., and the very name sufficiently expresses the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on the division of labour -- in a communist organization of society all this disappears. In a communist organization of society there are no painters; at most there are people who, among other things, also paint. 65

Benjamin, speaking of writing, advocated the public's access to authorship, so that reader and writer are no longer rigidly-defined categories. 66 He deplored the increasing specialization brought about by technological advances, with the result that the author or intellectual becomes a narrow

specialist, separating him or her further from the mass of the people: "...the limits imposed by specialization must be breached jointly by both the productive forces that they
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were set up to divide". Benjamin applied this theory not only to authors, but also to the photographer and the musician. He also advocated the role of the writer as teacher through his or her work. The author should teach others to become writers themselves, thus helping them gain access to the means of production -- publication and distribution -- to which the author already has access. "An
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author who teaches writers nothing, teaches no one" Berger discusses the role which the Russian Constructivists felt they were fulfilling immediately following the Russian Revolution. He says that the categories between artist and public were destroyed at this time, and the concept of the
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professional artist became obsolete.

Sanchez Vazquez identifies two distinct types of artistic creation in contemporary society: "cultured, professional creation by specific individuals in whom artistic talent is apparently exclusively concentrated, and
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the collective and anonymous creation of the people" He remarks that Marx and Engels admired both kinds of
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creativity, while particularly exalting the second He further emphasizes the rarity of this kind of truly popular art in capitalist society, which produces people who are
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alienated from both their labour and themselves. He praises individual creation by professional artists for

keeping alive some vestige of humanity's creative capabilities in a hostile environment.

Although both Wieland and Curnoe are professional artists who for many years have made a living by means of their work, they have both demonstrated an interest in the kind of popular, collective creation of which Sanchez Vazquez wrote. Wieland created the works in her "True Patriot Love" exhibition, the Barren Ground Caribou quilt (figure 26) and virtually all of her textile pieces with the assistance of craftswomen from various parts of Canada. Her interest in the traditions of popular women's crafts has been mentioned repeatedly. Wieland even at least temporarily eliminated the anonymity of the artisans who participated in the "True Patriot Love" exhibition by crediting them by name for their work. She has also referred to herself as teacher. She feels her exhibition gave these women "the sense of a better consciousness of what they were doing. I was trying to get them to do Canadian designs, and they really enjoyed it, and some of them kept on doing work that had to do with Canadian

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themes". In fact, she feels her work has had a general
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effect in legitimizing Canadian subject matter.

Curnoe has also shown an interest in local, rural creativity in Canada through the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada. In its exhibition in 1974-75, which Curnoe helped to organize, the work of several folk artists was featured, including that of sculptors Arthème St.-Germain from Thurso, Quebec

38 Lukács quoted in Wellek, Four Critics, p. 41,
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CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

In the Introduction three questions were posed. What political and social subject matter is found in the work of Joyce Wieland and Greg Curnoe? How should their art be interpreted? How can we evaluate the work of these two artists?

The first question, involving the identification of the principal political and social subject matter in their work, is answered in Chapters II and III. In regard to the second question, the interpretation of their work, Chapter IV, demonstrates the necessity of interpreting the work of Wieland and Curnoe from both a sociological and an aesthetic perspective. It must be viewed in relation to the major political and social issues of the period in which it was created. ~~At the same time~~, it must be seen against the background of certain artistic movements and interpreted from an aesthetic perspective. The third question, concerning the evaluation of the two artists' work, is answered by employing Marxist criteria. Their art satisfies several of these criteria and must be judged successful in these terms. Assessment from an aesthetic perspective is also appropriate, although beyond the scope of this essay

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW WITH JOYCE WIELAND

Toronto, Ontario

8 October 1986

BKS: When did you live in New York -- from when to when?

JW: From about the winter of '82 -- fall and winter we went to find a place and we settled in early '83 -- then we stayed till '70.

BKS: So it was seven to eight years approximately that you were there?

JW: Yes, probably more like eight.

BKS: Your disaster paintings and assemblages -- I read a comment you made about the general theme having to do with the American fascination with violence. Do you have anything else to add?

JW: Oh, no, they weren't all made in the States, and so it's really to do with a state of mind -- an obsession with death and accidents that I had for a long time. So you find sailboat disasters and the airplane and other kinds of disasters in my work. And there were some that were very much stimulated by that very big mid-air collision over New York.

BKS: A particular one?

JW: Yes, and I got fascinated with how you're here one minute and gone the next, the way children do. But because I was orphaned very young, I think there was always this kind of strain in my work: a theme of disaster that went through it, even though in some of the earlier works you wouldn't have seen that much disaster ~~per se~~, but there was a period in my life when I was obsessed with that.

BKS: It's interesting your mentioning the way a child would feel it, because there's a very child-like look to those works. It's almost like toy sailboats, and in your assemblages you actually use toys.

JW: Yes. It's innocence and loss and disaster. So that period reflected what had gone on much earlier, but it was dealt with in terms of art, and therapy, finally.

BKS: Would you say there was any connection between those disasters, which I guess were largely personally motivated, and Andy Warhol's disaster works?

JW: When did he do those?

BKS: I think he did those in the early 60s.

JW: 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.

BKS: Would you say that you were influenced by the Pop Art movement in general?

JW: I think I was finally influenced by that, because there are these comic-strip works like Cafeteria, and there's a whole period in there when I was certainly influenced by it.

BKS: Can you say why you decided to incorporate Pop elements into your work?

JW: Well, I think it was in the air, anyway. -- the acknowledgement of this sort of thing was going on amongst artists, and earlier than '60. It came into bloom with the stars of that movement. A lot of those things were very formal. They were not to do with the expressionism in my work at all. There was no expressionist side to it at all. It was really very much more formal and arranged -- Roy Lichtenstein, Wesselmann and all those people.

BKS: Do you think it would be fair to say that you have Pop Art elements in some of your works, but that your work isn't Pop Art?

JW: I think I received it in my own way. These things were in the air and everybody was tasting them: the ideas of Pop objects or comic strips or whatever. I took that and flavoured it in my own way, because I couldn't do it their way. Basically the whole movement was male and the 60s period was dominated by the male establishment and the big money scene. And also it was a very happy period, the Pop movement. So, when I did it, I did it my way, and it was kind of sloppy and grungy and it was the way I received it and the way I put it out.

BKS: Did you know all the major Pop artists when you were in New York?

JW: I met them.

BKS: Not as friends, though? Did you see them socially?

JW: No, I made friends in the movement that came slightly after that, like Richard Serra. I met Frank Stella, but I wasn't a friend of his. But you see it was a very snotty

scene after Pop Art. The way it became the "Golden Heaven" to which people aspired. To be with Castelli was everything. Carl Andre, Hollis Frampton -- there were a lot of people who were film-makers. Carl Andre -- he was the sculptor of the early 80s and developed a lot of the whole Minimalism thing, along with Don Judd. I knew him and I knew Andre very well and Andre liked my work. However, I did things my way and there was no way I could do things the way they were doing them. It didn't appeal to me. I knew it was good, and I knew it changed the tide of history for a while, but you know, big money changed that history. I mean the big galleries and the big bucks that went into the product. The importance of buying this particular product by these people allowed for them to be made into history.

BKS: Mythologized, almost.

JW: They are the history. Like Pop Art, and there are the leaders of that history, and then the Minimalist period, and so on. There was a lot of other work going on, but those big movements were it.

BKS: They were the leading edge?

JW: They were the leading edge, and that was what was sent to Europe, and that was what brought in billions of dollars. When it was written down, that was the history, the official history.

BKS: But you would now think that it was an incomplete history, because there were other things going on, too?

JW: There's always incomplete history. But when you have a main line with all that money behind it -- huge amounts of money from corporations and individuals buying this stuff -- that legitimizes it. What else is it but the history in terms of New York? But there's always so much else going on. I argue and I really am embittered about that kind of history. What embitters me a lot is that I was part of the avant-garde film movement, and we made films and nobody cared. We were part of a tradition that was started in America and that was very creative and very much involved with sharing amongst each other. It was the way I imagined that art would be and probably how the Cubists were. It was as important as the Cubist movement in that sense. I don't want to idealize it, but what was really sad at the end was that the artists -- Richard Serra and Yvonne Rainer and a lot of people that had been in other disciplines -- came into that movement and took it over, not because they wanted to take it over, but they found it fascinating and so they worked in that medium. None of the works initially were very filmic or very visual in terms of film. But then later the theoreticians took it over. They took the whole history of that movement, pushed it over to one side and said:

"We'll corner it with all the theorists." And then, the written word was God. So that October and all these other journals took over. Internationally it was co-opted by people who are word people. That was the final analysis right there. I think it was a very tragic thing that happened: handing down edicts and teaching in universities and telling students the word comes first. Their theories come before the students' visions. In the States they have literally dictated theory to students. Students will say, "We wish there was more feeling, more passion involved. We thought that's what art was about."

BKS: It's been pointed out in regard to your films that you use what they call "illusion-defeating devices." There are ways in your films that you remind people that they're watching a film, that they're not watching a slice of reality.

JW: Oh well, that's a whole tradition.

BKS: Well, I think it's true of your other works, as well. For example, in your textile pieces, you can see the stitching; you can really see the construction of the piece. The other thing, too, is that your use of words in your films and paintings and textile pieces also adds to that lack of illusion. Is that a conscious choice for you, to eliminate illusion to the greatest possible extent?

JW: It's really good to show how the piece is made. That's already a tradition. The knitted pieces and a lot of the embroidered pieces are very emphatic about examining that. In fact, the one of the knitted flags is not framed with glass. It's framed with heavy plexiglass which was pressed onto the stitches. So they're the subject, as much as the theme. They're the subject, as much as the subject!

BKS: Your piece called Man Has Reached Out and Touched the Tranquil Moon: is that a phrase that you originated or does it come from elsewhere?

JW: That was part of my propagandistic stance whereby I would make propaganda about what Trudeau had said. So he said that. I was acting as a government propagandist.

BKS: I'd like to ask you a few questions about your "True Patriot Love" exhibition. I feel there was a real sense of urgency on your part when you agreed to do that show -- a sense of urgency involving saving Canada, because you felt that it was in danger. I also feel that there was an attempt on your part to reach as many people as you could.

JW: Yes, that was a basic premise. I was sick of all these little groups, like little priesthoods of understanding, groups that believed in one theory or another, and I found

things drying up towards the late sixties. I also had been reading what the nationalist writers had been writing and I had been reading my own history again and had been very much involved with American history and various demonstrations and all kinds of political work there. Finally, when I took all this into consideration, I realized that the statistics looked terrible in terms of Canada surviving as a nation. I began to absorb that into my work and I did Rat Life and Diet in North America and then started the quilted works. The quilted works began in the early 80s, but in the late 80s I began to reiterate and go into a whole new phase of that, where the quilt was used as a political platform. Women's work was used as a way of announcing and speaking out against what was being done to the ecology and then eventually embroidery and all these things speaking out, referring to our history, referring to nature, referring to women's issues. There was a great urgency, I felt, basically in the terms: "Is there going to be a country left?"

BKS: And where was the threat coming from? Was it coming from the U.S.?

JW: The American takeover. When I came back here I began to work with CAR and also with other groups. That's when CAR formed coalitions with the farm workers of Ontario and the native peoples and the athletes. We had to pick up Toronto CAR first and get it going, and then we could work on various fronts and I spent years on that. And we went crazy -- you can't fight all those battles. But I tried to and there was a group in every city, with Greg Curnoe and Jack Chambers, all of us working together to try to turn the tide of the takeover of Canadian universities and the takeover of museums, which was a very real threat. I think it made a difference -- it staved it off. I think a lot of it made a difference; we held a fort there for a long time. Without the 20 or 30 people speaking out in this country and working and leading students and trying to interest people in the front, we probably would have had a complete takeover. I don't think there's any doubt about it.

BKS: What you did really raised people's awareness?

JW: I think we did a great job there and we were hated for it and still are and still laughed at. But I don't think our whole bunch will be laughed at later, that whole group which I've been in in many different cities.

BKS: Do you see that threat coming back again?

JW: It's always there.

BKS: Do you see a need for that kind of activism again or do you think the systems that you already put in place in that

period will help to control the problem?

JW: Well, they're not systems, but they were ideas and activities that were done: to see how rotten the system is for native people, for one thing.

BKS: Getting back to the "True Patriot Love" show: do you think that that show was a success as far as your aims were concerned, judging by the reaction it got?

JW: There were a few complaints about having ducks at the Gallery, but they were happy and cared for by the curator who did my show. I was overwhelmed at how well it worked -- everything. There was so much there: the sounds, the smells, the way it was hung, the way it was arranged, the space, the whole first floor of the Gallery. When I would leave the Gallery and walk down the street, because my picture had been in the paper every day for weeks, people would say: "Oh, you're the one! Do we ever like those quilts -- we love those quilts!" I felt, "Oh god, isn't it great to put it where it can be received." You could have a direct and an emotional communication, as well as with ideas. I think it worked on every level. Maybe things were referred to that some people wouldn't understand, but they would understand it visually and sensually. They felt they were taking away things, that they got things, they received things. And I had plenty to give, and that's what matters.

BKS: I think it's also the directness of your art that we were talking about before, that lack of illusion. I think it really helps to communicate with people who don't know anything about art particularly.

JW: I think that's why good art will survive. Great art, say Rembrandt, some people can see that at one level. But when I was taking tours around the Gallery during the Netherlands show, I discovered about 20,000 more levels of Rembrandt! People would look at the work, and I would say, "In this aspect he was 85 and this had happened and so you can see the man changing." As I'm looking at it I'm thinking, "Holy god! How did he do this? It's so complex." So there are many levels for whoever wants to take it at that. I think that's a test of greatness. So I'm learning about that now and how to get it done.

BKS: The catalogue for that show -- would you call that a kind of book art?

JW: Yes. It really has no information about me. It's so sad in a way that there wasn't a book that had something about my work. This has something about my work, but nothing about me as an artist.

BKS: It's funny that Pierre Théberge didn't put out

something.

JW: Well, he did this book, which cost quite a bit even in those days. Yes, it's a kind of an art thing.

BKS: It's really another work in the show.

JW: It's another work, yes.

BKS: Why did you choose to use that particular publication?

JW: Because that is an actual government publication, and I found the book and it had all the flora of the Arctic and I chose that as my platform from which to build another work. So that the floor or the earth was the book and then I built up things over it and into it.

BKS: There's an interesting notion in the interview at the back of the book, something that you say which is kind of a Marxist notion. You talk about having driven across the country and feeling that the land cried out to be claimed humanly.

JW: Or artistically.

BKS: The Marxists feel that when people are working creatively -- when they're not alienated and they're in touch with what they're doing -- they project themselves onto what they're doing; they project themselves onto nature or whatever it is they're working with. It's almost a process where they imbue that object with their own characteristics and learn something about themselves from doing it.

JW: So, an artist or an artisan can project themselves into it. Of course, that's what it's about. And later I read about "claiming the land", and I read recently about the Group of Seven saying something very similar about why they went north. It's like these ideas are around in our psyche in Canada...

BKS: And they crop up.

JW: 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.

BKS: Barry Lord wrote an article probably in Canadian Art or Artscanada, in which he said that one of the effects of Expo 67 was that it gave a great boost to the morale of arts in Canada, because there was so much Canadian art at Expo. The work was shown, seen by a lot of people, valued by a lot of

people.

JW: People were overjoyed at that. I remember people being in love with Expo, because it was us emerging..

BKS: Do you think it gave any particular boost to the arts?

JW: I don't know. I couldn't say. I know it was nice that we were all asked to participate. A lot of people were asked. But I don't know if it was enough or too little. All I know is it really did a lot for everybody.

BKS: Would you say that the "True Patriot Love" show was also about saving Canada from breakup if Quebec separated?

JW: I can't even remember if I said anything like that, but certainly I did have the death of Wolfe and Montcalm -- Last Letters -- and in a way it's meant to be an embrace whether it's the embrace of the whole country. I feel that way but not in the way that Trudeau would feel it or the way those people there were acting about it -- the government, I mean. But I felt for no intellectual reason at all that it should have all remained one. That's why the final piece would have been a big thing about the Arctic -- women across the Arctic -- and eventually one that went all across Canada, but it never got to that stage.

BKS: Why?

JW: It was too much. Like I tried to get that garden on the expressway and I got it through the City Council -- they liked it -- but I couldn't get the money; it was already too late. Fifteen thousand for the whole landscaping on the Don. It would have been beautiful. Several million people would have seen it. I want to have a man and woman dancing. The first one that I did was a woman.

BKS: So it's too late? There's no possibility?

JW: That was for two years ago. Now, maybe they would still say, "Okay, we will still pass it, if you can get the money to do it." I should start trying to raise the money but I have too many things to do. It probably could be done for as little as ten thousand, but you have to draw water from people's houses up there to get the water down.

BKS: Another thing that Barry Lord says about your show -- he's very critical of that exhibition in his book, "A History of Painting in Canada". One of the things he finds surprising about your show is the timing of it. It was in the summer of 1971 which was just after the October Crisis and the War Measures Act of the previous fall. You were obviously very concerned about Canada and Canada's survival and yet there was no reference to that in any way.

JW: Couldn't. I had only planned what there was. I couldn't go out and do a massive work about that when I'd just about done myself in doing what there was.

BKS: So it was a practical problem? It was just too late to incorporate that?

JW: It happened in the fall of the year before. I don't know. I don't know why. He's a catalyst, the biggest catalyst we've ever had. No, I guess I didn't do anything.

BKS: But was it something you felt strongly about?

JW: Oh, yes. It was horrible. It's a very big, deep scar. That's partly why I became more radical, because he -- what did he do to the American president when he came? He said something horrible to him, the president. I like someone who's so insane like that. No, he did some great things.

BKS: I'm wondering about your attitude about Trudeau. When you were making the film, Reason over Passion, and when you made the two quilted versions of the phrase, what message about Trudeau were you conveying in those works?

JW: I was saying that he had this reason above everything. And it really should be reason and passion in a person. But this man is only reason over passion, and ultimately, he's a psychopath.

BKS: You'd go that far?

JW: Oh, yes. That is a psychopathic type. Not that I say "reason over passion" is psychopathic, no. This man has a terrible imbalance. Though he believes himself to be so oriental and very balanced, he isn't. And what happens when people want the kind of power that he achieved in this country. It's psychopathic.

BKS: Is it true that you really dropped the French version of the quilt on his residence?

JW: No.

BKS: I read that somewhere.

JW: Our group in New York was going to do that. My friend, Mary Mitchell, and I made this association for Trudeau in New York, which was largely bogus. Our idea was to comment on what the government was doing. So she wrote plays and I did these things and we made up this big group. A lot of them were Canadians but they didn't even know why they were coming to this thing. We said we were coming to finish this quilt, so all these people came, and Norman Mailer came, and

all these Canadian actors came, and they were all sewing on it. We were playing at very deep levels, actually. They had to really answer to us, too, because we sent messages up to him. He answered with a film because he thought, "Well, these are really new-age people." And he thanked us on film. Screen Gems International, which was a big film conglomerate -- the president was a friend of mine. So we would make up these film messages or Trudeau would send one down. We would all come and look at it. It would say, "Thank you, Mary and Joyce." He wanted to be creative and catch up with what was happening in New York. But the basic thing behind saying "Reason over Passion" was that it was strictly a send-up. He was into the mood of that. He could get into the mood of the thing. Trudeau never saw this as a joke on him, though. The English quilt -- he just took it straight, as a compliment.

BKS: He owns the French version of the quilt, doesn't he?

JW: He's got the French version, and what's interesting is that different girlfriends of his have had themselves photographed in front of it. Not naming any names, they obviously see something funny about it. But I've heard it from several people that he really takes it seriously. I had to talk to him about something three weeks ago. And he phoned me back and he said that Arthur Erickson had just done his house up north. He probably spent a couple of million on that. He said, "We've just hung your quilt." And I said, "I hope it's not in the sun; I hope it's in the shade." He said, "It's in the shade."

BKS: Would you say that you were ever a supporter of Trudeau?

JW: Oh, yes. We were. Oh, yes, at the beginning Mary and I were.

BKS: When did that change? Was it based on any particular thing that he did?

JW: Well, I think when you see the narcissism. I mean, there is a wonderful brain, but when the heart is closed over then it's not much fun anymore. Once you've made the statement -- and a lot of people thought it was funny -- then what do you do after that when you find out that the person's heart is closed and that the War Measures Act could take place. I think we just got bored with it, but we had a lot of fun with it at one time. I made the film Reason over Passion, which is really passion over reason. And making fun of his statements in the beginning when the applause comes on. "Reason over passion, that's the theme of all my writings." Reason over passion in government was the first one. We were on a plane leaving that day when he got the leadership. And I just thought that was so funny. I said,

"Mary, I've got to make a quilt about this."

