

More Voice-Over

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More Voice-Over: Colin Campbell Writings, Colin Campbell & Jon Davies (2021)

Everything is Relevant: Writings on Art and Life, 1991-2018, Ken Lum (2020)

MORE VOICE-OVER

COLIN CAMPBELL WRITINGS

EDITED BY JON DAVIES

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This book is dedicated to my father, Jim Davies (1924–2020), and in memory of Bruce W. Ferguson (1946–2019).

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Introduction: “There Is No Fiction” – Colin Campbell, Writing, and Video Art

Jon Davies

Did they think things like that?
Also, this wasn't dialogue. It was voice-over.
Did they go to bed then, or go their separate ways?
Write one another once every ten years?
Letters weren't dialogue either.
More voice-over.
“More voice-over,” Miranda's voice-over said.
– Colin Campbell, *No Voice Over*, 1986

When artist Colin Campbell died of cancer in 2001, he left behind a marvellously idiosyncratic body of work. While he was committed to the medium of video, over the course of his career he came to embrace writing in many different forms. This book approaches Campbell through a selection of his writing, collecting transcripts of many of his videos – the majority never before published – alongside artist talks and statements, critical articles, short stories, excerpts from his two novels, and other textual material. If Campbell's tapes are marked by great candour, I hope that this collection can intensify that feeling of intimacy even further, the format of the book creating a one-to-one narrowcasting from a technology with wide, broadcast potential.

Words were central to Campbell's oeuvre, the building blocks of indelible personas like Art Star, the Woman from Malibu, Robin, and Colleena, whose identities were forged through their idiosyncratic manners of speaking and moving. Campbell's video scripts and the characters within them are fascinating verbal bricolages drawn from his observations of day-to-day life and mass media events. He understood that words are a primary means of constructing ourselves for others, but for Campbell identity was always mercurial, malleable according to one's moment-to-moment whims, power dynamics, and the desires of others. In the mode of gossip, the charismatic personas he wrote into being confide their stories and secrets, and spin seductive mythologies. This collection allows us to witness Campbell in his often-intertwined roles of writer, director, and performer as he evolves from the petulant Art Star of the early 1970s to the elder Colleena in the late 1990s, reflecting on her “sisters” to devise wild new narratives for the artist's past personas. *More Voice-Over* reflects not only the

centrality of writing to Campbell’s groundbreaking video practice, but also his vital presence within English Canadian artist-run culture. Playfully fluid in his sexual and gender identifications and affiliations, Campbell was pioneering in crafting a markedly queer persona as well, decades before the term came to designate positions that exceed binaries of male/female and homosexual/heterosexual. Though many genres of writing appear in the “perverse collage”¹ of these pages, all evidence Campbell’s wry voice, which is equally adept at flights of fancy as it is at critical skewering. By juxtaposing the various kinds of writing that he took up in one anthology, we can see that his distinct – and immensely prescient – artistic voice did not adapt to but instead transformed textual genres through his charismatic blurring of the lines between fact and fiction.

Some initial notes on my selection process: Campbell was a master/mistress of the monologue, which strongly influenced which tapes I selected for inclusion. While Campbell was enthusiastic about writing dialogue, the monologue format allows one to enter a character in greater depth when reproduced on the page. His tapes with extensive dialogue, more ad-libbed communal performance, and those that rely heavily on the visuals for their meaning have largely been excluded from these pages or, in a few special cases, passages have been excerpted if they are particularly memorable and meaningful. Transcribing Campbell’s spoken texts from video to page, and shaping them with precise punctuation, was often more a matter of intuition than hard science, particularly as Campbell was fond of the pregnant pause and the fragmentary utterance. However, I have endeavoured to be as consistent as possible. In general, I have tried to put the focus on the use of language rather than attempting to recreate the experience of viewing Campbell’s and others’ performances. I would encourage all readers to seek out the tapes from video art distributor Vtape and to engage in further research into Campbell’s rich oeuvre.

There is an expansive corpus of scholarship and criticism on video art in Canada. A consistent theme is how the focus on narrative and performance in video coming out of Toronto in the 1970s by artists like Campbell, as well as his once-partners Lisa Steele and John Greyson, Tom Sherman, Susan Britton, Rodney Werden, Vera Frenkel, and others, opens up the potential for a different history of the medium than that recounted in the United States, which, historiographically,

1 AA Bronson coined this useful phrase to describe Campbell’s work in his vital article on the Toronto video and performance scene, “Automatons/Automorons,” *Performance by Artists*, ed. AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1979), 292.

has been under the cloud of teleological accounts of modernism's progress. Perhaps the most cited academic essay on video, Rosalind Krauss's 1976 "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," cut the form adrift from "serious" art by arguing that its relationship to modernist understandings of the medium and critical self-reflexivity could only be parodic. For Krauss, the video camera and monitor do not qualify as a medium in the traditional modernist sense; instead its true medium for her is narcissism, the "psychological condition of the self split and doubled by the mirror-reflection of synchronous feedback."² Video is symptomatic of artists' then-recent enthrallment to the mass media landscape, rather than a means of grappling critically with it. If for Krauss, the artist sees themselves reflected, in Campbell's work the self is constructed instead as a precarious, prismatic other.³ If we rightly foreground Campbell's role in the early history of video, we can provocatively ask what it means to shift the medium's history more toward fabulation over documentation, narrative over formalism, and speaking over showing. This approach necessarily brings video into closer proximity with its oft-denigrated kin, cinema and television, which is in line with Campbell's own desire to expand the audience of video beyond the fine art world. In his 1980 lecture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which took place the night Ronald Reagan was elected, Campbell spoke against the limits placed on video's audiences: "Video artists hasten to say that video art was not TV. Well, scrap that audience. Video artists hastened to say that it was not a cheap way to make film. Scrap that audience. I began to wonder about that. Was there not a certain safety factor in narrowing one's audience to the predictable realm of aesthetics?" Writing is promiscuous, opening Campbell's video art as much to a Rainer Werner Fassbinder film or a daytime soap opera as to a tape by a fellow artist like John Watt, for example.

Irredeemably tainted by capitalism and mass culture, television in particular was seen as the "frightful parent"⁴ that video as a fine art form had to kill off. Even when used to plumb new levels of intimacy

2 Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October* 1 (1976): 55.

3 Bruce W. Ferguson's catalogue essay for his curated retrospective of Campbell's work explicitly critiques Krauss partially for being blind to her own positioning within the context of an American culture of narcissism, a subject I will return to below. He argues, "For Campbell, the state of otherness generated by video feedback is to be celebrated as one of the many ironic conditions of being." See Ferguson, "Otherwise Worldly," in *Colin Campbell: Media Works 1972-1990*, ed. Bruce W. Ferguson (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1991), 20.