BKS: You once made a comment, I think, or I read a comment that was from you about feeling like Hitler's film-maker.

JW: Of course, Leni Riefenstahl was a very different kettle of fish. She really did believe, I think, in Hitler. Although it's really a shame because she was a great innovator, one of the great film-makers in the history of film and very avant-garde. But then, I got that notion when I kept thinking, "Triumph of the Will" and here I was editing Reason over Passion, and I said it's the same thing. "Triumph of the Will" and they say about Trudeau -- what can you say -- "Reason over Passion". Reason dominates passion.

BKS: Can you say what your Canadian nationalism is? Where it comes from? What does it consist of? What is it about?

JW: I don't know if I feel that way now. Where does it come from? Lucy Lippard has written the Introduction to my catalogue. She said something about naiveté: people accusing me of having naive nationalism. She said but what about Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. She said perhaps it takes this to become a nationalist or to do artistic things. She settled a lot of issues that I've been attacked for in this country. Nationalism is one of them. "The flag-waver. Here comes the flag-waver." And I wondered how they could criticize me when the whole goddam sociology department at Thunder Bay had been taken over by Americans teaching Black studies when Indians were lying all over the sidewalk. They didn't have a study program for that because they couldn't get it from Chicago soon enough. It's so stupid. I got so furious. I was so angry in those days. So I can't tell you where it came from. I just know that you can talk about Russian poets and the Revolution. You can talk about it in any country, and there is an artistic brand of nationalism. You want to get some respect for having been around and having been an artist in this country. In those days at the University of Windsor they were telling students when they asked about Canadian art, "There is no Canadian art." When the schools were just changing over to their American schedules -- all the textbooks in the public schools were American. So, my nieces and nephews didn't know anything about Canada. Some of them didn't even know there was an Arctic. People have graduated in the past twenty years who didn't know there was this or that or the other thing. They could say about Shevchenko, peasant of the Ukraine, "Oh, that asshole patriot! Trying to save the Ukraine!" Who's going to do it? If the artist doesn't get up and sing a song about it or tell people.

BKS: What effect would you say that living in the U.S. had on your nationalism of that period? It seems to me there must have been a kind of contradiction for you, living in

the U.S., which was where you perceived the threat to be coming from.

JW: I wasn't a patriot when I went there. I went there because it was The Apple and everybody from all the world was there. You know, you meet Nam June Paik, you meet these people from all these countries. Then I learned about that country and I got involved in that country's politics and I was involved in all the pursuits of the 80s there. But being an ex-patriot made me look at where I came from and that's the value of being an ex-patriot. You actually see where you came from: where it was, what it was, what it means to you and how it stacks up. So in the late 80s when I started re-reading history, I found the whole thing as my subject. I found all of it as my subject. Especially when it's across the border, because it's pretty horrendous living in the States. Especially when in your building they're searching people in the top loft and people are getting other people over the border and the cops are watching your building. The only time that building was ever guarded was supposed to be when Trudeau came to the party, but that was a week too late when a cop kept walking up and down in front of our block with white gloves on. It was a little belated.

BKS: You've said you're not a follower of a particular ideology or theory or party line...

JW: I can't -- I don't like it.


BKS: ...but you did use excerpts from James Laxer's book in The Water Quilt. Does that imply any sort of sympathy for the Waffle movement?

JW: No. I thought it was a brilliant book because it dealt with all the facts. The hard theories were that they had planned since 1953 to re-route all the major waterways south. Mad fantasies like that. It infuriated me to think that someone outside could be drawing plans for stuff like that. And that's what inspired The Water Quilt -- the stuff that he dug up.

BKS: So it was the information that he had in that book and the issues he raised rather than his own political stripes?

JW: Yes, he and the two or three others that were involved in writing books at that time and making sense.

BKS: I'd also like to ask you about your attitude to Pierre Vallières when you made the film on him. It strikes me that there's a contradiction in watching that film because I feel that you're sympathetic to a lot of Pierre Vallières' ideas and what he has to say, and yet the use of his mouth as the main visual component of the film -- the mouth of somebody



really isn't that attractive when it's that close. It seems to me there's a kind of sympathy and lack of sympathy at the same time.

JW: Oh, no. The mouth is about language. It was about dealing with the mouth of a person that was put in jail without trial for three years. My friend, Judy Stead and I were starting to work together in the early seventies and she couldn't interest anyone in doing a film journal story on him. We knew where he was. So she talked to him, and said, "We want to do this on you and it's going to be a different kind of film." So we decided to go there and find out for ourselves and deal with this person, and maybe deal with more Quebec stuff after that.

BKS: So the use of the mouth was...?

JW: Subject. Also, the teeth and the particular lower-class kind of accent or imbued with a kind of working-class speech. The teeth of a poor man. And the rolling of the tongue and lips -- the whole thing about what is a mouth. And what is this man, because he is an orator, and very good at it.

BKS: Well, and also the contrast between a man who hasn't been allowed to speak for a long time, or whose views haven't been accepted, then to blow his mouth up to the size of a whole screen.

JW: Yes, sure. But then the embroideries were doing that before. And the Nellie McClung stamp that I designed that they didn't want. That was her mouth, because she was a great orator. 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 was a very important book.

BKS: You certainly had concerns over the James Bay hydroelectric project when that was in the works --

JW: Did we ever. \

BKS: Did any of that ever make it into your art directly?

JW: No. I remember I did a print, though. We had that night at the St. Lawrence Centre where we all made prints -- many artists -- and we tried to sell them to pay for the native people's case against you-know-what. No, it was more organizing and trying to support these people. So many of them came down. And it was a very huge evening and it took a long time. We had all the ecologists there. The Drowning of the North Woods -- Richardson, who wrote that book, all those people were there. It was a fantastic night. Not a word in the paper the next day, not one word. This is part of what we went through. We were going nuts after a while.

We had to fight Reed Paper on the English-Wabigoon river systems. There was that exhibition. We didn't know quite what it was, but there was going to be an expensive catalogue. We were all invited and all of a sudden we found out it was sponsored by Reed, who for 23 years has been poisoning that system. So all the artists and many of the dealers marched into that gallery. I guess Reed got involved in the show to clean up their image, which can never be cleaned up now. They put up this big catalogue. So we came down and we demanded our works be taken out.

BKS: Where was that show?

JW: A.G.O. The night of the opening we were all across on the side where the Gallery is, packed solid. The cars would drive up but they couldn't get in. All the curators and other people were looking out through the windows and the glass doors, and nothing got by.

BKS: I think you've also been quoted as saying: "Canada died with Tom Thomson".

JW: Yes, the old part of it, the old ways and stuff like that.

BKS: That's what you meant, that a historical era died with him?

JW: Yes. And a whole generation died in that war. So it was something that it never recovered from, really. Vast numbers. We went in there, especially the Newfoundlanders. They thought they were still fighting for the queen -- Queen Victoria.

BKS: Do you think it's fair to say your work -- again, I'm talking about the work around the time of the early seventies -- that your work was really an attempt to develop a Canadian political consciousness? Not just for yourself, but to communicate that to other people in Canada?

JW: I think I was casting around trying to find out what was important or what was symbolic or what we understood as something we understood something about together. I think I was sorting out a lot of stuff for myself but on a very willing basis of communication.

BKS: How did you feel about getting the Order of Canada in 1983?

JW: Oh, I felt very pleased. I was surprised, because a booklet came to the house and I thought, "Isn't that nice. They sent me a book on what this Order is about." And I threw it in the garbage. Then I came and sat here and I thought, "Why would they do that? Isn't that a sick joke?"

So I went back and I found a piece of paper stuck between the pages and it said that I was invited to do this and did I want to. And something just made me feel great. I thought, "This is real recognition." So when I went there, I found it was a very democratic recognition. From the poorest people -- I'm telling you, really amazing -- to people who ran the oil companies. It was a big swath, right through. Those were the people that got the award. A man who had led an orchestra in Shawinigan Falls for forty years -- it was a youth orchestra. That was his doing, and he came up and he was all bent and he had white curly hair. I forget his name, Monsieur whatever. He received it. And a woman who'd taken 400 children into her house during her life, including the retarded. She'd just acted as a public service on her own. And then right up to the very wealthy -- all kinds of people. And it was just so moving. I can't tell you. It was so moving. And I was very honoured, really. I don't think you'll find many people who were not really honoured. Margaret Laurence felt the same way.

BKS: The reason that I ask the question is because of the fact that you've been critical of the government, you've been critical of the authorities at certain times. And that's really where the award came from.

JW: No, actually, it doesn't come from them. It's done by people who write in about you or people who suggest your name and then it's put before judges. Not just a committee, but judges of the Supreme Court. But they hear from your peers. So I don't know who wrote in about me and how that happened. And it's supposed to remain secret. So they asked me whether I wanted it and I found out later how it worked.

BKS: I had something else to say about the "True Patriot Love" show, which had something to do with Barry Lord's criticisms of it in his book. He said that he felt there was a trivialization of Canada's national symbols like the maple leaf and the flag in the way that you presented them in that show.

JW: Well, I don't think about Barry Lord or anybody else. I think about how I can communicate with people. And I think since about 1967 -- 1968, really -- I have been more concerned with communication than most artists are on a general level to people. I know I reach them because I get that response from them. And I don't think of who I am going to please. I think about who I can tell this to.

BKS: On that topic of communication by artists: it seems to me a small percentage of people actually go to galleries and look at art. Is that a problem for you since that's where your work is mostly displayed?

JW: People that like my work, they come to see it. And I'm pretty happy about that. I don't know most of them, but when I have a show I make sure that everyone knows it's on, because it's not very often that I have a show for one thing. The last show, the big coloured drawings show, had more people in it than any other gallery showing my work ever had. That went on through the duration of the show and it was wonderful. Wonderful to get the feedback.

BKS: I know that lots of people do come to see your shows, but there's a lot of other people, obviously, that you're not reaching for various reasons; because they don't live here, they can't come to those galleries. Does that bother you?

JW: It's so hard just to get a show. I've hardly been in any museum shows. I was in the '71 show. I was in a few group shows. But I've never had a show in the Ontario Gallery in my life. I've been in two or three group shows; that's all I've ever been in. So it's very hard for an artist to wish to communicate and then find the doors closed or find -- how can I send it to Victoria? I don't have the money to ship it there. But my retrospective will go to different places. Not the places I'd hoped. Montreal -- it didn't work there and it didn't work in a couple of other places that wanted it. It's not easy to communicate on the level that we'd all like to. We've had meetings over the years -- Boyle and Curnoe -- how we can make prints that we could sell on a broad basis. That was the big struggle in the seventies, but you know, people tried it and John Boyle put an ad in a magazine and nothing happened on a broad basis. We could never make it work. Because it has to be real cutesy-pie, too. And then, you have to sell it world-wide and you have to sell it for cheap.

BKS: And you risk becoming so commercial that it turns into something that you don't want to say.

JW: There's nothing to say in a lot of that stuff. What does it say? Nothing.

BKS: I'd like to ask you a few questions about your quote-unquote feminism. A lot of critics have called you not only feminist, but the feminist par excellence of Canadian artists. Would you agree with that terminology or that description?

JW: I don't know.

BKS: Do you have difficulty with that term: "feminist"?

JW: Well, if it were true, I'd have a hard time accepting it.

BKS: In what way?

JW: I mean I want to avoid it. But it's because I was well-known to begin with that when my involvement -- it was my turn to become a feminist, in a way. That started in the 60s in New York. My first consciousness-raising wasn't till '71, so my works became more and more feminist and they became more known than others, maybe because I was more well-known to start with. I think my greatest feminist involvement was the creation of the women's work, which I did long before Judy Chicago.

BKS: Yes, as Susan Crean has pointed out in an article.

JW: I think there are a couple of interviews in the 60s which point to who my mentors were and I said I had a hard time -- I wanted to be part of my female line. My mother was part of my female line and she sewed, she made things, and my sister made quilts. I had a hard time looking at history, because I was one of the first people to take a look at history and find no women. I chose the writers, the women writers, and I followed and had them as my idols.

BKS: What was your interest in the Empress Josephine?

JW: Oh, the part of a woman with a famous man. And historically how women were dealt with when they wanted to get rid of them.

BKS: Is there much that you can find out about her that doesn't relate to Napoleon?

JW: No, there's not much. I mean, everything's known about her. I mean, I don't think she kept journals or anything like that. But it's pretty well in the light.

BKS: You say in Sandra Paikowsky's recent catalogue for the show at Concordia that you feel that Nevelson's concept of a kind of feminine sensibility in art perhaps applies to your work better than the word "feminist".

JW: Feminism wasn't around. It had been lost after the whole Victorian thing, but I have feelings about Nevelson and her boxes and stuff like that, because I had always loved to make little nests and things like that, and women do. I've seen it in all the art schools. They may hide them, but they make them. I really could relate to what she did. I know that when she was really arriving in the early 60s, the men had a real tough time calling it art because it wasn't this pure form of this and this and this and this. But they had to let her in. They had to give her some glory. But, boy, very, very few women got that. And there was always this ambivalent attitude towards Nevelson amongst men. But in terms of feminism, I say "feminine", yes. Her

femininity in the strength of those boxes and the big walls.

BKS: I've got another factual question to ask you. Joan Murray says in an article that the first exhibition that you ever had was called "The War Between the Sexes" and it was at Isaacs -- I know it wasn't called Isaacs then.

JW: No, it was a dual show. Rayner and Wieland.

BKS: Rayner and Wieland, yes. And was that the right title of the show: "The War Between the Sexes"?

JW: No. She calls it that.

BKS: Do you know if that show was reviewed anywhere? I know you were both young artists at that time.

JW: I don't know. I don't remember seeing anything.

BKS: The imagery of your stain paintings of the early 60s: would you say that it's fair to say that it combines both a notion of eroticism or sexual pleasure and a more biological depiction of women including their role in birth?

JW: The womb. The womb as a giant space. That's in a couple of them, yes. I think they have to do with women's cycles, especially the big one in the Ontario Gallery. When I did those I never thought -- I just felt the urge to make those paintings. Especially a couple of them, the one that's like a big egg. I felt a real urge. I love it when that happens. It's very rare for most artists, I think. I had to -- It's like wanting to put some mandala out there. And so I did them and I never thought about them as wombs. And afterwards, sometimes only maybe a year later, you see what a painting is really about. And that's what they seemed to be about: cycles and wombs and eggs.

BKS: But still, you had a great need to make those at the time?

JW: A very deep need to make those. Probably because I was childless.

BKS: I would just like to talk a bit more about your concept of women's work, which is a phrase that you've used several times. If you could just expand on that a bit. What does it encompass?

JW: Everyone uses that term lightly, but I have great respect for that, my mother having done that and my sister. And then, I saw these big fairs in the Maritimes, when I taught out there, seeing the range and the amount of work; I was so moved by that. And I've known that this is going on everywhere, in every place, since I was as young as I can

remember: women making things. Also, I remember seeing some big American quilts at Expo, and they were elevated there. They were Mennonite or whatever and they were placed around inside the Bucky dome. It wasn't till later that the idea of giving this work its rightful place came to me, and the idea of entering history with the quilt as a political platform for political statements, and the re-emergence of Laura Secord and so on and so on. I look back now and say, "Yes, why shouldn't it be elevated?" It's already something great which ties women together and society.

BKS: I'd like to ask you a few questions, just at the end, about your current work. It seems to me that there's a certain amount of difference between the work that you're doing now -- the work of the 80s -- and the work that you were doing back at the time of the "True Patriot Love" show in the early 70s. Would you say that your current work has an overall theme, and if so, what would it be?

JW: Well, it's been changing for a long time. Coming out of the nationalism, coming out of the women's work -- women's art -- as a platform for politics. A lot happened after The Far Shore, and I've told this to many people that I've been interviewed by. Like having a complete breakdown and having a hysterectomy during the film and then just falling apart, and trying to get myself -- I can hardly talk about it. But I had to mend myself and get psychiatric help. And the breakdown of my marriage, all of these things concurrent. So through that, the coloured drawings came to me. And it was as if they came as a gift. The coloured drawings don't relate, in a way, to the ones that were made for The Far Shore, because I went to the Arctic before the coloured drawing series happened and I rediscovered something about light, or I discovered something about light. I did a print there of an Eskimo woman, an artist, and I intended that we would do one of each other, but it's just really difficult to explain that and why you'd want to do that. But she allowed me to draw her with her baby, and then when I came back, I picked up the coloured pencils again, and that's when the whole healing process took place for me: that 2 1/2 years when I did these drawings. I didn't know it then, but I was actually making a bridge to a new link. It was through these beautiful colours, and especially the rose colour, that I healed myself. The themes in those drawings joined together everything that I'd ever been involved with or loved, so they synthesized. Then from those drawings later came the paintings, which didn't exactly reiterate every theme in the coloured drawings, but they started a whole new phase, a different style of painting than I'd ever done. About nature again, about people, about struggles between men and women, about cataclysms. And a knowledge of a certain kind of sky I liked, about trying to paint that. And then, after that, I was able to do very, very shamanistic works that were very deep, about my relationship

with my father, being, and all kinds of struggles that were going on, but it took me about two or three years to get to the point of making Paint Phantom, say, or The End of Life As She Knew It. So now that phase seems to have gone and I now don't know. I'm completely flipped about the whole thing. Except one painting now dedicated to Hildegarde of Bingen, probably one of the greatest artists and scientists who ever lived -- and a woman. She lived in the 1100s in Europe. I was completely inspired by this woman's writing. It's so fresh and so joyful. I made a painting called Arroser, which in French means you water something or a mist. It's 14 feet long and I did it in one night. It's just like sending this mist out, a rose mist and a green mist across everything. So it's almost like a very abstract painting. A lot of people don't know what to do with it; other people can get it immediately. So you see I'm struggling. I have to really just keep doing it. But it's just like I don't know where to go; I don't know what I'm doing.

BKS: Does it worry you to be in a period like this or does it excite you?

JW: It scares me, because I just don't know where I'm going. I've never had anything as strong as this. I want to feel safe and do a still life or something! It's not good for product. Your product must always look -- but mine never looks the same, so it's hard for people to know. "Is she losing her oysters or should we invest in this?"

BKS: Where has your concern with Canada gone, or has it not gone?

JW: It's synthesized. It's totally synthesized in the coloured drawings and in all the works. It's pulled everything in. I love those paintings from the '83 show. And I didn't know if I could ever translate the coloured drawings into paintings. But I just let it go and gradually I went into them.

BKS: Do you think it's fair to say that the work you're doing now is more inward-looking and the work that you did back in the early 70s was more outward-looking, in terms of communication?

JW: No. They're very fragile, those coloured drawings. They're very secret. You have to go into them. You have to look at them and get close to them. Whereas the paintings: they're more out. But neither is difficult.

BKS: Are you making any films now or has your film-making stopped?

JW: No. I'm finishing old films. There have been two

finished in the last couple of years.

BKS: There's one of your recent works that I've read about called Experiment with Life. Somebody said that it was about "the physical and psychological horrors of experiments on humans to see how they would react to nuclear war". Is that what it is about?

JW: I think it's what people do with chemicals. They experiment. Vietnam was a great experimental ground, to depths that they never dreamed -- agent orange and the babies that were lost. And now in the Maritimes, there are constant experiments. Without extreme paranoia, we're being experimented with all the time.

BKS: You have said before that there are some artists you feel have had major influence on your work. Could you name some of those?

JW: Oh, I like Chardin's work a lot. Whether anyone would see a direct influence. The mystery of a still life and that all things are equal. He has a respect for inanimate objects. I think he's one of the greatest that ever lived. One of the great works at the Ontario Gallery is his Jar of Apricots I think. And Tiepolo came in before the coloured drawings of the late 70s and that's when I was really aroused by that work and I began to love it. I have a few books, but there's very little in colour on Tiepolo. I met the guy who's the biggest scholar on Tiepolo. He lives in Vancouver. But I didn't learn anything more from him. There's very little known. But I love his work. He's just considered a decorator, but to me it's far more wide-ranging than that. Rembrandt. In the last three years I've been overwhelmed by what I see in that. And Watteau. And now the one I can't find much out about is Fragonard. But the Louvre is going to have a retrospective of him. And there are many, many others.

BKS: What about contemporary people?

JW: Well, I think when I went to New York, my favourite and I think the most important artist in the last twenty years in the States is Claes Oldenburg. I think he's the most unique, the most powerful, the most marvelous artist. But in my earlier days with my husband, we were influencing each other in very different ways. My one dream was to become myself. I performed one experiment when I had been married about two or three years. I fell in love with Miro's work and I started to keep this book on Miro beside me and every day I'd look at Miro, because I didn't want people to say, which I'd heard people say in New York when I went there on a visit, "She's pretty good for a woman. She's not a bad painter herself -- in relation to her husband." So I didn't want to hear that. I was adamant. I've seen that painters'

wives were considered second-class, and that many failed and dropped out. Everybody dropped out in my generation except for two or three people. They just disappeared. And I thought, "Fuck that, boy. They're not going to deny me!" But it certainly didn't help me in the way I wanted.