4 David Antin quoted in David A. Ross, *Southland Video Anthology 1976-77* (Long Beach, CA: Long Beach Museum of Art, 1977), 92.

and new horizons of minoritarian self-representation, narrative video art was specifically considered suspect, too close to the “master’s tools” of corporate entertainment for comfort. Where Krauss saw narcissists unmoored from history, fawning over their own images, creating a dangerous symmetry without any outside, artists like Campbell used writing and narrative to critically examine the social and technological mediation of the self and of desire. Campbell once described narrative as “a tool for social, sexual, and cultural investigation.”⁵ Unlike the typical 1970s network TV show, narrative could be more fragmented and open-ended in video art. Lee Rodney writes, “As a site of paradox and contradiction, narrative is [...] taken up and explored by Campbell as a strategy of dissemblance.”⁶ Commentators such as AA Bronson and Bruce W. Ferguson have suggested that Canada’s colonial relationship to the United States allowed Canadian video artists to engage with television and with narrative on their own terms, precisely because the mass media plays such a decisive role in shaping our collective self-image.⁷ As a nation, we are weaned on American pop culture yet grasp that it is not *addressing* us; a productive sense of irony arises in watching the televisual flow in quotation marks. Campbell’s distinctly queer point of view further distances him from the mass media and makes him ideally suited to mine it for camp. He was perpetually looking askance at the dominant culture’s doings. Therefore, while

5 From a January 19, 1987, letter to Sara Diamond at Video Inn, Vancouver, describing a script-writing workshop he will lead there. He also cites the importance of Laura Mulvey’s 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

6 Lee Rodney, “Self Served: Early Video and the Politics of Narcissism” (MA thesis, York University, 1997), 98.

7 In “Otherwise Worldly,” Ferguson writes, “If we can only be recognized as the ‘other’ by a dominant discourse, perhaps it is inevitable that a Canadian artist would choose the evacuation of the self rather than narcissism in the first place” (20). Regarding *Sackville, I’m Yours...*, he continues, “Campbell holds on to an imaginary relationship to identity just as he does to an imaginary role in the art world. Such a marginal position is the only one available to video artists, even today, and perhaps to Canadian artists in general. Art Star’s confessions reveal a considered indifference to a master discourse which is powerfully indifferent to him. For Campbell, like other Canadian artists at the time, the pseudonym expresses both the desire to be other than oneself and the irony of a condition in which one can’t help but be oneself, however deviously, doubly, and incompletely constructed” (20–21). Contra Krauss, Art Star thus becomes “an admission of self-estrangement which deliberately avoids the illusion of complete identity.” In “Canadian Colonization,” Andrew Sorfleet reflects on the arrival of Campbell’s retrospective at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, suggesting that experiencing the show here in the nation’s capital demanded that Campbell’s work be looked at as a critical engagement with Canadian nationalism. He writes that Campbell’s characters’ status “as a reinterpretation of media representation, give hope for the liberation of a media-colonized Canadian consciousness.” See Sorfleet, “Canadian Colonization,” *C Magazine* 31 (1991), 48. On the specificity of Canadian video, also see Ferguson’s “Television Means, Video Is,” *OKanada* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste and Ottawa: The Canada Council for the Arts, 1982), 220–24, and Bronson’s “Automatons/Automorons.”

Campbell is a central protagonist in the history of video art, his writerly voice is very much that of an outsider-observer, keenly probing beyond appearances in order to reveal all the queer subtext and repressed drives – and politics – beneath the surface.

Curator Peggy Gale writes of the Toronto school of video, “Rather than wishing to be objective, some of this video looks inward, seeking a reality not evident on the surface of things. A kind of personal journalism, it probes the psyche through associations, memories, juxtapositions of facts and intuitions.”⁸ Visually, Campbell’s works in particular are profoundly “cool” in Marshall McLuhan’s sense of the term: the image often consists of barely more than a head-and-shoulders shot of a person speaking with a simple backdrop. The quality of the analog video resembles a photocopy, especially as the decades pass. (Greyson has suggested that Campbell’s tapes were “Xeroxed from life” as he “brilliantly magpied the shiny bits.”⁹) The lower the resolution, the more impoverished the verisimilitude, the more we are called on to fill in the blanks; our close involvement is interpellated by characters that seem to need us to complete them. Andrew Sorfleet explains, “Campbell’s tapes [...] stretch to its maximum the distance that the viewer must travel to suspend disbelief. Action rarely takes place on-screen and is usually related orally – a character recounting an event, reading a letter, engaging in dialogue or having a phone conversation. Shots are usually long. There is no rapid editing. Sets are almost always obviously constructed, if they exist at all. And characters often have precarious genders.”¹⁰

Campbell asks us to grapple with what video can be when explored to its fullest potential. For him, narrative material does not belong to any one medium, the way a modernist critic might say it is a holdover from the novel or the theatre. Krauss was correct in that there is no point in trying to find a modernist conception of medium in video; as a young medium, its practitioners came from other fields, its identity shaped by eclecticism not by the quest for purity. Writing reminds us that video’s origins lie not in modernist medium-specificity but in the dissolution of this towards fertile cross-pollination that characterized

8 Peggy Gale, “Toronto Video: Looking Inward,” *Vie des Arts* 21, no. 86 (1977), 85.

9 John Greyson, email to author, February 21, 2020.

10 Sorfleet, “Canadian Colonization,” 51. In his interview with Gale, Campbell suggests, intriguingly, that “a lot of things I and the people I know do seem as much to me like fiction as real life. It’s entirely possible to see one’s entire life in the third person.” Peggy Gale, “Colin Campbell, 3 March 1982/22 March 1982,” transcription of interview, box 127, folder 5, p. 6, Peggy Gale fonds, Art Gallery of Ontario.

postmodernism. Putting tired questions of ontology aside, what would it mean to consider writing as core to the practice if not the “medium” of video art rather than something external to it? Gale suggests that the Toronto scene’s quick progression from modernist (more specifically formalist) “video about video” to more personal narrative work means that artists there evolved “very comfortably and naturally” into postmodernism.¹¹

While the dominant history of video focuses on its formal attributes such as its nature as an electronic signal and the ability for simultaneous closed-circuit recording and viewing, an alternative (Canadian?) history might foreground *writing* for its privileged, highly intimate relationship with video, mined to its fullest by Campbell and others. The flows of analog video and of writing are both capacious and “hungry,” capable of devouring whatever is fed into them. As an audio-visual recording device, the video apparatus seems to invite us to talk to it, and not just to extemporaneously confide but to craft elaborate stories.¹² Campbell’s writing *feels* analog (meaning it has a continuous signal as opposed to the binary code of digital), his storytelling voice easily imaginable at a dinner party or around a campfire. While presented in an ostensibly casual manner, tension builds as the words’ power and meaning develop over time. Through this lens, video becomes the ideal container for content: narrative, rumour, self-fashioning, dress-up, social experimentation, and play. Importantly, Campbell saw his use of these practices under the rubric of realism, broadly conceived as representing reality truthfully (if not factually). The personal, even the seemingly confessional, in his work finds itself amplified, stylized by artifice or “extrapolation,” which generatively blurs fact and fiction to reach a higher sense of truth.¹³

Refusing to be caught up in questions of factuality, Campbell’s “realist” writing becomes a means of building intimacy with his audience, such that questions of what is true and what is not fade into the background. One of his greatest accomplishments was to develop a confessional mode of writing and speaking that simultaneously queers or undermines its own truth claims; he is an author who resists authority. (This tendency thrived as Campbell expanded the number of

11 Gale, “Colin Campbell” 1982 interview, 7–8.

12 Rodney writes that the apparatus of the video camera seemed like it “wanted to hear something, and it asked the subject to speak” (“Self Served,” 86).