BKS: If you had been single in the early 60s, instead of being married to Michael Snow, do you think you would have gone to New York?

JW: I don't know. I know I would have travelled. I went to France to work on a chicken farm. I think I probably would have gone to Europe more than to New York, but I'm really glad that he wanted it so strongly. I didn't want it as much. But I'm glad that I did go and I'm glad that he wanted to do that. It was really wonderful, and there were many people in many ways who influenced me very much, because largely of who they were -- many were film-makers. They were just great human beings. They lived in abandoned buildings under the Brooklyn Bridge. It was amazing. There were at least ten people there who changed my life forever -- wonderful human beings.

BKS: Do read what is published about your work on a deliberate basis or a regular basis? Do you keep up with what people are saying about it?

JW: Whatever I get I find out. I mean, if it's in the paper I'll read it. But usually I go like this: "NO! AAAAAAAH!" Especially with ambivalent writers. Needless to say, I don't have to name them, but male ambivalence drives me crazy. They like you in one paragraph, and kick you in the ass in the next. It's horrible! But there are very few intelligent, balanced people who are actually sane, who can look at you and say I see this and I see that, who don't come in with axes and neuroses. Very unhealthy, people in art. Power-mongers. And critics are lazy swine, anyway.

BKS: Do you think that art -- you can either talk about your own art or art in general -- can and does change society? I mean, can art have a real effect on society?

JW: It's supposed to. I mean, don't hold your breath about it! I really don't know. I think there is a community kind of thing and that certain people can influence and you can see them taking an influence. I've received and taken influences, so it must; it must. One maybe can't make a diagram of how, but I know that I saw Oldenburg and I forever loved his work. He's dried up now like a lot of middle-aged men, but not some of them.

BKS: Some people say that even though art can't necessarily change specific things about society, it can change the general climate of opinion that affects everybody.

JW: If it affects a couple of people, especially creative people, I guess it's very powerful, but I don't know how you can register it, except if you see an artist influencing another and say, "Oh, they got some nectar from that person and that'll help them to grow." So maybe we can only think of individuals having growth from each other and that is the most important thing of all. So many people are inclined to think of statistics. I think it's perfectly useless to think that way. The Pop Art movement went around the world instantly, but I don't know what it did. I guess it liberated people in some way from the old.

BKS: How do you feel about your public commissions like Defend the Earth at the National Science Library, hanging where people see it every day, coming in and out of that library?

JW: That's wonderful; that's successful.

BKS: And the caribou in the subway, for example.

JW: It's in a very poor place. I wish they could move it. I think that people like it and they need it. It's a very necessary thing. That's why, when I wrote my essay, I said you need in the technological bowels of this thing, you need a reference to nature and especially a reference to Altamira, but done in terms of a quilt. I feel very strongly that it should be moved to the Bloor Station or where children can see it, where you're not just dragged onto a train immediately. You can't even see it properly. But I feel very strongly. I feel the best thing we ever did was the Science Library, where the warning is very clear: "Défendez la Terre".

BKS: And the right people are seeing it there. That's the beauty of that. It's just in the right spot.

JW: Yes. I'd like to know if there's anything people have said about that who have used that Library. I'd really like to know.

BKS: I was wondering about doing this in the subway, today, but I could also do it in the Library: park myself in front of the work and ask people as they go by, "What do you think of this?" Just to get some spontaneous reaction.

JW: You know, you've just given me a wonderful idea. We can't take that quilt out for the show, but why don't we have someone go up and do a video? If only we'd done it for the sculpture garden, the garden of the lady, the goddess garden that I did at the Guild. She's called The Venus of Scarborough. If he had been able to keep the place, he would have had me do it every year. We had wonderful

comments on that. When it was not even finished, a woman from India and her children went by really slowly, and she got about twenty feet away and she turned around and she said, "Is that a lady?" And I said, "Yes!" Apparently people would come to the guardbox at the Guild, and they'd say, "Where's the lady? We've come to see the lady." Isn't that great? When I heard that I was so happy. Maybe I can get the money to do the woman again.

BKS: Do you think your work, generally speaking, has gotten the kind of critical reaction that it's deserved?

JW: No.

BKS: You think you've been badly served?

JW: The films have been analysed and all treated in the States. There are younger writers now who are writing about films that have never been written about by Canadians, and they're good articles. About my art -- well, what can you say? There's been nothing in any art magazine since 1971, except there was a little reproduction and a putdown of Mozart and Wieland. You could look through those, you could go through a computer and see my name mentioned, maybe, in them. But -- nothing. Only the newspapers. The only reason why people come to my shows is that they read about it in the newspapers.

BKS: And Maclean's magazine, for instance. Joan Murray writing in Maclean's magazine.

JW: Only because of Joan. She did two articles in the last few years. But in terms of the art magazines -- zilch. I mean nothing.

BKS: And why is that, do you think?

JW: You tell me. And there's nothing in the schools. There's not one book on my work. The True Patriot Love catalogue doesn't tell you about my life or how I achieved this or why I did that. It's an artwork. So, there's not anything on my film. A teacher in Vancouver would have to take the trouble to go to the library and find a clipping. There's nothing on my artworks. I was very bitter for a long time. Finally, I thought, "You fucking bastards! Why would this be so?" To not write about the Paint Phantom! Well, the curator of "Toronto Painting" wrote about it. But that painting was talked about amongst artists a lot. It was Gerta Moray who said I was performing a shamanistic purpose in throwing this extremely personal painting out. She said it's having an effect. But no one touched it -- not one. About Paint Phantom people said, "What's happening to her?" My student went up and she said, "I want to hear what they're saying." They'd say, "This is Joyce Wieland!"

What's happened to her?" It was the best comment I ever heard! They got the message -- something really happened! It did! But there was a really bad putdown -- Parachute has never mentioned my name. Once! They wrote an article by a feminist who came in -- big boots on -- and she wrote an article on a Marxist viewpoint and it's hideous! These critics are all lazy and very shallow, unable to take a stand about what they believe. They're always worried about: "What do the Marxists think? Am I going to be right?" They're worried about their asses. They're cowards. No one risks anything at Vanguard. I'd just like to get out there and make some changes -- knock their bloody blocks off! I didn't make that painting for that reason. I made it out of my own suffering and to get more self-knowledge. People laughed at The Artist on Fire at that show at Harbourfront. And the one with myself acting out Artemis, no one's ever even mentioned that it exists! And there have been photographic shows. Nothing. But the point is, it's nothing compared to what some artists, some of these people, have been through. When I just look at that bookshelf, I say, "Forget it, man, you're lucky to be painting. You're lucky to be doing this stuff." And some of them only lived to be thirty-four. And Mozart, he's a very didactic artist. A very great teacher. It doesn't matter that it's about music. You learn about painting.

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW WITH GREG CURNOE

London, Ontario
15 December 1986

BKS: Would you talk a bit about the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada? I know you were one of the co-founders of that organization.

GC: Pierre Théberge and I started that.

BKS: Is it still going strong?

GC: Well, it's kind of a dormant thing, but it's still going on. As far as I know Pierre is and I am still quite interested in the material, and still get stuff. I still look at things and still take slides occasionally. That's about all it is is a collection of slides that we own together, and we set up an association to disseminate the stuff. We brought out one issue of our journal -- I'll give you a copy of our first issue. We've never followed it up. But then, he's gone on to other things, and I have, too. But I'm closer to what I was doing than he is to what he was doing.

BKS: So basically it's images of...

GC: Well, it's not just images, it's collections of writings: journal writings by some folk artists and collectors and eccentrics.

BKS: How do you find these people?

GC: They show up. You drive out in the country and you see something, or you read it in a newspaper. In the case of a man named Simmons -- he came from south of here; he collected stuff and wrote journals about selling it and buying it and looking after it -- I just read about it in the paper, and then we went out to an auction at his place because he'd died, and saw all this stuff.

BKS: That sounds fascinating. It sounds fun and interesting at the same time.

GC: Well, it is. It's like my work.

BKS: I'm wondering if you still feel as negatively about the U.S. as you did in the sixties and seventies.

GC: Absolutely.

all that seem pretty mundane, but at the time, when you had a whole lot of artists who were aping New York and Willem de Kooning and Jasper Johns -- not Jasper Johns so much -- it was unheard of for a so-called sophisticated visual artist to work with materials from his or her hometown. That was very unusual. So that was an oppositional point of view to take at the time, but it becomes funny when a university with a studio program teaches students Dadaism, and then students leave school and practise it. That is very sterile.

BKS: That's surely going against a whole fundamental principle of Dadaism. You're not taught it and go out and ape it.

GC: I was not taught it. In fact at school the teachers I had hated the whole idea. Some people paid lip service to it, but when I began to work on those principles I ran into trouble. I had a lot of trouble with certain shows because of that. I was threatened with being put in jail over one we did at the London Art Gallery. That's not the same as is happening now.

BKS: No, that's true. Well, this whole business of performance art has opened up whole new areas that perhaps back in the sixties would have seemed shocking.

GC: Yes, but performance art does also come from Futurism and Dadaism and I think a lot of it is that kind of stuff. It's an academic exercise, not really felt.

BKS: Are you concerned with communicating to a wide audience?

GC: Yes, definitely.

BKS: Do you see a problem in that in actual fact a small percentage of people actually go to galleries to look at art?

GC: Well, I'm more fortunate than most in that I've had a pretty big audience for a lot of my work. I know that a couple of my paintings have been among the more popular ones at the National Gallery. They're not paintings that I compromised to get that popularity, it's just because the things I was painting and the sources I was painting people could understand. I've always tried when I write and with my own work to be quite straightforward, to not mystify for its own sake.

BKS: Still for all, even though your retrospective travelled extensively, even though I know your art is popular to a certain extent, there are still an enormous number of people who don't go to galleries, who don't live

BKS: Are you negative about the U.S. per se or is it just in terms of the U.S.'s overweening influence in Canada?

GC: Well, it's the U.S.'s overweening influence everywhere. They tend to homogenize everything. But also, this is coupled with the tendency of many Canadians to just roll over when it comes to negotiating with the Americans for anything. So, I'm afraid for the citizens of my own country.

BKS: I understand that at one time you refused to exhibit your work in the U.S.

GC: I still do that.

BKS: Why is that?

GC: Well, I just don't want any part of it. What has happened in one recent case is that my work was borrowed from a museum with my approval to show down there. But I'd rather not show my work. It's a fuzzy principle that's gone on a long time. I have visited the States recently. Two years ago we took one of my sons to Port Huron. So, there are things like that that I'm more prepared to do now, to have a look at. But I do find that in recent years the situation has gotten very, very bad again. It always was bad, but I think that with Brian Mulroney in Ottawa it's gotten rid of any sense of independence that you had with Trudeau. Trudeau was a lot of things to different people -- they didn't like him -- but what I liked about him was that he was interesting and that he had ideas about the rest of the world. I think that Brian Mulroney is only interested in head office which is somewhere in Cleveland. So, that's why I'm afraid right now.

BKS: As far as exhibiting your work in the U.S., you don't see that as exporting a little bit of Canada, the influence going the other way?

GC: For me personally, no. I'm much more interested in getting my work into Europe. I'm much more interested in opening up international markets for my work, too, because that's very necessary. I don't think those markets exist in the United States. I think they do tend to exist in Europe.

BKS: Any particular parts of Europe?

GC: I think probably Germany or England. There would be a possibility of something happening there. I think, but I don't know, I'm only guessing.

BKS: Do you think the artistic influence of the U.S. has lessened? I know that the economic domination is very much there.

GC: Yes, it has. New York is not as dominant as it was. So that has lessened a lot.

BKS: Yes, I agree, too. I think developments are a lot less centralized than they were in the early sixties.

GC: Yes, things were far too neat with New York up until -- what was the last movement that was big there -- possibly performance art. But that whole succession of things has slowed down. It's no longer neat like that; it's no longer all coming from New York. And, in fact, what's been going on in my opinion is that it's seen now that calling New York the capital was like calling Paris the capital in the teens and twenties. It wasn't. There was a lot going on in Germany and Italy. Same thing now.

BKS: Many people who have written about your work have identified an American Pop Art influence in it. Do you think that's valid?

GC: Sure. I think you would probably notice more of an influence from Jasper Johns -- pre-Pop -- because my work developed at the same time as the Pop artists. I didn't know about them, but I knew about earlier American painting. I saw them when they happened, but I was looking very closely at Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, among other influences. They certainly weren't the only influences. So you would have to combine them with people like Stanley Spencer and Otto Dix; there's all kinds of people like that I had been thinking about.

BKS: It seems to me that there's a contradiction in the American influence in the style of your art. How do you reconcile its presence with your anti-American views? It seems that you're displaying American influence, and yet you're arguing that American influence in Canada is bad.

GC: Well, I don't think the influence is that strong in my work. I'm admitting to an influence obviously, because I know about American culture. But then I know about American popular music, too. But I also know a lot about Canadian popular music and European popular music. So, it's not a contradiction, I don't think. I don't think there's anything wrong with being influenced by another country's culture. There is something wrong with only being influenced by that country's culture. I think there's a case that can be made in my work that it's been influenced more by my own environment than it has been by cultures from other countries. But, I know about painting; I know about art. I'm not a primitive. But I think you're emphasizing the American influence too much in my work. I think there are critics who have done that. I think they're too quick to call me a Pop artist when, in fact, I'm in a very similar

position in some ways to Guido Molinari. There have been people who've said about him that he was too influenced by Gene Davis when, in fact, he was doing his formative work at the same time. That's the case with my work, too. So that anything that can be called a Pop influence -- I did it first! I was doing it in 1960, before anything was said about Pop Art.

BKS: So they were developing in tandem in a way: Pop Art and your art?

GC: Sure, they were. And the thing is that the mix of popular culture that I come from is similar to popular culture in England and in the States, but different. So you can see that in it. You can see that the popular culture I come from has other sources, but it does have some in common. Just as an English child would know about Superman and an American child would, I would. But an English child would know about the Beano, an American child would know about something else from the States and I would know about the Canadian Whites, Johnny Canuck. So, there are differences, too. But we're talking about popular culture in the English-speaking world, so there's bound to be some stuff that's in common.

BKS: Would you say that you're a reflector of what's in your environment and in your country and in the world, or do you seek actively to change things?

GC: Both. My work does reflect a lot of what is available to me, but I do express political sentiments in my work which say how I would like things to be.

BKS: It seems to me that those two elements definitely are there: your wish to change things and your wish to conserve and preserve things, because you do express enormous dissatisfaction and yet there's this other strain of family, family values, elements of your own past and also the actual records of times, dates and places that appear in your work.

GC: Well, part of that is because there's nothing that frustrates me more in buying a record album or looking at a painting or reading a book, than to not know when it was written or to not know when this music was played. I find that very important. I can place it.

BKS: The historical context.

GC: Yes, I can place it in context. Maybe not historical, but the context is important. It's particularly important if somebody's been working for a long time. For instance, if I go and buy a Don Messer record, it's nice to know when it was recorded, because he recorded for a long time. It would be interesting to know if it was recorded in the

forties or the fifties or the sixties. It tells me a lot.

BKS: Do you think either one of those two things -- the impulse to change or the impulse to conserve -- dominates, or would you say that those two things are balanced in your work?

GC: Well, I don't think that there's any problem with reconciling them. I don't think there's any problem with that. One could say that the desire to conserve is identical to the desire to improve. One could say that. Frequently what disturbs me is the wholesale destruction of things, and so when you see things that you value being destroyed, then you would speak out about it. So, if that's the case, they're part and parcel of the same thing.

BKS: Preserving what's valuable so that what's not valuable doesn't take its place?

GC: Preserving is the wrong word, though, because I'm not an antiquarian. I'm not all for preserving everything that's old. It has more to do with valuing things, and valuing the mundane frequently. As a Canadian or somebody living in Ontario, it's a matter of valuing things from here, which are very much undervalued. Things that develop here are just not valued.

BKS: Part of the defeatism, as you were saying.

GC: Part of the marginalism of being Canadian. We are on the margins of Western civilization. Are we a first-world country or a second-world country? Arguments can be made that we are a third-world country. We're on the margins; we don't count; nobody hears about us; nobody thinks about us. We're out in the sticks. We are receivers of culture, rather than senders. We are receivers of ideas, rather than senders of ideas. We don't originate anything. All of those things. I'm not saying this is true. I'm saying this is stuff that is said. And, of course, this is the very reason why you would start out by speaking to me so strongly about the American content and style in my work, because you would not be as aware of this tendency in English or German painting. You would be more aware of the tendency called Pop Art, because it came to us as an American form. That's the reason that many Canadian artists run into this. I know a very interesting story about Royden Rabinowitch, who had a show of his steel sculpture at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery. He came up from New York to install the show -- he was living there at that time. A student came in to the show and said, "Oh, this work isn't any good. I saw stuff just like this down on Canal Street. This guy's been copying American art". And Royden said, "Well, that's very funny, because you saw my show in New York". There's a Canadian art student who's assuming that this work is just lifted

from New York. I think that all of us labour under that. It's very difficult for Canadians to accept that a Canadian could do something innovative like that without taking off his hat to the head office.

BKS: Without it being influenced.

GC: That's changed a bit, I think.

BKS: One of the things that came up when I was speaking with Joyce Wieland was the beginnings of CAR and the activities that some of the Canadian artists were involved in against Americans getting into important positions in the A.G.O., universities and so on. She said that she really thinks now that a complete American takeover of Canada was imminent then, and that you people were very instrumental in stopping it or in helping to stop it. Would you agree with that?

GC: No. I think Joyce tends to be a little bit pessimistic. This is true of Mike Snow, too. They tend to be a little bit more pessimistic. I don't think a complete takeover is a possibility. I think there's a residual thing going on in this country that will resist that. I hope and I think that. It's a fragile hope. The country survived that wave of American immigration which came about because of the Vietnam War. And it turns out in hindsight that many of the people that came up here were political refugees. I know this to be the case of a painter that I met in Nova Scotia -- he and his wife. I went to see them again after quite a few years. They've taken out Canadian citizenship and their kids are Canadians. They told me about the environment when they left the States. It was in the midst of the Chicago riots. They left because they didn't like what was happening. I think this has also happened with a friend of mine who teaches philosophy at Western, who's come up here. His daughter is Canadian. He's not a Canadian citizen, but he left in that climate, too. You hear them talk and they came to another culture.

BKS: And wanted another culture?

GC: Yes, but I think even the people that didn't think of that at the time ran into culture shock. But it was a delayed-reaction culture shock. They found themselves in another country with another set of values. On the surface it appears to be just like the States, but when they were here for a while that changed. But I think it's true that something had to be said at the time about the placement of so many Americans in our institutions. And it's going to have to be said again, I think. But it doesn't seem to happen as much now. There's a different feeling here. With the writers, too. Look at the success Canadian writers are having in the States. It's a different feeling now.

BKS: Well, I think consciousness was raised back then and I think that there's a residual effect from that.

GC: I think that's true. The great thing about it is that it's taken for granted now. But I think that there are some issues that are not being taken for granted that I'm a little afraid of. For instance, I think the idea of receiving payment for your work when you exhibit it may disappear. People have taken it for granted, but some people now will pass it up. So there are a few things like that that are getting distant from us. But I do think that there is a self-confidence in this country that wasn't there before because of that.

BKS: There've been in the past great scandals and so on at Stratford when somebody British would be proposed to be the Artistic Director, rather than somebody Canadian. What side of that issue would you fall on?

GC: Oh, I think it's great to get more Europeans and English people in here running things. I think that's terrific, as long as they're not American. I think it's very important to keep adding.... You see, that's where I always had a problem. It was always for me just anti-American. I have no problem with people coming in from the rest of the world. But I really feel that it's important in this country to have these other influences to offset the predominant one. And what gets me is that when this thing happened with the book duty, that duty was not just restricted to American books, it applied to books from all over. That is so harmful. I think the duty is harmful to begin with. But it tends to penalize our exposure to other countries when, in fact, the United States should be singled out. And that doesn't happen. That's why the stuff with John Dexter got disturbing, because you knew that John Hirsch was going to go down and work in the States, and we were going to miss out on getting this guy from England. I don't know, it's more complicated for me than that.

BKS: Do you think that art can and does have any real effect on society. Can art change society? And I mean now, in the late twentieth century.

GC: Well, it can only reflect the society it comes out of, and by reflecting it, it can reinforce it. In other words, art becomes the product of a society. The more of that you have, if it reflects the society, it reinforces the society.

BKS: So it's reinforcing the status quo then?