13 Campbell argues that real experiences are the core of his work, and while they may undergo extrapolation, they are not fiction: “In fact, I don’t know what fiction is” (Gale, “Colin Campbell” 1982 interview, 5).

characters in his tapes; at the same time, characters are just as likely to speak about something they overheard as something they experienced directly.) It is productive to imagine Campbell's entire oeuvre of writing, video, and other material as a vast web of gossip, with each speaker merely one node in that web coming forward to address us. Writing down gossip, using it as a model for narrative, and then committing it to video, allows it to become part of the archival record without giving it any kind of authoritative status. To put it another way, writing for video allows Campbell both to capture gossip and to keep it moving through his characters' mouths. The sum total of this cosmology becomes Campbell's self-portrait of the artist as *synthesizer*.

Campbell's work in video developed alongside the technological advancements of the medium in distinctive periods, each marked by a different use of writing: early on, he used words to test the boundaries between truth and fiction.¹⁴ In the mid-1970s, his tapes were dominated by voiceovers; here a mediating narrative voice is evident. Distinct and disembodied from the figures on screen, it acts as an internal consciousness made external. As Campbell developed his personas over the course of the 1970s and began speaking directly to his viewers, performance and storytelling became a means of synthesizing the two into a compelling whole. In the 1980s, Campbell explored both improvisation and the tight scripting of increasingly complex and more populated narratives that trace the power and sexual dynamics between various characters; these combined voiceover, direct address, and dialogue. Finally, in the late 1990s, he explored themes such as transhistorical connection and reincarnation in his two novels before returning to his video personas, reimagining them in new scripts. This anthology thus unfolds chronologically, and each decade includes both video transcripts as well as other published and unpublished texts.

We begin with Campbell's extensive October 1990 interview with curator Su Ditta published in the catalogue for his touring retrospective curated by Ferguson for the Winnipeg Art Gallery. For Ditta, Campbell is as much a writer as a visual artist: "I realized that Campbell was the only video artist I knew whose 'lines' stayed in my head as long and as clearly as their images did. [...] Some of the scripts read like prose, whole short stories, tucked like hidden treasures within larger

14 Campbell embraced new developments in video technology over time. His tapes became more televisual with the advent of colour, for example. However, while camera movements are prominent in the *Woman from Malibu* series, he does not tend to take advantage of the increasing portability of the video camera as the years go on. The fixed shot, often of a face, remains the visual signature of his video practice over the three decades of production. Similarly, with a few exceptions (such as *Fiddle Faddle* [1988]), he does not employ visual effects during editing.

narratives. Others were very poetic, lyrical, constantly playing with rhythm and timing.”¹⁵ She focuses the interview primarily on his writing practice: Campbell relates in detail how he started to write, how his writing developed over the course of his video oeuvre, and his move into more complex, fragmented narrative structures, and from monologue-driven to dialogue-driven scripts. Ditta is particularly interested in how Campbell writes and voices his compelling female personas into being. Growing up, he claims, “writing seemed to me the most liberating, exciting kind of thing to do.”¹⁶ Ditta also notes that texts are central agents within Campbell’s video narratives, whether it be a newspaper article, a postcard, a letter, or a recording.¹⁷

Campbell was born in 1942 in Reston, Manitoba, a tiny community in the southwest corner of the prairie province. The undated document “Stories of Reston” offers three morbid narrative vignettes about his rural hometown, which in 2012 achieved brief fame for its efforts to attract newcomers by offering properties for just ten dollars. The landscape Campbell etches is one of solitude and secrecy. He studied at the University of Manitoba before moving to Southern California in the late 1960s to complete an MFA at the Claremont Graduate School. It was not until Campbell arrived in Sackville, New Brunswick, in the early 1970s to teach at Mount Allison University, however, that he made his first videotapes with equipment housed in the university’s physical education department. His *True/False* (1972) and *Sackville, I’m Yours...* (1972) are considered classics of early video art and lay the foundation for all of his later work.

Early on, Campbell went through a formalist phase, where he used his own body to examine themes such as depth versus flatness in the video image, the video medium’s capacity for truth and deception, and its inherently voyeuristic and exhibitionistic qualities in several tapes that are not represented here (*Real Split* [1972], *Janus* [1973], and *This Is an Edit/This Is Real* [1974]). These tapes, most of which were made after Campbell had relocated from Sackville to Toronto, culminated with a lithe Campbell strutting around in *I’m a Voyeur* (1974) as the artist plays both the voyeur behind the camera and the “victim” being watched.

15 Sue Ditta, “A Work in Progress: An Interview with Colin Campbell,” *Colin Campbell: Media Works 1972–1990*, ed. Bruce W. Ferguson (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1991), 32–33. (The author now goes by Su Ditta.) Ditta’s conversation with Campbell has been reprinted in this volume. Pagination from here on refers to this collection.

16 This volume, xxxvii.

17 This volume, xl.

While many artists made tapes such as these (frequent comparisons are made to artists Vito Acconci and Dennis Oppenheim) the structural dualities in all of these tapes – as well as in *True/False*, Campbell's earliest title in distribution – take on an added resonance when we read the works as grappling with his bisexuality and gender in the context of expectations of the 1970s serious male artist.¹⁸

The explicitly personal would soon manifest in a number of tapes – most since withdrawn by the artist from circulation – that drew on letters from friends as well as his own long-form diaristic writing. Campbell's reading of these intimate texts in voiceover were typically juxtaposed with long takes of houses, gardens, and other mundane scenes. The formalist bent of the earlier work carries over here in the geometry of his careful framing and compositions, leading me to call this his “Windows and Mirrors” period, after the title of a text by Peggy Gale.¹⁹ Some of these were made while he was briefly living in New York and clearly indulging an introspective mood. I have reproduced *Love-Life* (1974), *California: Myth/Reality* (1974–75), *Hindsight* (1975), and *Passage* (1976) here. *Hindsight* is the only one that remains in distribution and is the only to credit specific friends as contributing writing in the form of their correspondence. *Love-Life* draws on letters from others to him, though Campbell remains coy in the credits as to their origins; *California: Myth/Reality* is entirely in Campbell's first-person, highly idiosyncratic voice. While the writing in these tapes is quite interesting, Campbell likely understood that the relationship between the visuals and his voiceovers remained unresolved despite what critics like Gale saw as a formal elegance. Perhaps the greatest lesson that Campbell learned in this period, however, was that identity is a collage of different moments and perspectives, internal and external, and that words – particularly when spoken through a distinctive voice – can convey this refracted reality with considerable impact.