GC: It's not reinforcing the status quo; it's reinforcing the culture that exists. Let's not confuse status quo, which tends to mean economic things or social values, with culture. Because the culture is the sum of everything that

goes on in a society. Art that reflects a culture values a culture. It's something that the culture produces. And if it reflects that culture, then it strengthens the culture. And that's how it can have an effect. But if it doesn't reflect the culture, if it's alienated and reflects things that it thinks are better from elsewhere, then that tends to tear down the culture. So that in that sense I think art can change society.

BKS: So you're saying that it's strengthening...?

GC: It's strengthening the sense of self, the sense of belonging.

BKS: Which is obviously a positive thing.

GC: Yes, it is. It's stuff that Lévi-Strauss has talked about when he says that one of the pre-requisites for a strong culture is to believe that you're better than other people. There's got to be that element in good stuff like that. It's got to be done. You just have to do it. And the doing of something is an assertion of your own value. And that's what good painting does: it just asserts the value of the society in which it's made, or the values of that society, and in that way it changes things.

BKS: It seems to me that art will sometimes express revolutionary ideas, but the revolutionary ideas so expressed get appropriated by society, get neutralized by society. In other words, their message gets diffused.

GC: Yes, it does.

BKS: I think that's partly because to a certain extent the artist is expected to be a rebel, at least within certain limits.

GC: Now.

BKS: Yes, now.

GC: This is the history of modernism. The modernist period, starting with Courbet and people like that, who take a position, that is, the left-wing artist would take a position of being a rebel against society. There's something interesting in the notion of the artist being expected to be a rebel, and that is that it's for this reason that the whole thing of Dada appealed to me. Because I could see when I was developing as an artist that one of the strongest oppositional points of view you could take in 1980 was to have talked about the values of where I came from -- to be critical of them, but to reflect them -- because nobody was doing that. And that was a Dadaistic act to do that at the time. Now, of course, home and family and

all that seem pretty mundane, but at the time, when you had a whole lot of artists who were aping New York and Willem de Kooning and Jasper Johns -- not Jasper Johns so much -- it was unheard of for a so-called sophisticated visual artist to work with materials from his or her hometown. That was very unusual. So that was an oppositional point of view to take at the time, but it becomes funny when a university with a studio program teaches students Dadaism, and then students leave school and practise it. That is very sterile.

BKS: That's surely going against a whole fundamental principle of Dadaism. You're not taught it and go out and ape it.

GC: I was not taught it. In fact at school the teachers I had hated the whole idea. Some people paid lip service to it, but when I began to work on those principles I ran into trouble. I had a lot of trouble with certain shows because of that. I was threatened with being put in jail over one we did at the London Art Gallery. That's not the same as is happening now.

BKS: No, that's true. Well, this whole business of performance art has opened up whole new areas that perhaps back in the sixties would have seemed shocking.

GC: Yes, but performance art does also come from Futurism and Dadaism and I think a lot of it is that kind of stuff. It's an academic exercise, not really felt.

BKS: Are you concerned with communicating to a wide audience?

GC: Yes, definitely.

BKS: Do you see a problem in that in actual fact a small percentage of people actually go to galleries to look at art?

GC: Well, I'm more fortunate than most in that I've had a pretty big audience for a lot of my work. I know that a couple of my paintings have been among the more popular ones at the National Gallery. They're not paintings that I compromised to get that popularity, it's just because the things I was painting and the sources I was painting people could understand. I've always tried when I write and with my own work to be quite straightforward, to not mystify for its own sake.

BKS: Still for all, even though your retrospective travelled extensively, even though I know your art is popular to a certain extent, there are still an enormous number of people who don't go to galleries, who don't live

in big centres, who you're inevitably not reaching.

GC: That's right. Well, I'm not about to compromise what I'm doing or my ideas to reach people. That's the difference. I'm not a commercial artist.

BKS: And I guess that's really the way you'd have to go to reach more people.

GC: That's right and you'd lose everything, so I'd rather do what I'm doing and get to a number of people, than really commercialize it and reach millions.

BKS: Are you ever concerned that you're speaking to converts that way, though?

GC: No, because I have enough insights all the time that even the converts, if you want to call them that, are getting new stuff. It's not the same message. It's not like church, where you're converted and that's that. It's not like that. These are very good questions. You're very well-prepared.

BKS: Well, that's good to hear.

GC: Obviously you've thought about these issues, and that's very interesting.

BKS: One always wonders when coming to speak to an artist if they're going to think...

GC: No, this is pretty interesting.

BKS: Well, that's good, good to hear. Various people who've written about your work have commented on its spontaneity. You've made reference to this before -- your lack of a system, your lack of preconceived formal strategies, but I do feel that they are there in your work.

GC: Sure they are.

BKS: I suspect that you don't have an aesthetic theory that you've worked out in advance and then apply to canvases, perhaps they're more a product of sensitively responding to what's around you, but I do think they're there. I wonder if despite your use of everyday subject matter, some of your combinations of bright colours, unrealistic figures, text, allusions to historical personalities, if those things might confuse a person who's looking at your art, despite the fact that it is grounded in the everyday.

GC: I'm sure it does.

BKS: Does that concern you? Does that make you think that

it's a barrier to communication?

GC: No, it doesn't. I'm engaged in experimental work, much of it, trying to put things together, trying to combine text and images and sound, I'm engaged in that. It's difficult sometimes. There's no question that my art is informed by art history and by artists I know and by music and by literature and by readings in politics and readings in sociology and readings in sports. There's no question that there are all these things that I draw on for my work, and I try to assimilate them all and put them together. There's also no question that I organize my work. But when I said that there's not a system what I meant was that I work out of obsession. I get on to something rather than systematically doing things. Also I get my theory from my practice, not the other way around.

BKS: Something that you've done before will then affect something that you're doing now?

GC: I'm using the Marxist term "practice" as opposed to "theory": "praxis", I guess. But that's true of my work: I get my ideas from working. These paintings take their own shape, because they change as I'm working with the actual material. That's when I think best: when I'm fiddling with the material. I can think about it and think about it, but I've got to start working with the material to make the things -- to think with the material.

BKS: So then, from your audience you expect a certain engagement, a certain effort in looking at your work?

GC: I don't expect anything from my audience. I don't even think about that.

BKS: But yet you're concerned with communicating to as many people as you can.

GC: Oh yes, I want it to get through to people, but I like to think that the force of the work will do that. It's not the kind of a thing that I think about when I'm doing it, though. It's not the kind of a thing I worry about. I do want to disseminate it, but it's not the kind of a thing that I think about when I'm doing it. They're two different functions, you know. Disseminating the work and getting it out are very different to making it. That's part of the art business, I suppose. So they're different things. We really can't equate them. They're two different processes, really. If I were a singer in front of an audience, it would be different. But even when we're playing in the Spasm Band we just do it.

BKS: You have said about Canadian nationalism that's it a threat to Canada.

GC: Yes, Canadian nationalism is a frightening thing.

BKS: Could you just elaborate on that?

GC: The notion of a homogenized culture across the country is damaging. This is a very diverse country. To come up with national legends and the notion of loyalty that follows from that is to follow the American experiment, and it's very, very dangerous.

BKS: What about the divide and conquer principle? Isn't Canada more vulnerable to domination from the outside, from an outside culture such as the American culture, if it's that fragmented?

GC: I don't think so. No. I think it's in the nature of the culture to be like that. It's the way this country is. But it's a paradoxical country, too, because there are very, very close communications in this country. That's the funny thing about it. I have a lot of friends who are artists right across Canada, and it's very closely knit in some ways. And that's because communications in this country are probably as highly developed as anywhere in the world. I may not have made much sense to you on that one, but that's what I think about it.

BKS: Are you optimistic about Canada getting free of American influence any more than it is now? I know you're pessimistic about the present government, but in terms of culture...?

GC: I am very optimistic when I see my own kids and their generation. I sense that something's happening with the generations between say 15, 20, 25, that there is an incipient anti-Americanism there -- we ain't seen nothing yet -- and what it is is the generation that was taught by those nationalistic teachers. It's the generation who are being taught by the teachers who went through that first wave of anti-Americanism. There was a generation that was missed. The generation that went to school in the seventies was taught by the previous generation. I think that's in some ways how the generational thing works. So the wave of students who were caught up with the kind of thing that I was involved with in the sixties are now teaching and that's having an effect on students now. I think we are going to see some very, very interesting things come out of this country. My daughter, who's fifteen, is involved in the anti-war movement, and you should hear the kids talk about Ronald Reagan. They just think he's crazy. So, that's what's going on right now.

BKS: I would like to refer to elements of nihilism and anarchism in your work. I'm wondering how seriously you

take the Nihilist Party? Is it a vehicle for any kind of serious change, do you think, or is it a parody or is it just fun? How do you feel about it?

GC: There are elements of all of that in it. That's not saying much. It is a parody. The way it operates now basically is just our picnic. And we all laugh about things. But it is in opposition to things. The Nihilist Spasm Band -- there is a very strong sense of a group of equals improvising. And that's a political statement. I've said this many times before: it's very close to anarcho-syndicalism, or the whole idea of communist anarchism, where people come together as free individuals to make things. You know that a lot of anarchism developed in Lyon among the self-employed watchmakers there. They had to be self-reliant. They were self-employed manufacturers who then got together to merchandise the things that they made. Very similar to artists in a lot of ways. But it seems to me to be very important that people with similar interests and interested in making similar things should band together, which is what we did with our Band. And CAR, too. But CAR was different. There was a lot of compromising involved with CAR, because it meant you spent time with people whose work you may not have liked very much, which is maybe where CAR failed, too. But that was by democratizing that organization; it meant you were spending a lot of time with mediocre artists. The organization was probably more powerful as Jack Chambers first envisaged it: as a lobby of very famous artists in Canada. I had a lot to do with the democratizing part of it, because I'm a democrat.

BKS: I didn't realize that was Chambers' conception of it.

GC: Yes, it was. And it worked best that way. It worked least well the way I wanted it, but my conscience was better. It seems to me that with the Spasm Band there was no compromise. We simply did what we wanted to do. So there wasn't the compromise with mediocre elements that there was in CAR. And in that way it's excellent. It produces excellent stuff, because it's original.

BKS: And it's sure lasted a long time.

GC: Oh, listen, we just brought out our last album in England two years ago. We've got quite a following in England. That album's being sold all over the world. It's got an international distributor. Not a big audience, but we're known.

BKS: It seems to me that there's a violent element in anarchism, in anarchists as political activists and there's a destructive element to nihilism, which seem very different from another much gentler strain that's in your art, which involves pacificism, the family, family values.

GC: You've swallowed the old-time propaganda about anarchists. That's what's happened to you.

BKS: OK. Tell me about it.

GC: You should read a little bit about anarchism. You would never call Peter Kropotkin a violent person. He was a pacificist-anarchist. He wrote books on the efficient growing of crops along collective lines. He used the example of the British market-gardeners, the small owners, who had little plots of land. He used these as examples of the way anarchism could work. There's a whole line of pacificist-anarchists.

BKS: Is there not also a line of violent anarchists?

GC: Certainly there is. And there were terrific problems in the anarchist movement, because if you look at pure anarchism, its basic premise has got to be "my freedom ends where your nose begins", which would completely contradict any kind of violent attitudes. If you believe in the freedom of everybody to do what they like, then the worst thing is for one person to take another person's life or to commit violence against them. That's where Kropotkin comes from and Peter Tolstoy to quite an extent. That's where many of them got interested in the Dukhobors and in the various non-conformist religious sects who were pacificists. There's a whole line of that. It's in England and it's in Russia particularly. Now, when you talk about the Nihilists, that's another story. The Nihilists, more properly, as you know, are the political-activist wing of the Social Democratic Party in Russia, pre-Revolutionary Social-Democratic Party, the Narodnaya Volya, the People's Will. They had their executive committee who went out and did assassinations. There's interesting material written by Albert Camus about these guys -- men and women, I should say. The Narodniki, as I think they're called, are very moral in that they stayed at the scene and took responsibility for their actions and let themselves be arrested. So they're very moral that way. And that's something that interests me as well. I think that these elements run through my work. But there's no question that there's a contradiction. I was so fascinated with the Falklands War, for instance. I found it a whole test of self-determination. That this small island -- I'm fascinated by island cultures -- should have been invaded by the Argentinians, and that the British should have gone in. The issues fascinated me so much. I wanted the British to win. I'm very opposed to capital punishment, and yet here were hardened British paratroopers going in and killing a lot of Argentinian teenagers. So, these are contradictions in me that I can't explain. All I can say is: there was my loyalty to small island cultures and wishing to see them

survive, and I was very pleased to see an army from a democracy going in and cleaning up on an army from a dictatorship that had landed on them.

BKS: Why island cultures being of interest to you? Is it because they're such a defined, small area?

GC: Yes, like St. Pierre and Miquelon and Pelee Island. These are fascinating cultures. It would also be true of the Queen Charlotte Islands. We were on St. Pierre and Miquelon and it's fantastic to see a little island culture like that. I love it. I want to see more of them survive.

BKS: In your Family Paintings of 1966 you have images of your wife, children and pets with text about Chartier, who attempted to blow up the House of Commons. I just wonder if you might want to say something about Chartier.

GC: Well, he struck me as pretty admirable and very Canadian to go into the House of Commons to blow them up and to have a fuse that's too short and to kill yourself in a bathroom.

BKS: You mean the killing of himself was part of what was admirable?

GC: Yes. Just the whole situation seemed admirable. The only person who got hurt was him. He'd made a mistake. It's a very nice way of doing things.

BKS: In other words, his gesture was publicized without his actually killing anyone else?

GC: Yes, and I liked what he said, too: "You need a blast to wake you up". I thought it was fine, because I didn't like what was going on in Parliament.

BKS: Would you say that part of the reason for using images of your family in your work is some sort of positive attitude about family values?

GC: Well, I don't know what that means. It sounds like cant to me.

BKS: The family as a way of our getting identity, as against the media barrage.

GC: No, I don't think so. I think it's more fundamental than that. It is the basic human unit. I'm much more comfortable with an extended family than I am with a nuclear family and I live in that to a greater or lesser extent, because my mother's very close by and Sheila's parents were until three or four years ago. It seems to me that's important. There are problems with that, but it means you're more connected than if you're just living as a

husband and wife with a child, living in a distant city. That seems to be not as good; it seems to me to be very isolated; it seems to me to be very alienated in a way.

BKS: I guess what I'm really getting at is the family as being analogous to a small culture, an island culture or a regional culture.

GC: That's true. It's true that families form people and it's true that they are the basic unit in our society, basic social unit. They are interesting, families. And I live with a family. I have a wife and I have children, so I'm in a family. And we have a dog and two cats. You can't be more ordinary than that. In fact, I've been very heavily criticized by some people for living in a family. "How can an artist that regular do anything? You've got to be neurotic to do anything." There's a bit of that to it.

BKS: This combination of family and Chartier in those paintings: is there some idea here or does it just come out of my head that Chartier blowing up Parliament, which is a non-valid way in which society organizes itself, is put against the family as a better way?

GC: No. It's much simpler than that. It's a juxtaposition of the way I was living at the time with young children and this very interesting guy who tried to blow up Parliament and blew himself up. It's a simple juxtaposition, which becomes shocking in a way, too, because the two are very different. But that's what it's about.

BKS: So I'm making too much of trying to tie the ideas together that closely?

GC: Yes. I just put those two things together because they were two things that caught me. I was living one, and I read about the other and thought, "Isn't that funny?", and I juxtaposed them. I thought this is a very shocking juxtaposition, a very unusual juxtaposition, which it is. There isn't very much to understand; I simply did it and put them together. It makes perfect sense to me what I did, because I found Paul Joseph Chartier fascinating. He was a bomber and I'm interested in the Nihilists and all those bombers. So he was a mad bomber and he blew himself up! That's funny and I thought, "Now, isn't that good!" We're at Port Stanley and we're staying at this nice cottage, and the cat's there and the kids are there and Sheila's there and we're all doing stuff, and it makes a lot of sense to me if I'm going to paint that to put this in. That's not simple-minded, it's just the way it was.

BKS: I'd like to ask you a bit about your use of words, your use of text. Why?

GC: There is a story I've written about in a catalogue that you may have seen that has to do with when I went to take.... I can go back a little farther to when my cousin said, "Let's paint something." He was about ten and I was always drawing cartoons and he always drew, but he was doing seascapes and landscapes. I can still smell the oil paint in his dining room. That was art, that was recognized as art, whereas I was drawing cartoons. Very shortly after that, in spite of my cartooning, I was admitted to the children's art classes at the London Art Gallery. I would have been in public school. We all went down and did drawings at the market and I did a drawing of a kid stealing some fruit and a policeman chasing him with a speech balloon saying, "Stop, thief." And I was told, "No, no, that's not the way you do it. You don't put that in." My whole background was in comic books and reading books like Robin Hood, the English edition with the caption under the illustration. So I always associated text with paintings and drawings. So it's a very natural thing for me to do that.

BKS: Is it right to say that words and pictures are equivalent in some way to you?

GC: Well, I like to present them as if they are, because, of course, they aren't for people. That's where I was definitely trying stuff. When I first did some paintings when I was taking art at Beal, I remember putting lettering in them and I knew this was something that was not done around here. So, it makes me feel good when I treat them as equivalents. Those are old issues, though; now it's done all the time.

BKS: Absolutely. I saw the "Songs of Experience" show at the National Gallery in the summer, and virtually all of those works had text incorporated.

GC: There's something very ironical about this, because my influence has really never been acknowledged in all of this stuff. But I know I've had an influence; I've got to have had. But nobody ever talks about it, so again I'm a victim of amnesia. I'm sure they'll say that this came from elsewhere. It did not come from a mere Canadian.

BKS: Is there any element of words clarifying your message, making more clear to the viewer what you want to say?

GC: Yes, there are some things that can only be said by words, but then I've also used words to mess up an image, by putting a text right over top. That also has become de rigueur for a lot of recent painting I've noticed, where you have a scrim of words in the front with the image stuck behind. That goes back a long way; I've been doing that since the sixties.

BKS: Something else that people always talk about in relation to you is your interest in removing your work from the realm of high art and high culture.

GC: That's right. That's what the words are a part of, because that was exactly my experience in those art classes. They wanted us to do "art". And my cousin was doing art. What he was doing was very different to drawing cartoons; it was very different to making comic strips. It was serious.

BKS: But yet, you don't always use words. For example, some of your watercolours of yourself and your family, the Van Dongen series of Sheila. Is that a turning away from words or is that because words just didn't have a place in those works?

GC: I just didn't feel I wanted them there.

BKS: I wanted you to clarify something that was said in this conversation you had with Dennis Reid in this Provincial Essays. Dennis Reid says, "So then what we're talking about in London in the early sixties is not so much regionalism in the sense of the recognition of a place, but the recognition of the need for authenticity of inspiration?" And then you say, "The thing that's interesting about Royden and David Rabinowitch, that they had in common, and Ron Martin, and myself to some extent, and Murray Favro to some extent, is that we have all at one time or another tended to talk about our own work as if it was a phenomenon in itself. You got the sense that, at its very best, you didn't need any other references, the thing itself was an interesting object." Now the thing that interests me about that is that it seems to me in your work that there are tremendous numbers of references to things other than the work itself. And yet, in that statement, you're making a strong case for the autonomy of your work. And I just wonder what that's all about.

GC: Maybe I am making a case for the autonomy of the work, but I guess that isn't what I intended. What I'm talking about is that I first exhibited my bicycle serigraph and my first big bicycle watercolour -- one of them was exhibited at the Sportsman's Fair at the Western Fair in Craig Cycles booth. The first watercolour -- no, the first print -- was exhibited in the window of Bicycle Sport in Toronto. And they stood up. That meant that for people walking along the street who didn't know me or know anything about me, but this thing stood up. So, if you want to call that autonomy. But that's the kind of thing I'm talking about where these things are powerful things. They're powerful things in themselves. There are all these other references in my work, but the power of the thing itself has always been very important. And we all have talked about that, about the

importance of this thing.

BKS: Something that I'm very interested in in this particular essay that I'm doing is some kind of discussion about the autonomy of art versus its relationship to society.

GC: You're talking about two very different things. There are pitfalls in both approaches. You can go on like the art magazines do, by talking about this object, all the characteristics, describe this object, talk about all these things about it: boring, totally boring. Or you can then talk about all of the influences that went together to make it. Well, that's okay but that could result in belittling the object. Both things happen. Obviously, a whole lot of things go into the making of an object. I do a tremendous amount of reading. I listen to a lot of music and watch things and watch videotapes and stuff, but I do a tremendous amount of reading, which comes out in my work. And if you want to go backwards and unravel it, you can unravel it to some extent, but that shouldn't be allowed to take away from this thing in front of you. [Gesturing toward work in studio:] It's obvious there's a whole lot of material going into this, but it will be framed and put up on a wall and the impact of it should be considerable. And you look at that and look at the things in it. Now, a person doing that may then feel inclined to go and look into the stuff. You may feel inclined then to check these things out. But that may not be necessary. But it is kind of getting things screwed up if a commentator talks about the sum of influences and fails to address the object. But on the other hand, it's a drag if somebody just addresses the object. It's sterile. I find the writing that becomes most interesting is the writing that is anecdotal. That gets around it completely. So I find when I'm reading about Stanley Spencer painting the big Resurrection, his biographer talks about going in and Stanley Spencer is making a pot of tea and he's got the kettle boiling and the steam is hitting the painting in a corner, and later on the painting cracks. Those things tell you so much, and they don't violate the object, but they don't focus on the object either. They tell me more than anything about stuff. You see the way the artist lives, you see the object being made, and you learn about things that affect the object. That's what I find interesting and that's why I always rely on anecdotes to do that. I want the anecdotes in my own work to some extent.