As is evident from the fascinating *California: Myth/Reality*, California and its mythologies continued to hold great sway for Campbell after he completed his MFA there in 1969. I would suggest that it resonated with his bisexuality and his deep commitment to exploring androgyny through his almost analytic performances of

18 In 1987 Campbell stated, “I'm bisexual. It's a peculiar position to occupy in one's life because you get it from both sides. It's certainly been the basis for a lot of my work – the gender blurring and the cross-dressing, the mix up and rejection of commitment and gender roles.” See Kathleen Maitland-Carter (with Bruce LaBruce), “Colin Campbell Interviewed,” *CineAction!* 9 (1987), 38.

19 Peggy Gale, “Colin Campbell: Windows and Mirrors,” *Video by Artists*, ed. Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1976), 188–91.

gender, and portrayals of women that are a far cry from typical manifestations of drag. California represented the possibility of self-creation, yes, but also extremes of experience as embodied by its dramatic topography. (The desert figures often in his work, a kind of existential blank slate – it is no surprise that the Mojave is the Woman from Malibu’s final destination in *Hollywood and Vine* [1977].) Campbell returned to California several times, including a lengthy stint in 1976–77 with his then-partner Steele, where they lived at 576 Rialto Avenue in Venice Beach. In the shadow of Hollywood, with its fading glamour and grandeur, one would think that storytelling would blossom in the Los Angeles video scene. However, in an October 18, 1976, letter to Gale, Campbell claimed that video in Los Angeles was preoccupied with “fantasy” and that “there is nothing approaching our form of realism – or what looks like realism in comparison to this work.”²⁰ A decade later, Campbell would evocatively refer to the breakthrough of his Woman from Malibu series as a transition from “internal” to “external” fiction, a formulation I find highly suggestive in gathering both subjective and objective reality under the guise of narrative.²¹

Here the construction of a persona gave Campbell a means of mediating and processing all the information he was taking in from this highly eclectic landscape. Campbell was a cultural sponge, and the Woman from Malibu a way of absorbing his surroundings and returning them to the world transformed, in a gripping, meticulously scripted voice that was both Campbell and other. While the rubric of “collage” is useful for looking at Campbell’s work, the scripting and performance of this material through a unified voice brings all the pieces together. His experiences of and ideas about California are developed beautifully in the series, perhaps his landmark achievement, which is reproduced in its entirety here (the improvised outlier *Shango Botanica*

20 In the same letter to Gale, Campbell distinguishes his commitment to video from those artists working in the “I-also-do-some-videotapes’ category,” populated by figures like the documentarian and the “sculptor in search of a new medium.” Campbell’s sharp tongue here implies that his own practice was fully matured at this point, but in fact it was just the opposite: he had been that “sculptor in search of a new medium” just a few years prior when he was at Mount Allison University. October 18, 1976, letter from Campbell to Gale, box 103, folder 5, Peggy Gale fonds, Art Gallery of Ontario.

21 Maitland-Carter, “Colin Campbell Interviewed,” 32. His shift to “external” fiction should not be confused with an attempt at documentary veracity. As Steele suggests, “[Colin’s] work isn’t documentary because he doesn’t have anything to say about all of the outside part. He’s literally interested in – it would seem to me – what happens on the inside, the interior. It’s not his intention to talk about events. It’s his intention to talk about people.” See Sorfleet, “Canadian Colonization,” 50. In conversation with Gale, he claims that the term “documentary” “condemns people to a point in time” (“Colin Campbell” 1982 interview, 5).

[1977] via extensive excerpts).²² The five more monologue-driven tapes foreground Campbell's hypnotic performance as the Woman from Malibu, whose delivery is halting and full of excess attention to detail. While he portrayed other characters too, for the most part Campbell's experiences of LA were channeled into this dowdy, perpetually anxious middle-aged woman. She became his avatar for LA life: "I imagined things that she would do and then I went out and did them. [...] I became quite involved in her."²³ While writing was central to the mid-1970s tapes, these videos were the first that Campbell considered to be fully scripted. Later, he also came to see the series as a major shift in his thinking about gender and sexuality.²⁴

When Campbell arrived in California from Toronto in fall 1976 with Steele, he was arguably at a creative crossroads. His work needed to take a new direction, or rather rediscover one last explored four years earlier, back at Mount Allison. There in 1972 he created his persona Art Star in *Sackville, I'm Yours...*²⁵ A persona did not just allow for the combination of the "real" and the artificial in terms of content, but is a performative mode that contends with how desire, fantasy, and myth form and change identity over time. If Art Star embodied just that, an ego too big for the sleepy environs of Sackville, then the Woman from Malibu was a synthesis of LA life and a vital means of reporting on this alien environment. Fusing exceptional writing and performance, Campbell plays her as an older woman to whom everything bad has happened: her husband dies, her daughter disappears, she is abducted by aliens. She even recounts her own death, shot twice

22 *Shango Botanica* is a fascinating tape (which Campbell himself saw as an outlier in the series) that juxtaposes their friend Yrene Asalde-Brewster's memories of major earthquakes in both Lima and Los Angeles, and scenes of the Woman from Malibu and her unnamed friend (Lisa Steele) watching the Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena from the comfort of the friend's RV parked along the parade route, as well as from a colour television.

23 This volume, xli, xlii.

24 Gale, "Colin Campbell" 1982 interview, 18.

25 Artist Nelson Henricks suggests that Campbell's own performances are the primary content of many of his works, *Sackville, I'm Yours...* in particular. He writes, "the real narration of this work lies not in the text (what is spoken), but in the subtext (what is understood). [...] If we were to read a transcript of *Sackville, I'm Yours...*, we would never hear him invert the sense of what he is saying. His embodiment of Art Star however, renders this flexible interval between a white lie and its truth with delicious clarity." See Henricks, "True Lies or The Importance of Being Colin" (2002), Nelson Henricks: Writings, 4–5, http://nelsonhenricks.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/True_Lies.pdf. While the transcripts that fill the pages of the present volume may obscure the subtleties of Campbell and the other performers who brought them to life, I believe they still have great value.

on the highway shoulder, turning Campbell decidedly toward the metaphysical.