BKS: Do you have any thoughts about the art market, art as a commodity in the market, commanding large sums of money. Is that a set of issues that is of concern to you?

GC: Sure, it is, but one has to keep in mind that it is more clear-cut in music where they say that the music business is

very different to the business of music. The same with art. It's a very separate thing. Murray Favro is very sceptical about getting too involved in the art business. He lets his dealer do it. But it is a whole other area to think about. A whole lot of other things come into play. Part of the problem with being involved with CAR was that you got caught up in that, and it meant that you compromised on a whole lot of things, because you were thinking in those terms. There are artists like that, too, that I talk to. A lot of artists talk shop like that and it's soul-destroying. It has a funny feeling about it. But it's fascinating. You find out what things are worth so much and what artists' work sells at auction and how to market your work and all that. I have far more to do with selling my own work than most artists, with the number of dealers I have and the conscious effort to break away from having an exclusive dealer, and the direct effect I've had on sales, too.

BKS: How have you had a direct effect on sales?

GC: I negotiate directly with the National Gallery, for instance, or with the Art Bank. The reason that I haven't gone through dealers on that at all, that I've always insisted that I handle it is because I know the curators. In some cases I negotiate with private collectors as well, but if there's a collector in a place where I have a dealer, it's done through the dealer. But it's always been the case that I've had very close contacts with curators.

BKS: I wonder if you could talk about artists who have, influenced you, talking specifically about the non-American influences that have gone into your work?

GC: When I talked about Jasper Johns, he was an influence very early on, but he has not been an influence recently, not for years and years. But the ongoing influences haven't been American mostly, well vaguely a couple, but they've been people like Stanley Spencer, although not as much in recent years, and George Grosz, Otto Dix, the German Expressionists and Lucien Freud. But these are people I'm interested in, who probably would have influenced me eventually. I guess Francis Picabia, too. But, again, we're talking about older interests, although I'm still fascinated with Dix and Grosz and Kirchner. I try to find material on them. To some extent, Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele and the whole situation in Vienna. I like Schoenberg's paintings a lot.

BKS: What about Canadian people?

GC: Mike Snow has fascinated me. Murray Favro's work fascinates me. And Joyce Wieland to some extent. Joyce fascinates me. And Christiane Pflug I find pretty fascinating. John Greer I think is a very important artist.

I like his work a lot. I like Guido Molinari's and Claude Tousignant's work a lot. They're pretty good friends of mine. I like Rae Johnson's work quite a lot, what I've seen of it. And Jamelie Hassan is a pretty important artist to me. And Royden Rabinowitch is a pretty important artist to me.

BKS: Would you say Joyce Wieland has influenced you?

GC: I don't think Joyce has influenced me very much. I find her interesting. But I'm not sure that any of these people have influenced me a lot. I'm not sure they have.

BKS: It's partly a matter, too, that you are all developing at the same time.

GC: Yes, that's right. There are things traded around. But with Joyce and with Guido Molinari and Claude Tousignant, you're talking about artists who are well-advanced in their careers, as I am, so influences aren't as apparent, I don't think. And I don't think Joyce influenced me, because we developed at about the same time and there were things that we did in common, but I can't say that she influenced me. In fact, I was frequently a little bit uncomfortable with her sense of nationalism. And I never understood where it was ironical and where it wasn't. There is a sense of irony in Joyce, but I'm not sure I could detect it, because sometimes she means it, and I find that disturbing. She really liked Trudeau. Well, I liked Trudeau, but I did not admire him that way. I would never have helped him campaign, which is what she and Mike did. I would never have done that.

BKS: But she says that there was a time when she admired him, but that changed.

GC: Oh, yes. But I never went through that. I was always quite a bit more cynical about Liberals. As much as I admired Trudeau I saw that he could not be relied on. I knew if he ever got into government that he would certainly not be any saviour of Canada, although he did a lot of good things. So, there's where I would have been worried about some of the things Joyce was saying about Canada.

BKS: Your public commissions. I know of some public commissions that have fallen through.

GC: I've never had any success with public commissions. I've always either had my work rejected, or when I got it, it was a schmozzle. Most recently I submitted what I think was a very good design for an Olympic poster and it was rejected. They just didn't like it. The jury went for something else. I don't know why they did. It was excellent. This was for the Winter Olympics in Calgary. And I had a stamp design

accepted for the World Cycling Championships in 84 -- 74 -- but it just didn't get used. And then, of course, there was the Dorval mural.

BKS: And then there was a mural for Benson and Hedges.

GC: Oh, yes, that's good stuff. That was great. That was so good. Oh, I went after a rejection on that one. That was different. That was one of the best things I've ever done. They had this contest for outdoor paintings in Toronto and two of the three people on the jury were American and to paint the murals they were bringing a crew in from New York, so of course, I submitted the most vilely anti-American slogan I could think of and the jury just had to choke on it. And I got this cordial letter from the outdoor signpainters from Los Angeles or Maine or somewhere, saying they were really looking forward to coming up and working in Canada on my award! "Do not accept American money in your change" was one of the slogans. Things like that.

BKS: So that was really a deliberate statement to take advantage of the circumstances.

GC: Yes, it was. And they were totally embarrassed, apparently. This jury positively cringed when they saw these slogans. That was exactly what I wanted to do. And the interesting thing is that Caspar Koenig, a German editor and collector, bought that work. He saw how powerful it was. It was. It was good.

BKS: And also the drawings for Milton Acorn's poetry book.

GC: I ran into trouble on that, too, because they felt first of all that there weren't enough women represented, which they were correct about, but when I said I was going to include Marg Osburne, that wasn't good enough. They didn't want Marg Osburne. They wanted real heroes and heroines. They didn't like my including the people I did. They thought that there were more heroic people in Canada. They were too popular. I included Jim McLarnin and Stompin' Tom Connors. Good stuff.

BKS: What ever happened to Stompin' Tom, do you know?

GC: He's disappeared. They think he's living somewhere in Ontario. He became very bitter apparently, because he never did make it and he was dropped so quickly. It's a Canadian experience. He probably had so many people telling him he sounded just like Johnny Cash, first of all. "Tell me, Tom, how is it that you strike everyone as being Canadian nationalist when you've taken your style totally from Johnny Cash?" That would be the kind of question he'd get. And that would make him very angry.

BKS: I would like to challenge you on issues of universality and particularity in your art. Many people have commented on the large extent to which your work is tied to your region, to London, and obviously at one level it definitely is, because you draw a lot of your subject matter from here. But the thing that bothers me is: is London, as it appears in your work, is it really distinguishable from any other Canadian or American city of comparable size?

GC: Why would you ask?

BKS: I wonder if it is.

GC: Is Sudbury like Ottawa?

BKS: No, there is a difference. But I'm not talking about London as a city on this planet. I'm talking about London as it appears in your work. There seems to me to be quite a distinction there.

GC: I see. So you're suggesting that the London in my work is Everytown?

BKS: Yes. Somebody who knows London might look at your painting The Heart of London and pick out landmarks, because they know that landscape. But presumably 99% of the people who look at that work don't know London.

GC: But that's not my concern. And I can tell you another story. I'll give you another anecdote. This is a really good one. I taught for one summer term at the University of Guelph. I taught this one guy from Guelph. A few years after that I'd lost touch with him. He'd moved to Ottawa. About ten years ago there were two young students living next door. He was a graduate student at Western in Bacteriology. They knew this guy who lived in Ottawa. They told him they were living in London. He said, "Oh, do you know Greg Curnoe?" They said, "Yes, he lives next door to us." They'd never seen any of my work. They'd never been in the studio here. They lived next door, but like neighbours they hadn't visited. They went up to Ottawa to see this guy. He said, "Do you want to see some of Curnoe's work?" They said, "Sure." So he took them to the National Gallery. First painting they saw was the big View of Victoria Hospital. It's the view from their kitchen window. So that was the recognition they had. They walked into the National Gallery and the first thing they saw was this thing they see every morning at breakfast. My work is very specific that way. Now, when you say it's like every place else, what I'm wondering is why you're saying that.

BKS: It just seems to me that one of the important issues in your work is the issue of regionalism: your conception of Canada as a series of regional cultures. Well, presumably,

regionalism then is something that is important to you and something that comes out as an important facet of your work, something that you wish to communicate.

GC: Not necessarily. But it's there. That's the red herring: saying "something you wish to communicate". Let's forget about that. You can say that when we talk we wish to communicate or when we do a painting we wish to communicate, but let's not play up that side of it too much. Carry on.

BKS: I guess really what I'm saying then is you have no problem recognizing regional elements in your work obviously; you put them there. But my difficulty with it is the people who receive your work, the people who look at your work, don't get that regional sense.

GC: Are you sure of that?

BKS: I really wonder if they do or if they're looking at Anytown.

GC: They can't be looking at Anytown, because my work has very specific references in it.

BKS: But what if they don't recognize those references, though.

GC: But there are even verbal references, but they're very specific. [Looking at a painting in the studio:] This is not a regional painting -- well, it might be -- but look at this painting. You can tell what brands the radios are by looking at the painting, for God's sake, and it's a collection of funny radios. There's a Russian radio there; there's a German radio; there's an old Philco; there's a range-finder. So, when a work is that specific then you can't call it Everytown. It would be different if I were presenting a row of five generic radios, but I don't do generic paintings. If you're saying that to people who don't know me, my work is generic, then I'd understand you, but I can't believe that it is. I can't believe that you can paint things and be that specific and have people see it as being generic.

BKS: But isn't there a funny thing that happens with the very specific and the universal? I look at those radios, and maybe I don't own radios that are specifically like that. Those are very particular radios that you have drawn. But I have experience with radios in my life, so those particular radios get translated in my mind into radios in general, radios that I have known.

GC: Yes, well, then you're not looking. You're letting your own conception of some general idea of "radio" dominate your view of the painting. You're reading the painting that way,

if you can talk about reading a painting.

BKS: But, what if I'm thinking about specific radios in my life? And I can, actually. There's one of those radios that looks very much like a radio that my parents owned.

GC: There's enough detail in this painting that you could get some idea of the radios, those specific radios. It would be another thing to look at them just as general representations of radios. That would be overlooking the amount of detail that has been put into them, I think. That's the thing that I've always used in my work to prevent that reading of them generally, by making them specific. Of course, we all have difficulty with people who talk in generalizations and who write in generalizations and who paint in generalizations. I'm just not interested in that. I find it boring. So, I'm not sure how you could look at my work and begin to talk about it in general terms. I'm not sure where you're coming from to do that.

BKS: There are two things in this discussion that are getting confused. One is looking at your work and seeing something that's generalized, something that's not particular. That's one possibility.

GC: Like what?

BKS: Like seeing Anytown instead of seeing London. Over and against that, it seems to me the other possibility, for me, who doesn't know London and who doesn't know these radios, is that I can look at it and not just see generalized city or generalized radios, but specific radios and specific landscape that might call to mind associations from my own life. So that again is a very specific thing, but it's coming from me.

GC: Well, that's a need you have, but for example I was just looking at some photographs by a young photographer who I think is doing some pretty good work and he showed me some photographs he'd done of Newfoundland. Well, I didn't know that part of Newfoundland, but I really looked at it -- it was a very specific area of Newfoundland -- and I found it very interesting. But I didn't immediately translate and understand that in terms of landscape I'd already seen somewhere. You know: "That's just like the mainland of B.C." I didn't say that. I didn't need to do that. I didn't need to connect it with something to understand it.

BKS: No, it didn't call up associations.

GC: That's right. But I don't need a thing to call up associations to do that. So that when I look at a painting by Stanley Spencer of Cookham, for instance, I don't need to call up a relationship with Guelph, we'll say, or someplace

that might be similar. I just look at it and look at that, and there's new information in that for me, because he's working with something I've never seen before.

BKS: I feel that a lot of people relate to things by looking for something familiar.

GC: Yes. I don't. I may do it when I'm trying to evaluate things, and it puts me off about things more than anything else. If I hear music and I think, "Oh well, that's sounds like so-and-so", I will tend to listen to it a little less carefully.

BKS: You don't find those connections interesting?

GC: Oh, I find the connections interesting, but not if it's something that's just been lifted.

BKS: No. I can agree with that.

GC: Oh, I find connections interesting. I love that! That's what my life is about: finding connections. It's all about that. And I would presume that's what people will be able to do with my work, if they are so inclined. They'll be able to begin to just unravel part of it and find out that this is the kind of richness that I've been putting in it. [Gesturing to painting in studio:] For instance, in this painting here there is all kinds of stuff inserted. Like, I'm very interested in naval battles -- there's another contradiction, of course -- and Coronel was a great World War I battle when an undermanned British squadron was sunk by the Germans off the coast of South America near a place called Coronel. Well, I've been putting call signs for radio stations all over the world in this painting. I looked up Coronel in my international directory. There isn't any Coronel. So I invented one: the voice of Coronel, "La Voz de Coronel". A friend of mine who was formerly in the U.S. navy, he knows my interest in that. He glommed onto it right away. He said, "Oh, way to go!" He liked it. That's the kind of thing to unravel: very, very specific. That's going on through this whole painting, stuff like that. Like "Hilversum" is the great Dutch radio station where they broadcast all the famous jazz broadcasts. I went out and bought recordings. There's all these references in there.

BKS: I see the Falklands Islands there.

GC: Yes, Falklands Islands Broadcasting and then there's Radio Belgrano, which is in southern Argentina, you see, in reference to that ship that was sunk. All of that stuff is in there.

BKS: What about "Emissora Vanguardia"?

GC: Well, that I thought was very funny, because of the oblique reference to Vanguard art magazine.

BKS: That popped into my mind when I saw it!

GC: That would do, but I also like the idea of this Brazilian radio station that calls itself Emissora Vanguardia. I like that, too. It's a vanguard radio station. But, that's funny, isn't it? Because the art thing happened afterwards. But it's there, too. That's sort of what my work is about: loading it. You load the work. You load as much as you can in the work. You just load it up, and then assume that people will see this loaded object. That's really what I'm about, a lot of it.

BKS: There are a few specific works of yours that I would like to talk about. The first one I'd like to mention is The Vision of Dr. Bucke. Chris Dewdney states in his "Oregionalism" essay in this Provincial Essays about how you're anti-mysticism -- you abhor mysticism -- and yet here is this work which takes as at least part of its subject matter a man who's had this very mystical experience, which strikes me as interesting thing. Is it just that Chris Dewdney is not getting at the whole truth?

GC: No. That painting has all sorts of funny references to mysticism. There's a photograph of Madame Blavatsky, who's supposed to be a massive fake, but who knows?

BKS: Well, the Theosophists certainly thought she was an important figure.

GC: Yes. Well, there are all those references to that: this whole mystical thing and its presence in London. There's a woman in the painting, too: Mrs. Cumming, who was a very good friend of mine, who was a mystic. She was married to a United Church minister, which caused him no end of embarrassment. She met Pierre Théberge and me and said that we had been good friends in our previous incarnation and she told us what we had done and all that. And so she talked like this. She's dead now. She painted miniatures, very curious miniatures: one of a little boy with his pet white mice around his neck. She was a very funny person. She claimed that she saw plants move and she did a painting of a plant moving. This is very fascinating. And Dr. Bucke, of course, worked in London most of his life and he died here. This is the thing -- he lived in London! He was the superintendant of the London Asylum. He was an international authority on reforming mental institutions; he was a very close friend of Walt Whitman; he was the literary executor of his estate; he published Cosmic Consciousness -- just a fascinating person. And he was here. He fell on the ice, coming out of the Ontario Hospital -- out of his house,

I think -- and hit his head on the steps and died. Walt Whitman visited him here. They used to sit out on the lawn at the Ontario Hospital and Chris Dewdney's older brother wrote stuff about Walt Whitman and Bucke lolling on the lawn at the London Asylum. It's just interesting.

BKS: So in a sense that's another bunch of local things that were interesting.

GC: Well, sure.

BKS: The Dorval mural: somebody at Carleton wrote a term paper on your work, in which she said that the statement that was in the Dorval mural was very strong, and it was incapable of being neutralized by society, hence all the controversy that developed around it.

GC: Well, it may be simpler than that. What started the trouble was American customs officers, who complained while I was installing it. Most the Canadians who came by thought it was great; they said, "Way to go". They liked the sentiments expressed. But because there were complaints from Americans it was taken down, and that was the political problem: the inability of Canadian officials to stand up under pressure from the United States. There it was. And the painting was about that. I had similar problems with work in the Venice Biennale -- or the Sao Paulo Biennale. Among the strongest critics of the work were Canadians, who were afraid of what the Americans would think. So there was a problem with the content of my work, too, down there around the same time.

BKS: This person who wrote the essay about you talks about the two letters you wrote to La Presse -- this was in early April of 1968.

GC: Did I write two letters to them?

BKS: Or somebody did and signed your name.

GC: I must have. To La Presse?

BKS: To La Presse. To Montreal, presumably because that was the site of the mural.

GC: Really? Did I send them there? It wasn't The London Free Press?

BKS: No, apparently, it was La Presse.

GC: What did I say?

BKS: I should have prefaced the whole thing by saying that I went to the National Library to get the microfilm of La

Presse with those letters in it, and unfortunately it had been lent out to another library, so I have not actually been able to see them. All I know is what she quoted you as having said in her paper. It's in French. This what you say in your second letter: "Je n'endorsse pas nécessairement tous les points du vues que j'émetts dans mes tableaux."

GC: "I don't necessarily endorse all the points of view in my paintings."

BKS: That's right. Her point about this is that here you had made a very strong statement in your art, but then in this letter you tried to dissociate yourself from that statement

GC: Well, of course, because I wouldn't want to associate myself with the sentiments of German pilots in a Gotha Bomber about to bomb London, England.

BKS: Perhaps not, but that wasn't what the controversy was about. Well, perhaps that was partly what the controversy was about, but surely mostly it was about the American references, the perceived LBJ and the Mohammed Ali.

GC: Oh, I see. Well, you'd have to see what the original thing in La Presse was I was responding to. You see, there was a very vivid description in there of a kindergarten that was bombed by a zeppelin, about the children dying at their desks. That was terrible to read. They may have been suggesting that I was bloodthirsty or something. There may have been that.

BKS: There may have been, but from what I read about that controversy, my understanding is that what the American officials were objecting to were the American references: a) they saw that they were there, and b) they saw that they were uncomplimentary in the extreme.

GC: Yes.

BKS: My point about raising this is that here you were with a very clear opportunity to say something strongly anti-American in an international forum, because the controversy was on both sides of the border. And yet, if the quote from this letter is correct, you're not taking the opportunity to say it, you're softening your position.

GC: I'm trying to remember the context and this is very difficult for me to remember. I'm trying to remember the context of what was said in La Presse, because that's what that would be in response to. And I'm guessing that I was criticized for the quotes.

BKS: Well, if I do get hold of those letters, I'll send you

copies of them.

GC: But I did not apologize. Look -- you have to know that I held out -- we didn't have any money -- I held out to not alter the mural. They asked for proposals to change it, and I went up with proposals that showed black lines put through the text, and they said, "We can't do that, it looks like it's been censored." And I said, "Well, that's what you want me to do". My actions speak louder than my words. The painting was there and I refused to censor it. Now, I don't know what that's about, but you have to assume that's in response to some criticism that I thought was wrong. And you're taking that out of context, too. I mean, what did the whole letter say?

BKS: Yes, and I don't know, because I haven't been able to see it. It's something that I'm going to have to look into a bit farther. My understanding is that there were editorials in a lot of Canadian newspapers.

GC: Yes, there were, and nobody supported me.

BKS: Including The London Free Press.

GC: And I got a funny phonecall from The Toronto Star, which was ostensibly a more nationalistic paper. They said, "What do you have all these American references in this mural for, if you're supposed to be so anti-American? Why do you have all this American content?" So, you see, I couldn't win, that was what was going on. They objected because there wasn't enough Canadian content. That was that funny hokey nationalism that says it's really good if it's one hundred per cent Canadian. Well, I've never believed that for a minute.

BKS: This is Victoria Hospital presumably that I'm looking at.

GC: Yes, that's right, and the far window is the view I did the big paintings of.