Included in a cache of letters that Campbell wrote from LA to his friend Peggy Gale, I found his sharp-tongued 1977 response to Toronto critic John Bentley Mays’s “Lines on Video Art,” an essay that had appeared in a recent issue of *Only Paper Today*. Mays argued that video is a perpetually infantile and anything-goes medium haunted by the “birth defect” of its origins in television; video artists are overhyped “rude swains” enthralled to the latest technologies.²⁶ His arguments were critiqued not only by Campbell – who celebrates the accessibility and freedom video allows, and rejects Mays’s criticism that video is boring, ahistorical, and trite – but also in published responses by fellow artists Steele and Clive Robertson. Mays, who died in 2018, was a formidable presence in Toronto: a Louisiana-born writer with a vast intellectual appetite, he would go on to be art critic at the *Globe and Mail* from 1980 to 1998. In this exchange (Mays’s article is reprinted as an appendix), we see a clash between the view of art as a form of mastery versus something far more democratic and messy.²⁷

If *Sackville, I’m Yours...* is a monologue posing as a dialogue, Campbell fully embraced the monological form during his and Steele’s time in LA, and the two artists took it to new levels of narrative sophistication and affective power. First came an experiment, however. After he and Steele returned to Toronto in 1977, Campbell left the *Woman from Malibu* behind and made two rough-hewn comedic works, *Modern Love* (1978) and *Bad Girls* (1980), which were both set in and screened weekly at the Cabana Room, a popular New Wave hangout in Toronto. The protagonist of these tapes is Robin, a lovingly ditzzy Xerox operator (as the artist then was, working a day job at Wood Gundy, a large brokerage firm) played by Campbell, desperate to join the cool kids in the pursuit of “post-disco” libidinal horizons.²⁸ Moving into colour video, these and a few other tapes from the 1980s are more improvisatory, resembling scrappy, alternative art-scene versions of

26 This volume, 332.

27 This is not to say that Mays’s own work could not be highly experimental and risk-taking, for example in his darkly disturbing vision of Toronto art as seen through the lens of the brutal 1977 sexual assault and murder of twelve-year-old shoeshine boy Emanuel Jaques in “Miracles of Emanuel Jaques,” *C Magazine* 2 (1984), 38–47.

28 This evocative term is from an earlier version of the description of Campbell’s tape *Dangling by Their Mouths* (1981). Bruce W. Ferguson, “Video Programme: Programme II (Narrative) – Tape A,” *OKanada* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste and Ottawa: The Canada Council for the Arts, 1982), 246.

dialogue-heavy TV genres like the sitcom (*Bennies from Heaven* [1986]) or soap opera (*Black and Light* [1987]).

From the late 1970s, I have reproduced in full the published artists' book adaptation of *Modern Love*, which juxtaposes excerpts of the dialogue with stills, as well as two of his critical texts. The first is a gossipy "report" on artist David Buchan's (1950–1993) "Lamonte Del Monte and the Fruit Cocktails" cabaret at the Tele-Performance event in Toronto in September 1978 for *Centerfold* magazine. Spending far more time backstage than onstage, the article offers a snapshot of the decidedly DIY-glamorous and queer (or at least very "modern") social milieu of avant-garde media and performance artists now centred on Queen Street West in Toronto that Campbell inhabited, particularly as Buchan's persona of Lamonte Del Monte acts as the villain in *Modern Love*.²⁹ The second is a catty review of a disappointing conference that took place in Rome called Video '79, Video – The First Decade. Campbell details the myriad logistical snags plaguing the event, and notes the proliferation of what he saw as overly didactic, identity-based work, which often consisted of documentaries about the marginalized made by well-meaning, institutionally funded outsiders, with all the politics-of-representation baggage that this carries. ("Does anyone want to be a statistic in a cause?" he asks in the short story "Both.") It is interesting to read Campbell's playful critique of this genre considering how his own work will soon be transformed by the advent of AIDS (see *White Money* [1983] and, above all, *Skin* [1990], which I discuss below).

Included throughout the collection, Campbell's four critical articles give a strong sense of his commitment to video as an advanced artistic form – he has definite opinions on what works and what does not – and to artist-run culture in Canada, which, beginning in the early 1970s, grew in leaps and bounds as a grassroots, publicly funded alternative to institutions like museums and commercial galleries that were not necessarily equipped to support the latest artists' practices. In a number of his articles, lectures, and statements, Campbell shows himself performing an ambassadorial role on behalf of video, a medium that was still widely misunderstood and derided. In Toronto, dynamic artist-run centres like Art Metropole and A Space were quick to embrace video exhibition and distribution, however, while media

29 See Philip Monk's work, especially *Is Toronto Burning?: Three Years in the Making (and Unmaking) of the Toronto Art Scene* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016), "Picturing the Toronto Art Community: The Queen Street Years," *C Magazine* 59 (1998): unpaginated insert (published with The Power Plant), and "Picturing the Toronto Art Community" (1998–2002) on the Reading Philip Monk website, <http://www.philipmonk.com/picturing-the-toronto-art-community-2> for in-depth analysis of the performativity of the Toronto scene and Campbell's role within it.

production centres and alternative performance spaces also popped up. These venues were joined by new art publications such as *Centerfold*, *FILE*, *Impulse*, *Only Paper Today*, and *Vanguard*, just to name those that Campbell and his kin wrote for. Indeed, given the relatively small and tight-knit Canadian video scenes in cities like Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, and Halifax, artists were some of the most prolific critics of their peers’ work. On the subject of artist-run centres, Campbell writes in “Art Speaks in the ’80s,” “Tongues wag. Fingers wag. Camps are demarcated. Burn out, melt down, flared tempers, dampened spirits ... these are the active ingredients of artist-run society. No one’s reputation can ever be ruined ... we all think we know each other too well. There are no fortunes to be lost, no patrons to shock or offend.”³⁰

Campbell’s experience with the Cabana Room tapes and other largely ad-libbed efforts led him to seek greater control in his more ambitious 1980s projects, and he developed the monologue format further into a key part of his artistic toolkit. Greyson notes that for Campbell, “Monologues are more interesting than dialogue because they don’t pretend to be natural.”³¹ Campbell typically places his characters’ monologues in conflict with others’, creating a narrative hall of mirrors where the facts remain unclear, as in the dazzling *Conundrum Clinique* (1981)³² or *The Woman Who Went Too Far* (1984). As I have written about elsewhere, Campbell also regularly features monologues that only reveal themselves to be written from the perspective of the dead late in their recitation.³³ The scripted monologue emerges as Campbell’s prime métier as it allows for the development of a subjectivity over time, and for the stripped-down simplicity of one person seducing you with the force of their personality and deft manipulation of language and storytelling. And while I would not agree with

30 This volume, 203.

31 John Greyson, “The Singing Dunes: Colin Campbell, 194[2]–2001,” *C Magazine* 74 (2002), 30. He continues, “In *Dangling by Their Mouths* he quotes the dead-mother monologue from Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* at length. In tape after tape he returns to Faulkner’s strategy of competing monologues, different characters confessing their versions and secrets and poor little poems to the camera. The first movie we saw together was [Rainer Werner] Fassbinder’s *In the Year of Thirteen Moons*. More than anything, this film helped me understand the art that Colin was chasing, embracing, creating. The art of declamation, the art of melodrama, the art of tableau” (30).

32 I want to acknowledge here that *Conundrum Clinique* seems very indebted to Lisa Steele’s four-part series *The Scientist Tapes* (1976) that Steele wrote and produced – and which Campbell performed in – during their sojourn in LA. This work is also in distribution with Vtape and very much worth watching.

33 See Jon Davies, “The Gossip and Ghosts of Colin Campbell,” *Public 39: New Communities* (2010): 96–103.

Krauss that these faces appear to us outside of history, there is a way in which context fades into the background and we must attune ourselves anew, more sensitively, to the social and psychic dynamics that have shaped – or even “scripted” – this person on the monitor in front of us. Randy Gledhill suggests that Campbell’s use of direct address makes us “complicit in the fictional deceit. This intimacy creates an almost interactive illusion of camaraderie.”³⁴ For Campbell, often a single line can contain a world of possibilities within it. One example he gives is a woman who claimed, “I’ve never even met a man I’d even like to have dinner with.” He continues, “And I’m thinking, this can go any way, and she could have come from anywhere. It’s often seemingly benign lines like that that produce the core of a character. The part that’s most thrilling to me about writing is juxtaposing the unlikely against that and seeing how the two mix, if they can at all.”³⁵

As Campbell became more interested in turning his gaze towards other people, creating increasingly nuanced characters, his interests shifted away from performing in front of the camera himself and more towards writing and directing. Campbell noted that by this time, “I’m now into completely scripted tapes [...] the script is the core now.”³⁶ He continues, “[Video is] still one of the mediums that allows the enormous freedom to do anything you want, the rules are rewritten all the time. But I think it’s also time to convey really specific serious ideas about what you feel about living, and the only way to do that is to write it [...] the piece is done in the writing now.”³⁷ If Campbell is suggesting a lack in his chosen medium’s capacity “to convey really specific serious ideas,” his turn to writing in order to do so serves to infuse video with the emotional, psychological, social, and political gravitas required to contend with a tumultuous decade. The 1980s section of this anthology begins with the published version (plus a transcript of the final section, which was not published) of Campbell’s first performance work, *Peripheral Blur* (1980), which evolved into his masterpiece, the hour-long video narrative *Dangling by Their Mouths* (1981).³⁸ Unfortunately,

34 Randy Gledhill, “Cheezie Vogue: The Essential Modern Cinema Povera of Colin Campbell,” *Take One* 36 (2002), 20.

35 Gale, “Colin Campbell” 1982 interview, 14.

36 Gale, “Colin Campbell” 1982 interview, 2.

37 Gale, “Colin Campbell” 1982 interview, 3.

38 An early draft of the video script found in John Greyson’s uncatalogued Campbell papers reveals that he was considering titling it, appropriately, *States of Desire*.

little documentation remains of Campbell’s collaborative performances with Margaret Dragu, including his script for the acclaimed *I Am Already Changing My Mind* [1982]. *Dangling...* is a self-reflexive critique about what it means for men to use the stuff of women’s lives for their art. Played by Campbell and his then-partner Kerri Kwinter, the Belgian protagonist Anna’s monologue and her lover Anouk’s powerful recitation of Addie Bundren’s story from William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* stand against the theatrical manipulations of the two male performing artists, John and Sean.³⁹ In this brutal world, women live and suffer, and men extract their trauma and pain to fuel their own creativity and renown. This tape was followed by a deliriously dark, jagged coda, *White Money*; its three monologues about roadkill, kinky sex, and white gay men (delivered in Spanish, translated here) act as a bracing MTV-style howl from the early years of “gay cancer.” *Snip Snip* (1981, co-dir. Rodney Werden [b. 1946]), meanwhile, is a satire of Ontario Board of Censors chair Mary Brown. Brown was the public face of an organization that classified, censored, and banned films; at the beginning of the 1980s, the board started scrutinizing small, non-profit arts venues where experimental filmmakers and video artists exhibited, where they had once focused only on commercial theatres.⁴⁰ Campbell was a central figure in the organizing against censorship that media artists undertook in Ontario in the 1980s. The first artist talk in this anthology captures a Campbell disillusioned with a Toronto art community more likely to acquiesce to the censor than to fight it, and reluctant to view censorship in the context of wider struggles. This battle ripped open fissures in any utopian idea of a unified “art community,” even among artists working primarily in film and media art.

The epistolary format of another major work, *No Voice Over* (1986), with its globe-trotting female artist protagonists Mocha, Miranda, and Marcella, brings us back to the “Windows and Mirrors” of a decade earlier that drew on Campbell’s actual correspondence, and continues his concerns with gendered power dynamics in the art world. It was originally intended as a text-based project rather than a video,⁴¹ so I

39 Due to copyright concerns, we were unable to reprint Addie’s monologue delivered by Kwinter in *Dangling by Their Mouths*. While citation and appropriation have long been vital artistic strategies, they come into conflict with copyright law in situations like this. We have provided a reference to the relevant book pages instead.

40 For an in-depth analysis of censorship and artists’ organizing against it in Ontario, see Taryn Sirove, *Ruling Out Art: Media Art Meets Law in Ontario’s Censor Wars* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2019).

41 This volume, xlv.

have only included the published version from Elke Town's *Video by Artists 2* volume rather than transcribing the tape back to print. *No Voice Over* is Campbell's script that is most explicitly about writing, and letter-writing as a means of negotiating between geographic distance and emotional proximity. (For the video version, the letters are conceptually recast as audio and video tapes.) Interestingly, 1986 is when Campbell became romantically involved with Greyson, who was in Los Angeles teaching at CalArts for a semester per year, resulting in a heavily epistolary love affair. The mystic visions detailed in *No Voice Over* also bring forms of communication that inhabit more meta-physical planes than pen-and-paper or signal-on-magnetic tape into the mix, anticipating the explicitly supernatural conversations between living and dead in Campbell's two unpublished novels. The first of Campbell's short stories also appeared around this time, published, for example, in the catalogue for the inaugural exhibition at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, *Toronto: A Play of History* (1987). With its brevity and relative informality, short fiction gave Campbell a freedom that video could not: liberation from video's bulky apparatus of narrative events, equipment, sets, acting, editing, and exhibition. The story in The Power Plant catalogue, "Both" refers to both his relationship with Greyson (as evidenced by their nicknames "Pinkey" and "Thing") and to the two sides of Campbell's Gemini self: it is his blazing manifesto for ambiguity and simultaneity, for both/and. With all the dualities at play in Campbell's work, filmmaker Mike Hoolboom argues that Campbell asks us to see him as an artist "in stereo."⁴² Yes *and* no, man *and* woman, authentic *and* artificial, here in real life *and* there on that monitor, dead *and* alive. For Campbell, however, the performative malleability of identity is not all fun and games but more akin to the death drive; he was drawn to tales of extreme violence, and of personal and social collapse that resonate strongly with our current moment of daily reports of suicidal males choosing to turn their final exits into massacres that offer them a few brief hours of televisual attention. A blood-lusting mass media landscape is Campbell's foil for much of his