BKS: And what about Jack Chambers'...?

GC: Well, he did a photograph from the roof.

BKS: Yes, I was going to say that the viewpoint seems different from here.

GC: Yes, he was up higher and he used a camera with a wide-angle lens, so it flattened everything out.

BKS: The light today and the weather, it seems very much like it must have been in the photograph he took

GC: That's right. He took the photograph in the winter in the snow.

BKS: Yes, that very grey look.

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Figure 5. WIELAND. Eskimo
Song -- The Great
Sea. 1970-71
Canada Council Art
Bank, Ottawa
Cloth assemblage

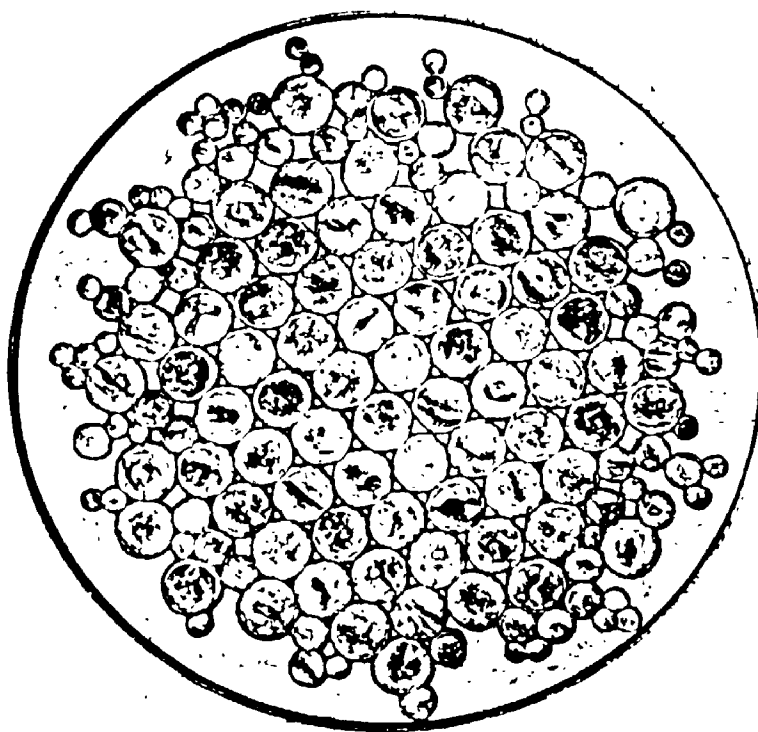
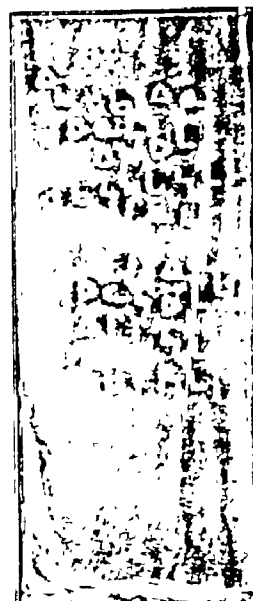
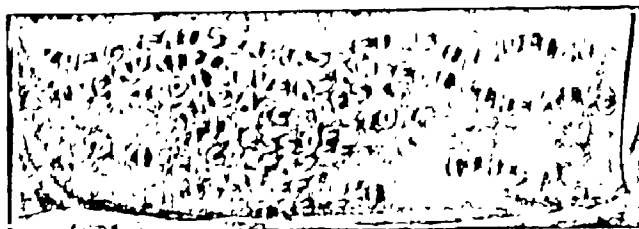


Figure 6. WIELAND. Arctic Day. 1970-71
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
Coloured pencil on cloth cushions



Figure 1. WIELAND. The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers. 1970-71
Collection of Dr. J.S. Boggs, Ottawa
Bronze

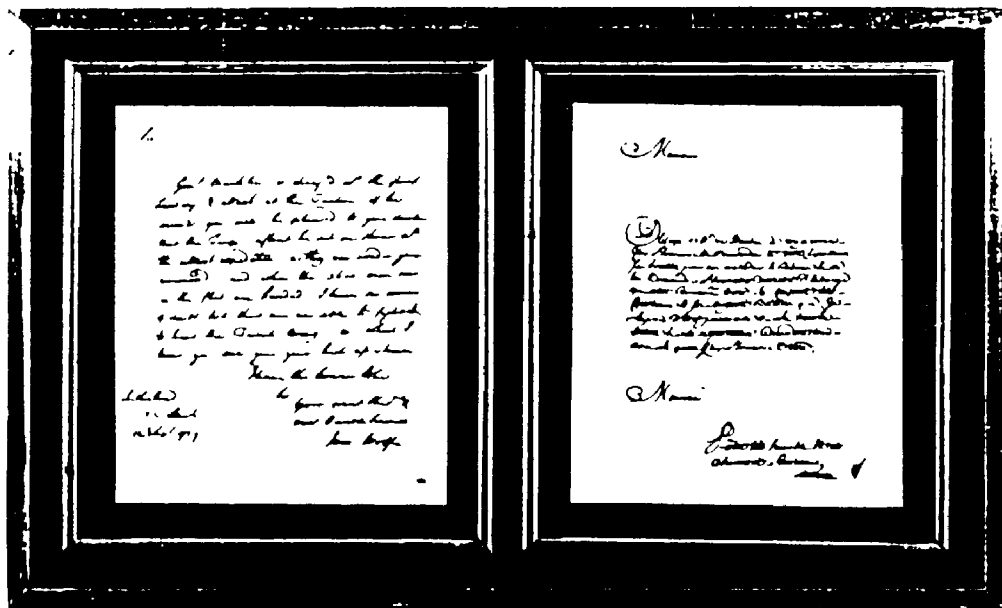


Figure 2. WIELAND. Montcalm's Last Letter/Wolfe's Last Letter. 1971
Collection of the Hon. J. Roberts, Toronto
Embroidery on cloth



Figure 3. WIELAND. I Love Canada -- J'Aime Canada.
1970
Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina
Quilted cloth assemblage



Figure 4. WIELAND. Reason over Passion. 1968
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
Quilted cloth assemblage

Figure 5. WIELAND. Eskimo
Song -- The Great
Sea. 1970-71
Canada Council Art
Bank, Ottawa
Cloth assemblage

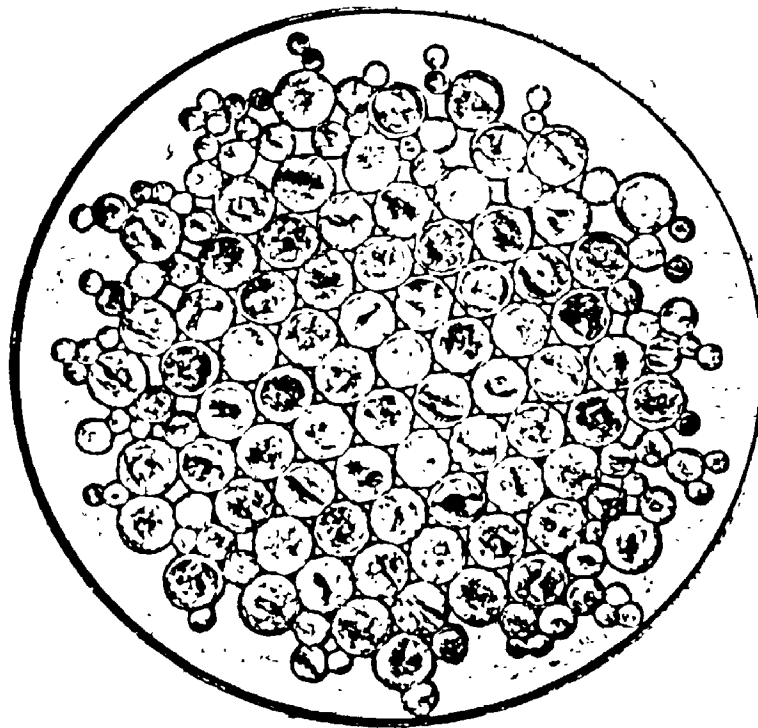
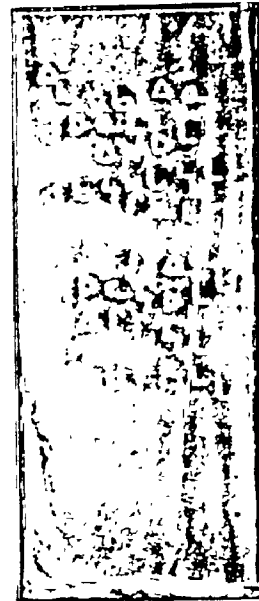
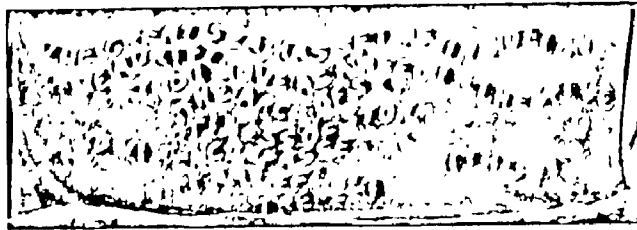


Figure 6. WIELAND. Arctic Day. 1970-71
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
Coloured pencil on cloth cushions

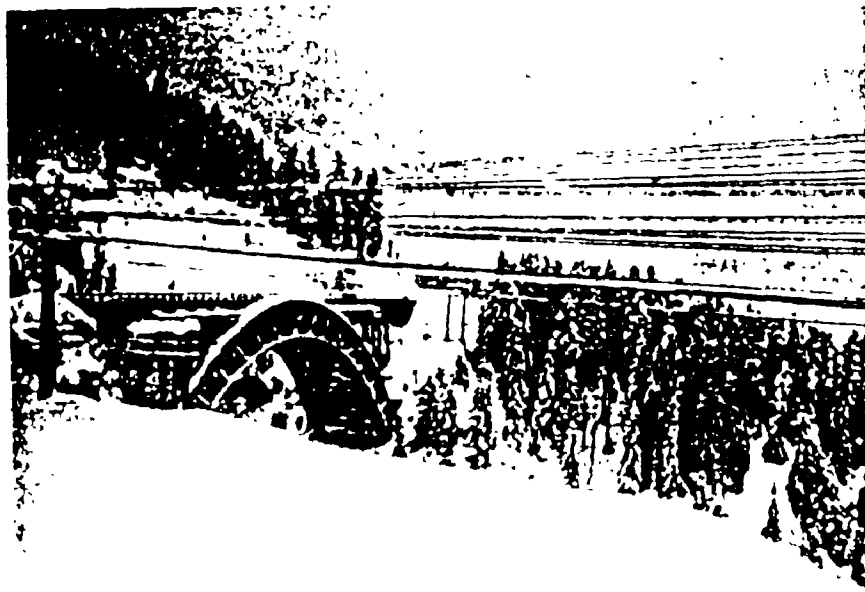


Figure 7. WIELAND. Reason over Passion. 1967-69
Frame from final third with western
Canadian winter scene
Film

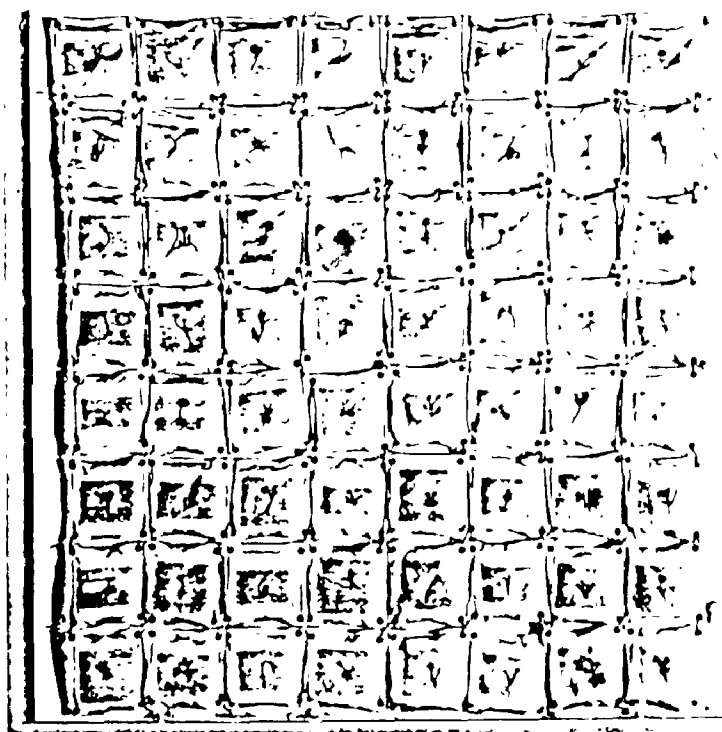


Figure 8. WIELAND. The Water Quilt. 1970-71
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
Embroidered and printed cloth assemblage

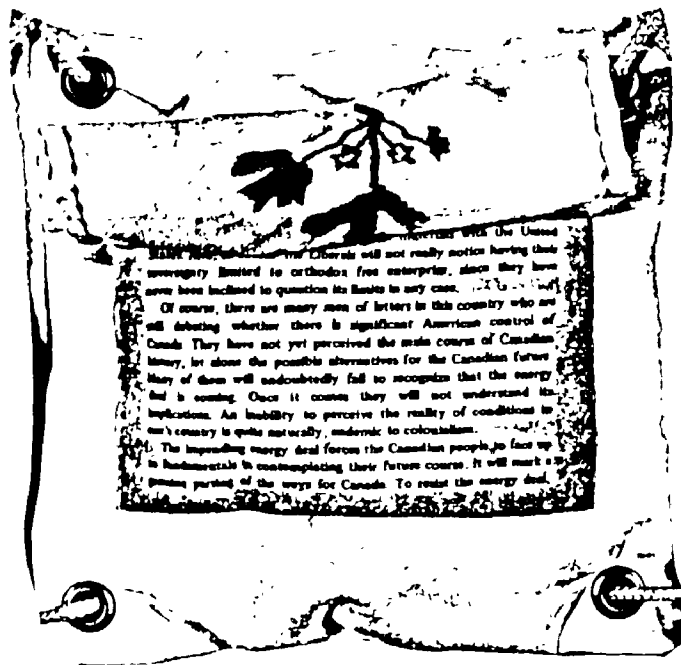


Figure 9. WIELAND. The Water Quilt. 1970-71 DETAIL
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
Embroidered and printed cloth assemblage



Figure 10. WIELAND. Nature Mixes. 1983
Collection of C. Hindson, Hamilton
Oil on canvas

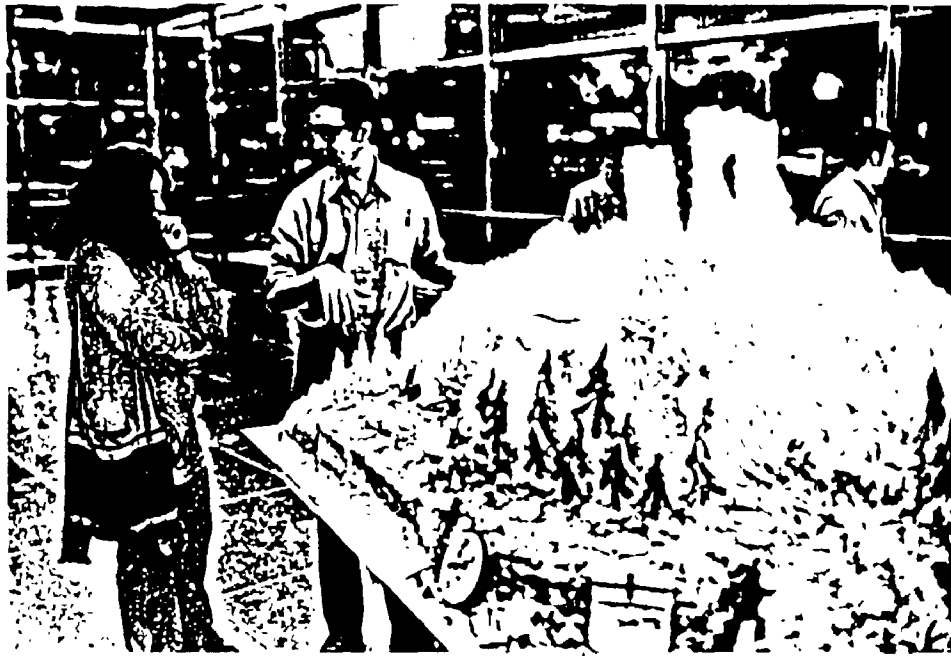


Figure 11. WIELAND. Arctic Passion Cake. 1971
 Photo in progress with Wieland and Pierre
 Théberge
 No longer extant
 Set piece

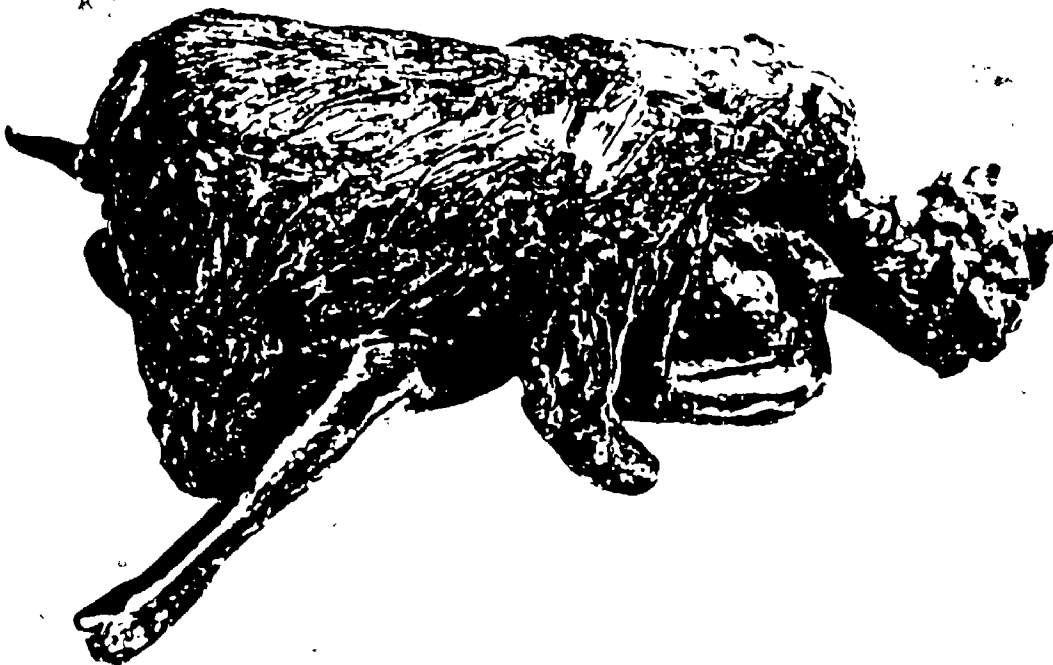


Figure 12. WIELAND. Bear and "Spirit of Canada".
 1970-71
 Collection of the artist
 Bronze