42 For Hoolboom, a "stereo artist" is "one who refuses the dichotomies of the cold war (us versus them, freedom versus slavery, the missile gap...) by being able to hold two apparently contrasting thoughts (he was both male AND female). He is a stereo artist because he creates pictures which look back, in other words, he joins the look behind the camera with the one in front of it." See Hoolboom, "Too Late: An Interview with Tom McSorley" (2007), Mike Hoolboom: Movies – *Fascination*, <http://mikehoolboom.com/?p=755>. Elsewhere he writes, "He demonstrated this important truth: that it was possible, even necessary, to live two thoughts at the same time. Not either/or but yes and yes." See Hoolboom, "Colin Campbell (1942–2001)" (2006), Mike Hoolboom: On Artists – Colin Campbell, <http://mikehoolboom.com/?p=51>.

1980s output, and he is at pains to disidentify the male aspects of himself from the spectacle of masculine violence around him.

Campbell ended the decade with his first and only foray into 16mm film *Skin*, which I see as an intriguing failure. According to Greyson, who was deeply involved in AIDS activist work when the couple were together (1986–89), Campbell was moved by the voices of women impacted by AIDS whom they heard speak at the 1989 International Conference on AIDS in Montreal. While enlivened by strong performances, Campbell’s writing of the four different women in *Skin* struggles to capture their voices, its tone wavering between earnest and mannered, thus losing his own distinctive voice in the process.⁴³ This is a shame considering that *Skin* is his most explicit media-art intervention into the heated debates around AIDS and representation, made while a number of friends were ill and dying, and he was assisting in taking care of some of them. Still as potent as ever, Campbell’s short story “Noise” (1991), by contrast, reflects on the death toll of AIDS but is also plainly haunted by his childhood in Reston. “Noise” also confronts Campbell’s declining pace of video production (which became a full withdrawal from around 1990–96), partly due to the expense and the impossibility of ever seeing any financial remuneration,⁴⁴ but equally from the psychic weight of the AIDS deaths of those around him, which made him contemplate time and mortality to an unprecedented degree.

43 A more typical Campbellesque strategy is to approach the politics of race, class, gender, and sexuality through the lens of the interpersonal, as if such forces could only be grasped at the micro level. His discomfort is palpable in the version of the *Skin* script published in the Winnipeg Art Gallery catalogue (which differs markedly from the finished work). At one point, Ann claims, “No matter how hard he tries, a white gay middle-class male can’t speak in my voice. Not my lesbian, Black or feminist voice. And that includes you, Colin.” Colin Campbell, “*Skin*,” *Colin Campbell: Media Works 1972–1990*, ed. Bruce W. Ferguson (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1991), 73. Both Greyson and Hoolboom comment on how Campbell’s politics were always communicated *sans* soapbox. Even the most difficult things are said lightly: “The mask of lightness arrives to carry whatever is impossible to bear.” See Hoolboom, “Colin Campbell (1942–2001).”

44 In the late 1980s, Campbell considered trying to write for film or television as he found the Toronto art world increasingly limiting: “I really do feel it is time to forge ahead, instead of digging an even deeper hole for myself with video production. [...] Video art is a ghetto, and a poorly paying one. Having given it 15 years and 45 tapes, I think it is time to initiate new options. One has to shudder when one is being referred to as a pioneer, know what I mean? [...] I don’t think the other pastures are greener, but I do know they pay better.” Letter from Campbell to Greyson, February 2, 1987. These efforts did not pan out. He also applied for arts council funding for an anticipated piece called “Absence of Appearances” about “the invisibility of gay images or representation in mainstream culture.” Letter from Campbell to Greyson, September 28, 1987. Relatedly, he and Greyson corresponded about a collaborative tape dubbed “Sex Lives of Famous Dead Artists” – Campbell drafted a brief, erotic script about illustrator J.C. Leyendecker and a male model – inspired by the 1986 Emmanuel Cooper study, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West*. It unfortunately did not come to fruition.

He would take up these issues through the 1990s until his own sudden death from cancer soon after the turn of the millennium. He writes, “Death is no longer merely a fictional device for me. Death is gathering around me like a cloak that is increasingly difficult to shake off. I question my right to speak in the voice of others. I want my voice to be equal, not ‘other,’ to be part of a community, not of the individual.”⁴⁵ “Noise” ends with a personal call to arms to “make some noise, Colin” because, as AIDS activists were blazoning on posters and placards all over the world, SILENCE = DEATH. But how can one make noise – artistic, activist – when one is frozen by grief?⁴⁶ This short story can be seen as Campbell’s foray into these wrenching questions, which were most concretely articulated by the late Douglas Crimp, who closed his crucial 1989 essay “Mourning and Militancy” with “Militancy of course, then, but mourning too: mourning *and* militancy.”⁴⁷

Perhaps not surprisingly, Campbell turned inward to close friends and to the fictional characters of his own invention in this difficult period. If Toronto in the early 1990s provided insufficient sustenance, perhaps Renaissance Europe could provide inspiration, support, and a sense of the *longue durée*. The anomalous *Skin* was the only time-based work Campbell produced between the late 1980s and the late 1990s. Through much of the 1990s, friends have suggested that administrative battles unfolding at the University of Toronto, where Campbell was on the faculty, took up his attention,⁴⁸ and he turned to the long-term project of writing first one novel and then another rather than scripting any new videotapes. Both novels’ protagonists are academics, with academia presented as rife with drama and betrayals. One beautiful short scenario from this period was inspired by painter Marsden Hartley (1877–1943) and his deep love for the Masons, a Nova Scotia fishing family, and more specifically for their son Alty, who died at

45 This volume, 218–19.

46 An undated [1993?] letter to John Greyson reveals Campbell’s emotional state after working an overnight care-shift for their mutual friend Alex Wilson, who was dying of AIDS. Campbell claims, “I have no more illusions about my death. I can see it so clearly, and I’m afraid of it being lonely. Or even worse – undignified.” He worries that his friends won’t be there when the chips are down: “[People] hate to see their illusions pale and wither.”