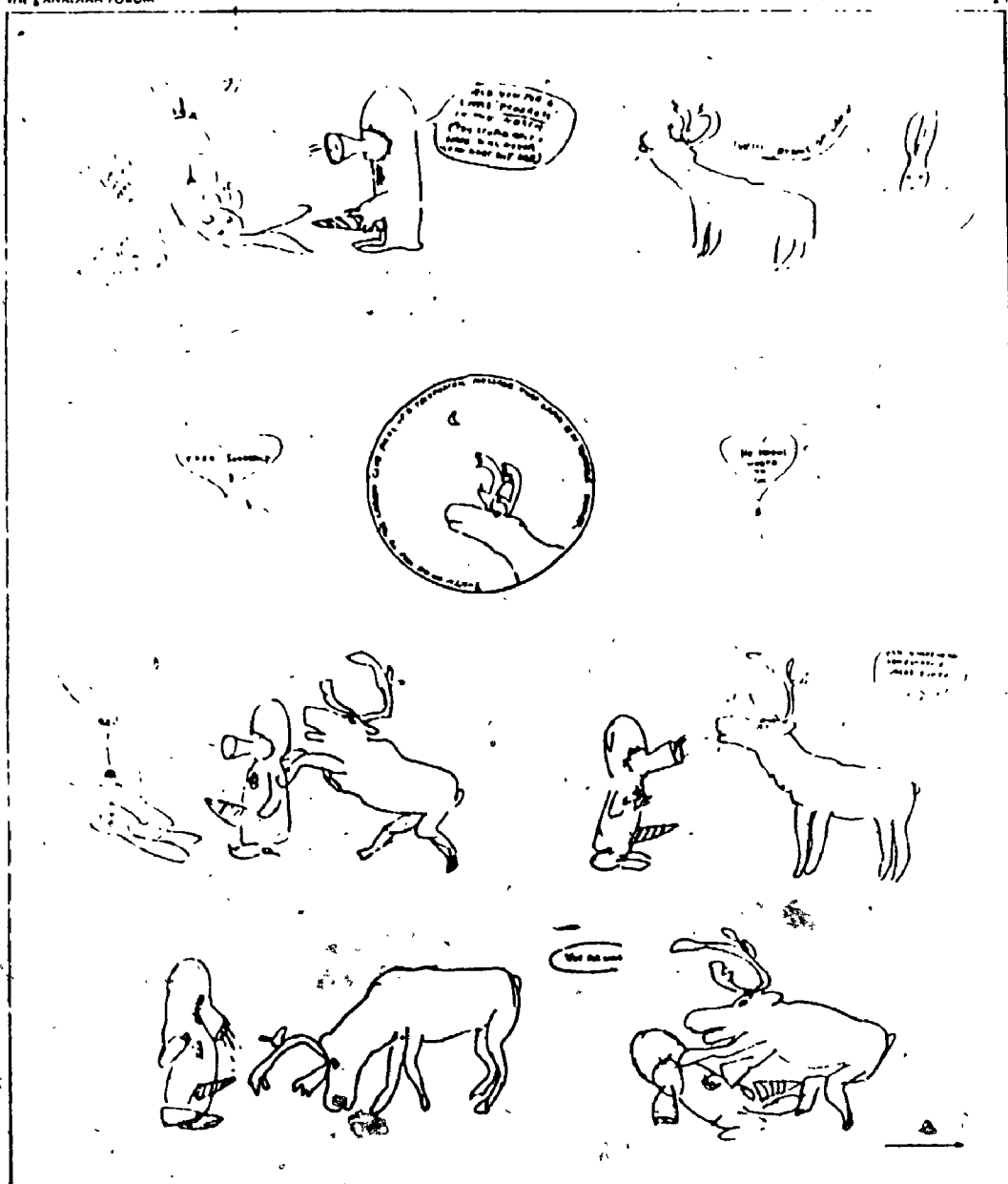


Figure 13. WIELAND. Aquí Nada. 1970 DETAIL
Collection of P. Lambert, Montreal
Ink on paper

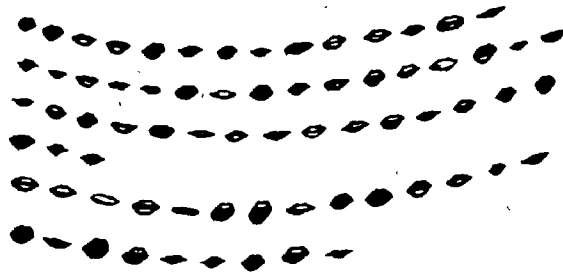


Figure 14. WIELAND. O Canada Animation. 1970
Collection of E. and M. Yolles, Toronto
Embroidery on cloth

Figure 15. DETAIL



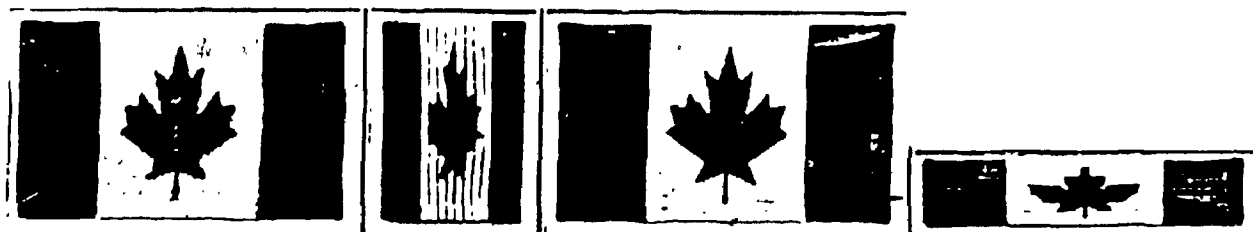


Figure 18. WIELAND. Flag Arrangement. 1970-71
The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
Knitted wool

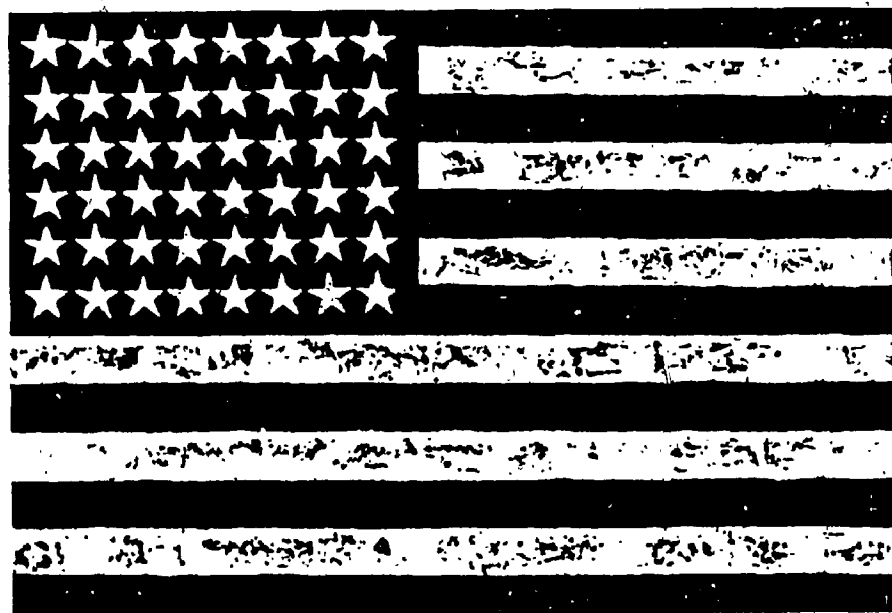


Figure 17. JOHNS. Flag. 1954
Collection of P. Johnson, New York
Encaustic and collage on canvas



Figure 18. WIELAND. The Far Shore. 1976
Frame showing Eulalie and Tom
Film

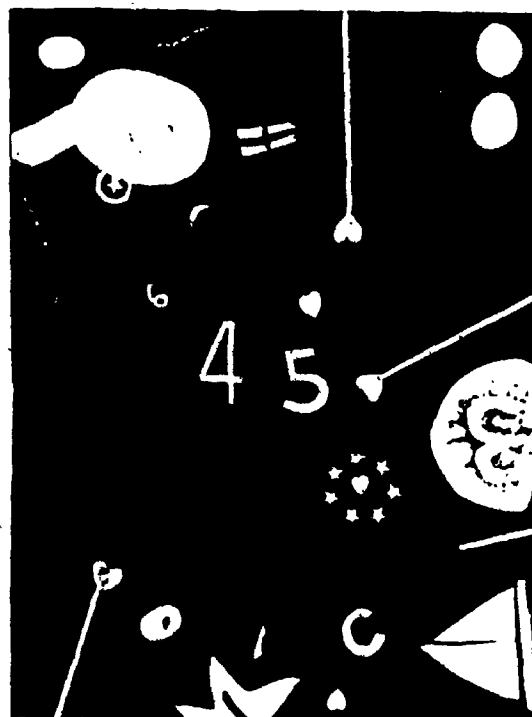


Figure 19. WIELAND.
The Michael Montague
Quilt. 1966
Collection of M.
Montague, Toronto
Quilted cloth

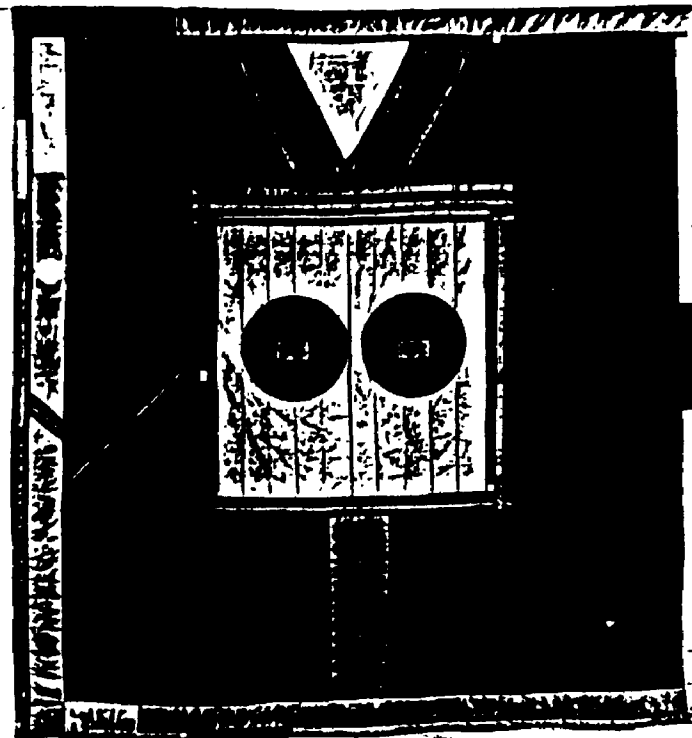


Figure 20. WIELAND. The Camera's Eyes. 1968
The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
Quilted cloth

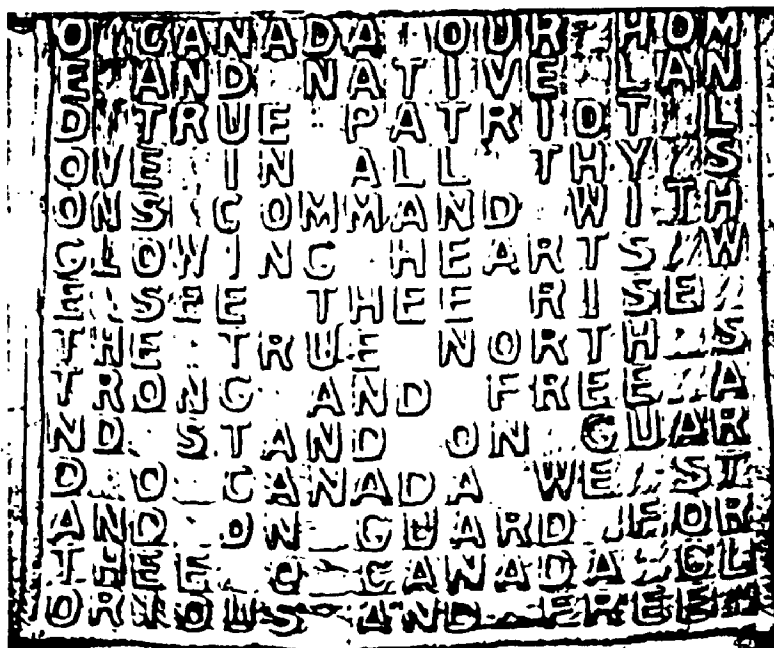


Figure 21. WIELAND. O Canada. 1970
Collection of R. and Z. Yanovsky, Kingston
Quilted cloth assemblage



Figure 22. WIELAND. The Maple Leaf Forever II. . 1972
Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa
Coloured pencil on quilted assemblage



Figure 23. WIELAND. Laura Secord. 1974
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
Quilted cloth assemblage



Figure 24. WIELAND. 109 Views. 1970-71
Collection of York University, Downsview
Quilted cloth assemblage

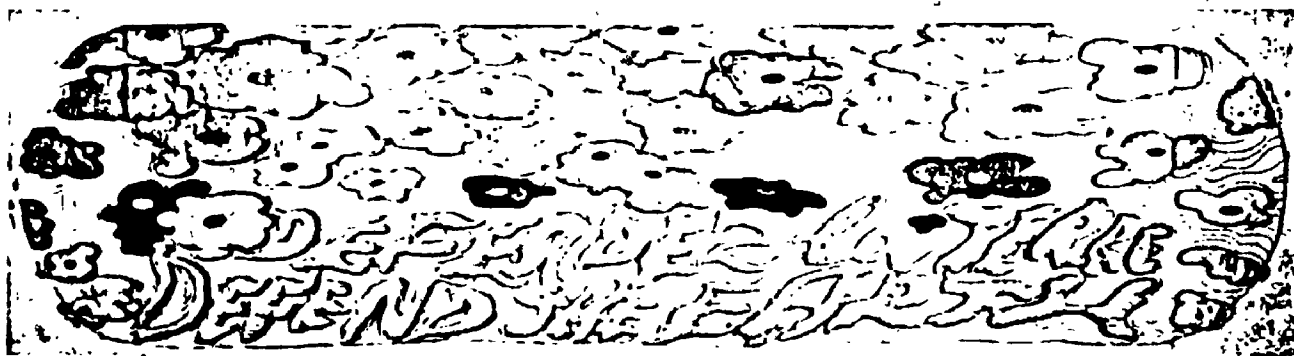


Figure 25. WIELAND. Défendez la Terre/Defend the Earth. 1972-73
Collection of the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information, Ottawa
Quilted cloth assemblage



Figure 26. WIELAND. Barren Ground Caribou. 1978
Collection of the Toronto Transit
Corporation, Toronto
Quilted cloth assemblage



Figure 27. WIELAND. Reason over Passion. 1987-89
Frame from central third with close-up
of Pierre Trudeau
Film



Figure 28. WIELAND. Birth of Newfoundland. 1980
Collection of R.J.C. McQueen, Toronto
Coloured pencil on paper



Figure 29. WIELAND. Conversation in the Gaspé.
1980
Collection of the artist
Oil on canvas



Figure 30. WIELAND. Study for "Venus of Scarborough". 1982
Collection of the artist
Coloured pencil on paper



Figure 31. WIELAND. Victory of Venus. 1981
Collection of M.L. Hammond, Toronto
Coloured pencil on paper



Figure 32. WIELAND.
Sunlight and
Firelight. 1980
The Isaacs Gallery,
Toronto
Oil on canvas



Figure 33. WIELAND. Mozart and Wieland. 1985
Private Collection, Ottawa
Oil on canvas



Figure 34. WIELAND. She will remain in the phenomenal world filled with ignorance with her sheep, and not go with him. 1983
Collection of the artist
Oil on canvas

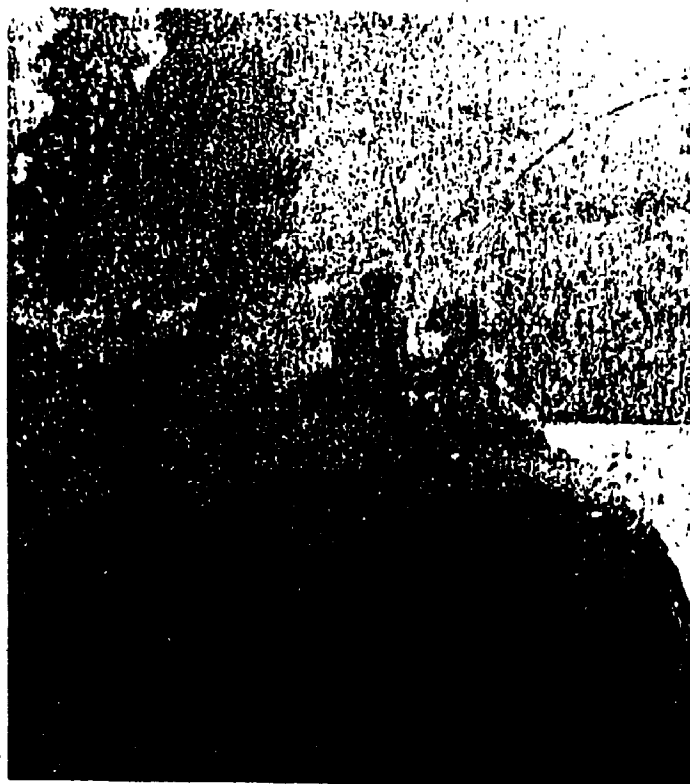


Figure 35. WIELAND. Crepuscule for Two. 1985
The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
Oil on canvas



Figure 38. WIELAND. Early One Morning. 1986
Collection of F. and J. Loeb, Toronto
Oil on canvas

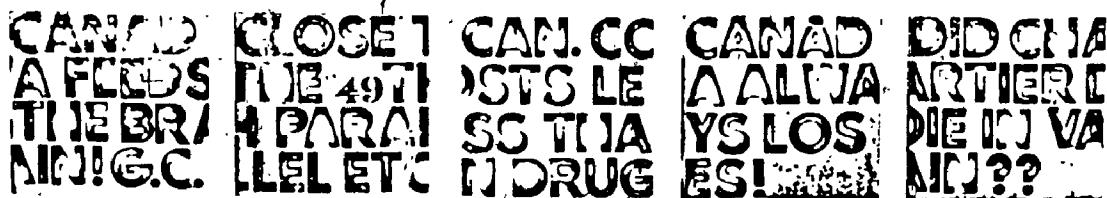


Figure 37. CURNOE. True North Strong and Free,
Nos. 1-5. 1968
London Regional Art Gallery
Stamp pad ink and polyurethane on plywood

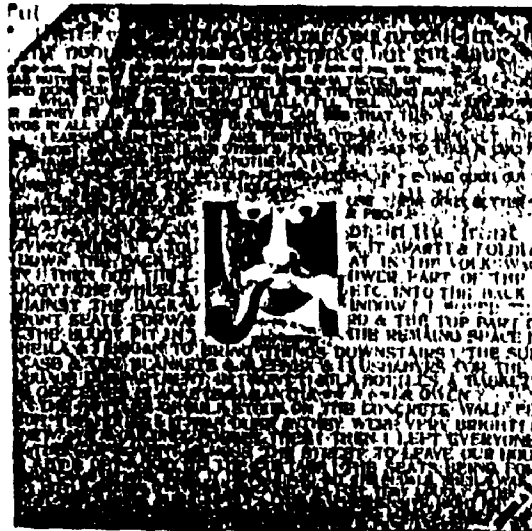


Figure 38. CURNOE. Family Painting No. 4: For the Mad Bomber (His Infernal Machine). 1988
Collection of M. Yolles, Toronto
Plexiglass, metal, plastic, stamp pad ink,
and oil on plywood

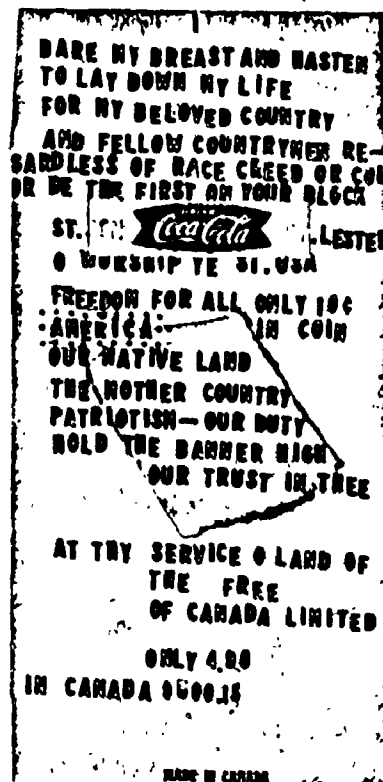


Figure 39. CURNOE. Untitled. 1982
Collection of A. Lind, Toronto
Stamp pad ink and collage on paper

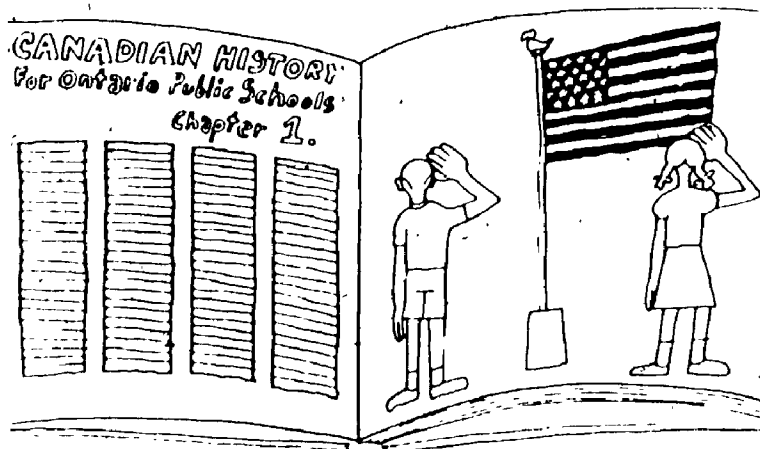


Figure 40. CURNOE.
It Was Perfectly
Normal. 1980
Collection of the
artist
Pen and India ink
on paper

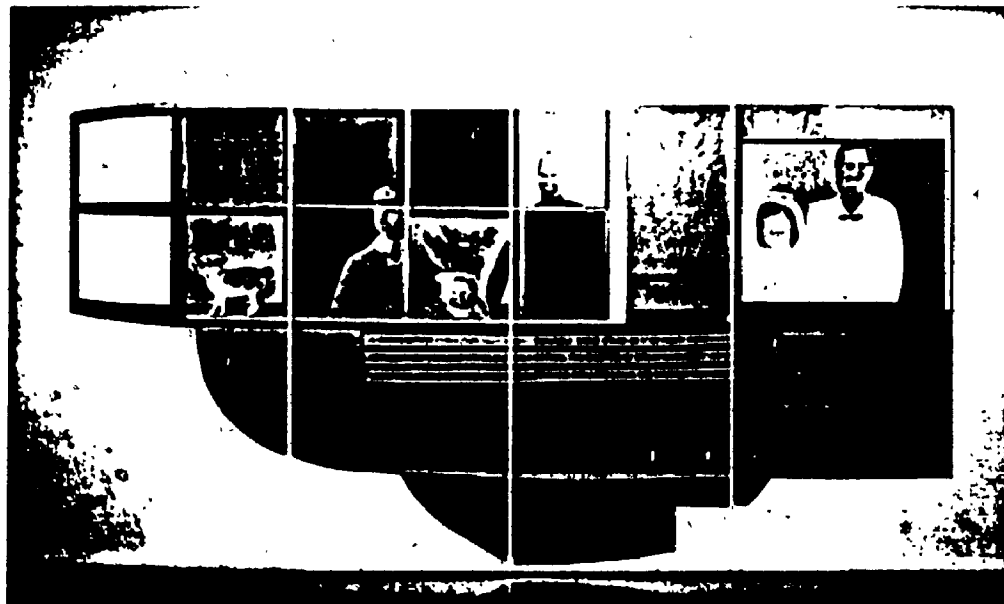
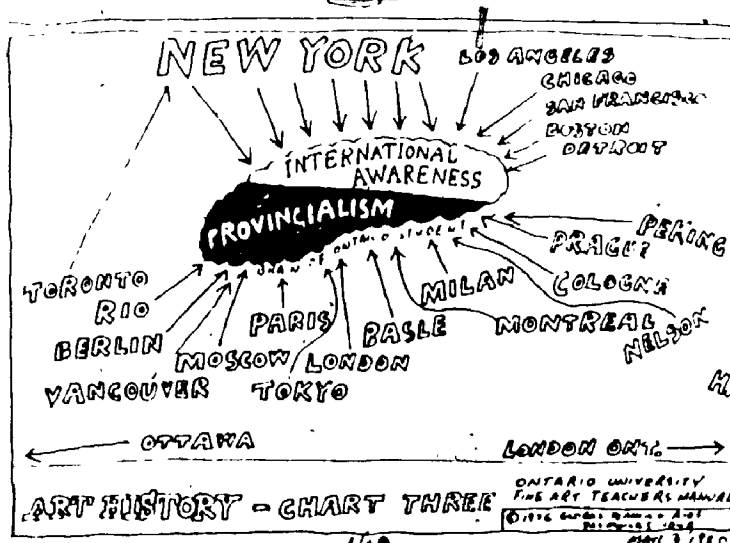


Figure 41. CURNOE. R-34 (The Dorval mural). 1967-68
Collection Dept. of Public Works, Ottawa
Mixed media
DETAIL

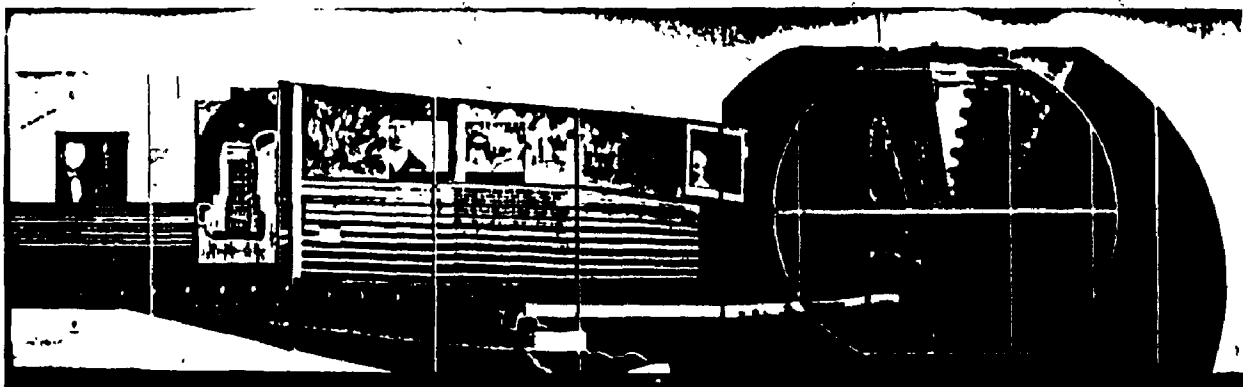


Figure 42. CURNOE. R-34 (The Dorval mural). 1967-68
 DETAIL
 Collection Dept. of Public Works, Ottawa
 Mixed media



Figure 43. CURNOE. R-34 (The Dorval mural). 1967-68
 DETAIL
 Collection Dept. of Public Works, Ottawa
 Mixed media



Figure 44. Curnoe. Kamikaze. 1987-88
The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
Acrylic, enamel, marking ink, rope, plastic,
rubber, plywood, wood and helium



Figure 45. Curnoe. For Ben Bella. 1964
Edmonton Art Gallery
Mixed media.

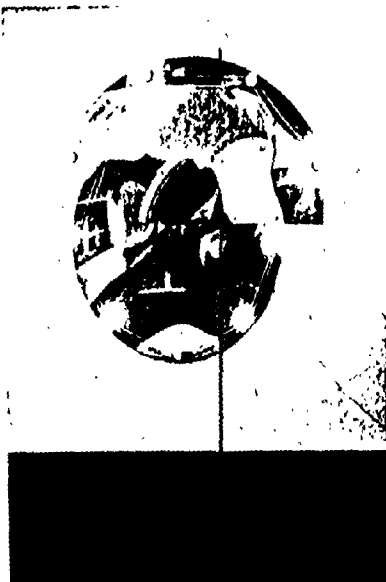


Figure 46. CURNOE. The Heart of London. 1966-67
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
Painted metal, wires and electric lights,
plastic and acrylic on plywood



Figure 47. HAMILTON. Just What Is It That Makes
Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?
1956
Collection of E. Janss, Jr., California
Collage



Figure 48. Curnoe. How
Does One Get To Meet You?
1960
Private Collection,
Toronto
Dayglo paint on
illustration board



JIMMY
McLARNIN

*Jimmy
McLarnin*

Figure 49. Curnoe. Jimmy McLarnin. 1972
Collection of J.H. Moore, Lambeth
Pen and India ink on paper

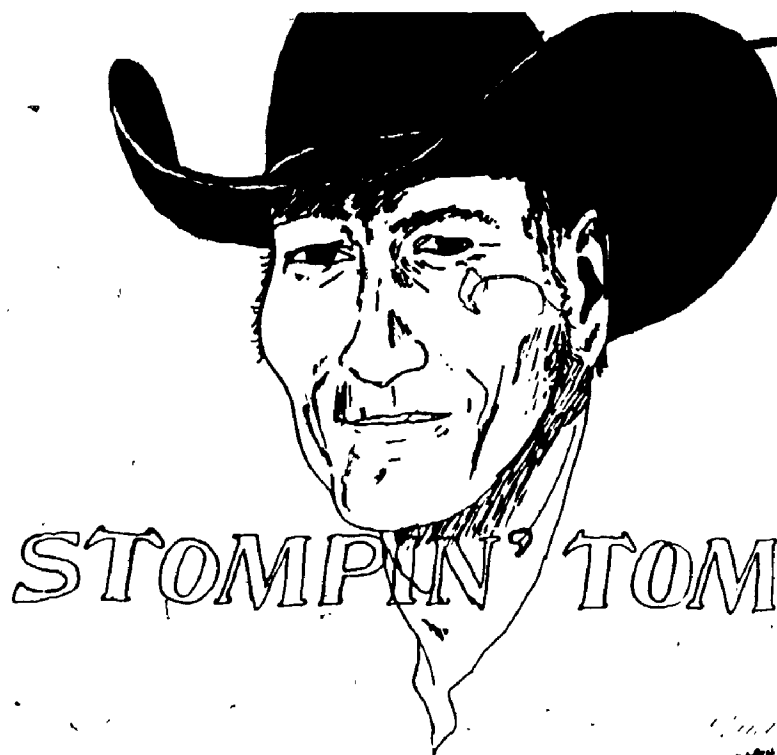


Figure 50. CURNOE. Stomp'n' Tom Connors. 1972
Collection of J.H. Moore, Lambeth
Pen and India ink on paper



Figure 51. CURNOE.
Richmond Street Papers.
1981
Collection of
R. Woodman, London, Ont.
Collage on paper

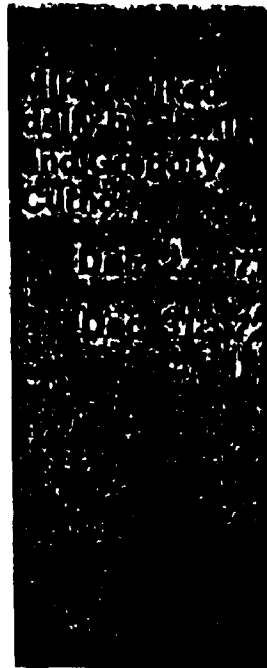


Figure 52. CURNOE. Blue Book. 1971-72
Collection of the artist
Stamp pad ink on lined paper (cloth-bound
accounting book; 152 pages)

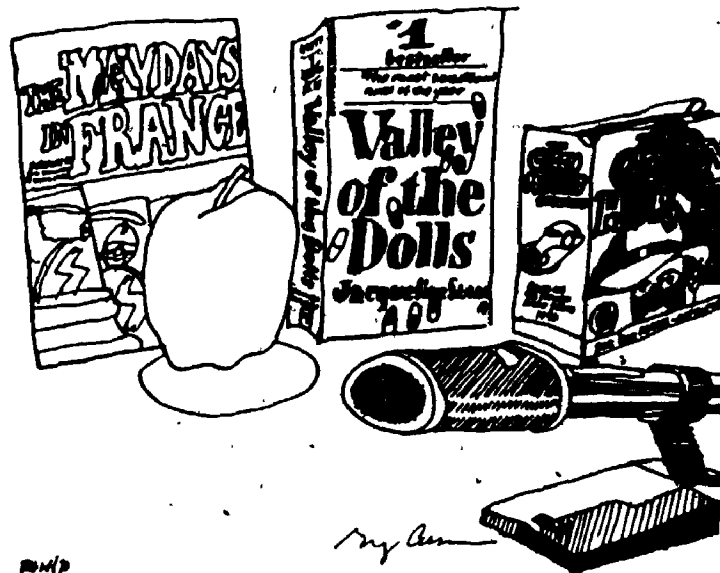


Figure 53. CURNOE. Contributing to the Story of the
Human Race. 1970
Collection of the artist
India ink on paper



Figure 54. CURNOE. Map of North America. 1972
Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax
India ink on paper



Figure 55. CURNOE. View of Victoria Hospital,
Second Series. 1969-71
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
Mixed media



Figure 58. CURNOE. Family Painting No. 2:
The Woolworth's Rattle. 1966
Collection of G. Bowering, Vancouver
Mixed media

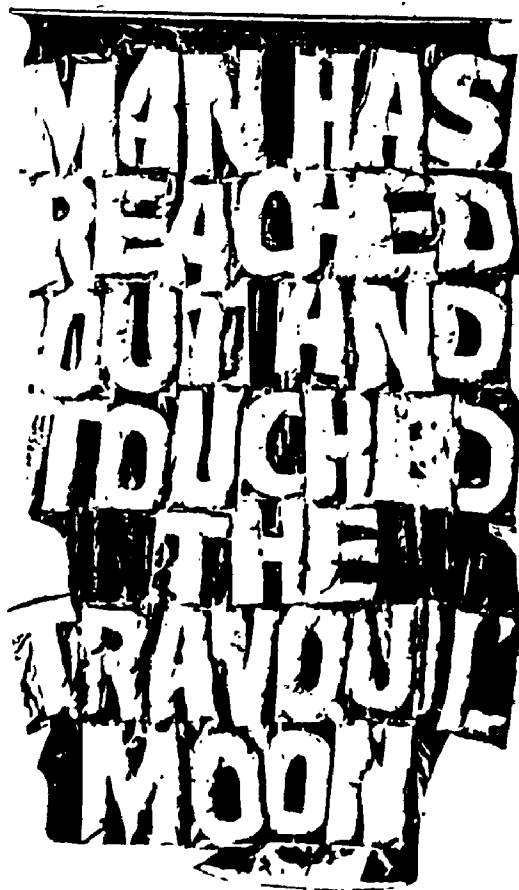


Figure 57. WIELAND. Man
Has Reached Out and
Touched the Tranquil Moon.
1970
National Gallery of
Canada, Ottawa
Mixed media

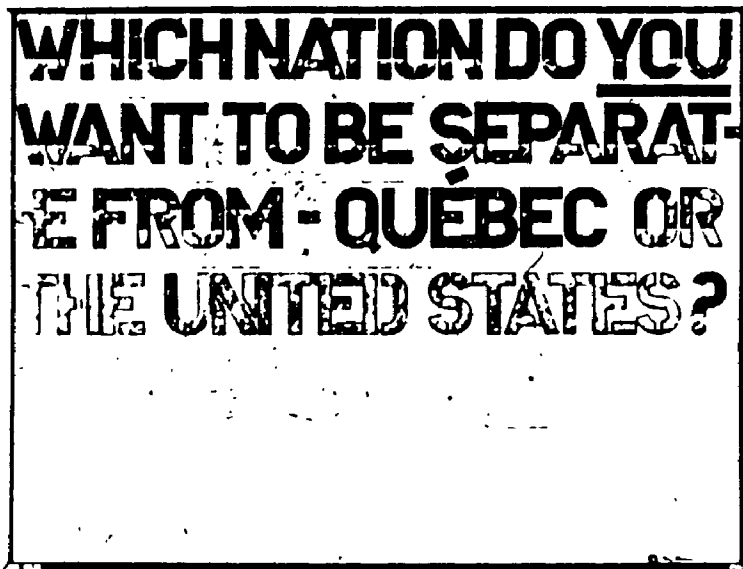


Figure 58. Curnoe. National Referendum Question. 1977

Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa
Watercolour and graphite on paper

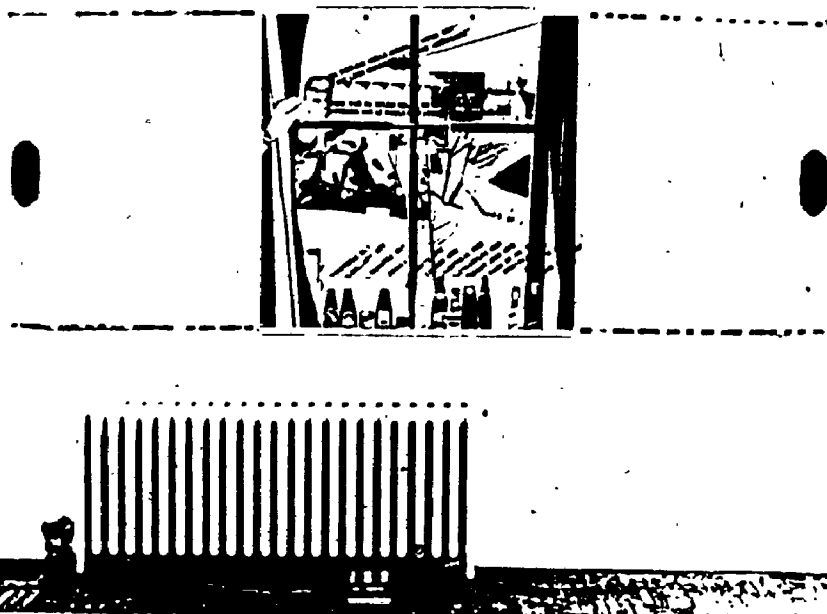


Figure 59. Curnoe. View from the Most Northerly Window -- West Wall. 1970-71

Collection of M. Robinson, London, Ont.
Acrylic, marking ink, wall-paper on plywood,
loudspeakers, magnetic tape



Figure 80. CURNOE. The Vision of Dr. Bucke. 1984
Collection of R. and J. Davis, London, Ont.
Oil and collage on wood

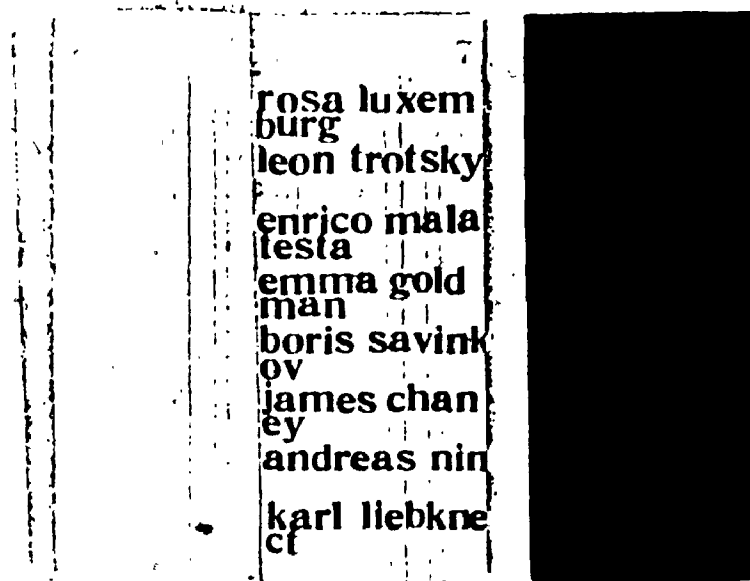


Figure 81. CURNOE. Blue Book No. 1. 1984
Collection of the artist
Stamp pad ink on lined paper (cloth-
bound accounting book; 180 pages)

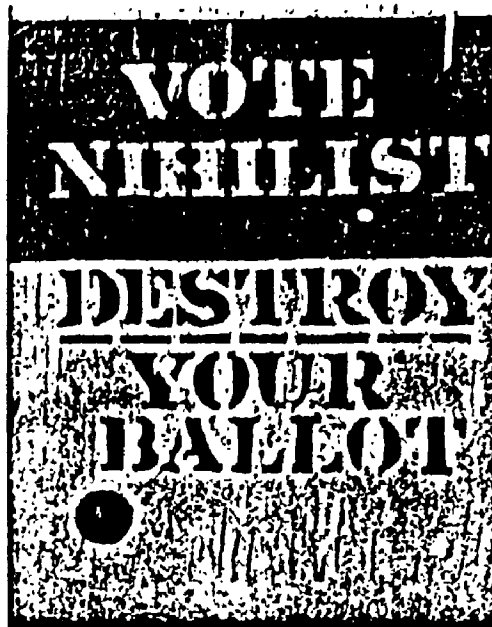


Figure 62. CURNOE. Vote Nihilist, Destroy Your Ballot. 1963
Collection of the artist
Woodcut in black on red paper.

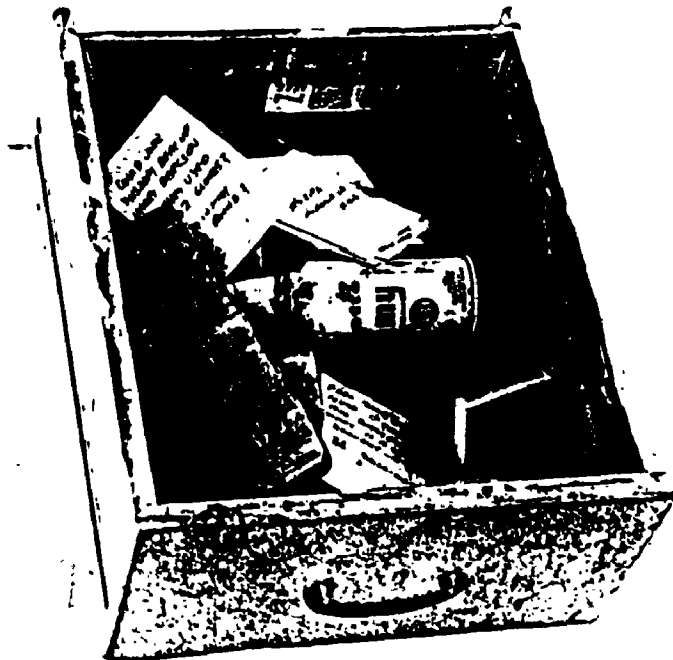


Figure 63. CURNOE. Drawer Full of Stuff. 1961
Collection of the artist
Assemblage (found objects)



Figure 64. CURNOE.
Sanouillet No. 1. 1979
Canada Council Art Bank,
Ottawa
Watercolour and graphite
on paper

Figure+65. CURNOE.
Looking at Three Members
of the Student Wing of
the Nihilist Party Through
Blue Glasses. 1964-65
Collection of D. and M.
Johnson, London, Ont.
Oil and collage on wood





Figure 66. CURNOE. Art is the Complement of a Weak Mind. 1984-85
Private Collection
Oil and collage on wood



Figure 67. WIELAND.
Paint Phantom. 1983-84
National Gallery of
Canada, Ottawa
Oil on canvas

END

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