47 Douglas Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy,” *October* 51 (1989): 18.

48 Campbell worked as a sessional instructor at both the Ontario College of Art and the University of Toronto for many years before receiving a full-time position at U of T. He also relied on grants from the arts councils to make his work, and times were often tough. In a letter to Greyson circa 1981, he laments the lack of production money and exhibition opportunities: “even if I could [make a new tape], where would I put it except on my shelf?”

sea in summer 1936,⁴⁹ entitled “Marsden and Alty” and published in *Homogenius 2* (1992). This was the second of four exhibitions, editions, or publications bringing together works in different media by gay male artists in Toronto in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period when AIDS mortality rates peaked before drugs made the disease “manageable” for some.⁵⁰ In this brief text, Alty takes his place among Campbell’s many undead narrators. I have also included a note Campbell addressed to Stuart Marshall a few weeks after his friend’s death from AIDS in 1993, describing the experience of collectively writing a memorial to him. Marshall (1949–1993) was a brilliant British video artist and teacher responsible for some of the most astute, critical tapes on gay men and AIDS of the era such as *Bright Eyes* (1984) and *Pedagogue* (1988).⁵¹

With Campbell increasingly feeling the weight of death around him, he became fascinated with both art and the occult as forms of channeling that allow for intimate communication between souls across historical eras. Both of his novels from the 1990s address these themes, and needless to say, both the academic protagonists – Alex Burning and Mallory Ryder – bear a striking resemblance to Campbell. Both also juxtapose and interweave narratives from disparate times and places. Set in Toronto, *The Lizard’s Bite* (1994) is about a middle-aged bisexual art historian named Alex who has ended up devoting much of his career to Caravaggio. He is surrounded by a coterie of eccentric colleagues and friends who are gathered at an ill-fated dinner party where Alex is bitten by a lizard, a nod to Caravaggio’s *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* of 1594–95, and enters via his delirium into Caravaggio’s world. Alex’s story is intertwined with that of the actor Ramos, a contemporary in Italy who has found the painter’s diaries – which supposedly did not exist – and has spent his life portraying the artist with an authenticity that only these diaries could allow. At the end of the novel, Ramos is dying (the inference is that it is from AIDS) and offers the diaries to Alex on the condition that he maintain the secret of their existence by telling no one else. Amid all the capers, the most moving

49 Hartley painted the Masons – whom he met in 1935, soon becoming a part of the family – repeatedly in the last years of his life; his writing about his time with the Mason family and the tragic deaths of Alty and others at sea was published posthumously as *Cleophas and His Own: A North Atlantic Tragedy* (Halifax: A Press Publication, 1982).

50 The first years of the AIDS crisis were a time when it was important for bisexual men – perhaps most prominently US artist and AIDS activist Gregg Bordowitz – to claim a specifically *gay* identity as an act of political solidarity.

51 Marshall’s work is available for viewing through the distributor LUX, <https://lux.org.uk/artist/stuart-marshall>.

aspect, reflected in my selection, are the letters from Lorna, a girl that Alex dated back home in Reston who is being cared for by Inez, sister of a boy who killed himself wearing his mother's clothes – a scenario directly from Campbell's "Stories of Reston." These letters and Alex's homecoming to Reston at novel's end capture Campbell coming full circle to his own childhood.

Campbell's mysterious "Caravaggio Diary" project is represented here through a brief teaser for an unfinished project began in the early 1990s that revolved around mural-size drawings he had made of Caravaggio works that hung in his apartment on Richmond Street, and the scores of photographs he took of male friends and other models posing with them. Greyson suggests that these short poetic texts, drawings, and photographs may have been made to inspire Campbell during bouts of writer's block as he penned *The Lizard's Bite*.⁵² (He was also teaching drawing at the time.) In his archives, some of the photos were taped to loose typewritten pages containing verse seemingly written in the Renaissance painter's voice.

Campbell's second novel, *Disappearance* (1998), is about a middle-aged bisexual medievalist named Mallory who is spending time in Santa Fe to get some writing done. Her close friend and colleague Andrea disappears in Paris right before she is to deliver a field-changing paper about reincarnation; Andrea's hunky PhD advisee Stu seems to be implicated. The object of Mallory's own research is Rainald, a medieval monk and poet whom she believes had been gay. Rainald's story is interwoven with present-day events, moving backwards and forwards across seven centuries and between the old and the new worlds. At its core, the novel is about someone contending with the disappearance of a loved one and eventually accepting that she lives on in another form. Considering the context of AIDS, one can appreciate the appeal of reincarnation and narratives dramatizing how a human life can extend beyond this mortal coil into other times and places. In conversation with Campbell's close friend Lori Spring, I came to appreciate Campbell's grappling with mortality in this novel; while still melodramatic, it moves away from the sometimes-exhausting theatricality of the first novel. I initially described both novels as full of "convoluted hijinks" reminiscent of pulp fiction. While this is true, this does not diminish their significant power. While I have not excerpted the two novels extensively or in a means that is representative of all the plot points and characters, I hope this modest selection gives readers

52 John Greyson, email to author, August 26, 2019.

a taste of Campbell’s fascinations at the time, which clearly shaped the haunted, backward-looking gaze that is so palpable in his last videotapes.

When Campbell returned to video in the late 1990s, he was a senior artist and professor who had spent years thinking about the intense affective attachments we develop to history, the fuzzy boundaries of life and influence, and what happens after death. While his final four tapes were produced in the final four years of his life, Campbell did not know they would be his last. They remain immensely compelling in how doggedly they return to the past – even directly including clips of himself from his earlier works – to both reflect on and create new stories. He does this in tapes like *Rendez-Vous* (1997) and *Deja Vu* (1999), both reproduced in their entirety here, through a final alter ego, Colleen, a performance artist supported by the patron Dix-Ten (of *No Voice Over*) who claims to be the sister of both the Woman from Malibu (“Mildred”) and of Robin.⁵³ Hoolboom poetically describes this self-reflexive, time-spanning self-multiplication as, “I am and I was, both together now, in conversation.”⁵⁴ These tapes were made in the south of France, and originated in summer trips that Campbell took to France with his good friend Sue Ehrlich. In 1996, Campbell researched the Cathars in Languedoc as his alter ego Mallory does in *Disappearance*, which he worked on there. After shooting a short experimental work known as *Un mois dans Languedoc* with Ehrlich in 1996, he completed *Rendez-Vous* when they returned to the region the following year. In 1998, he invited Almerinda Travassos along to shoot *Deja Vu*; she had been the cinematographer of *Skin* and would become the key collaborator for his final tapes. These European trips offered a relaxing context for writing, and Travassos suggests that this more pared-down, “friends and women”-only production method offered a respite from his large-scale dramatic shoots of the late 1980s.⁵⁵ While these final tapes move away from the 1980s genre experiments,

53 Campbell claimed in a late interview, “A lot of my current work is about aging [...] The older you get the more irrelevant your sexuality becomes. If not to you personally, then certainly to the outside world. When you are thirty everyone is interested (in your sex life), everyone wants to know. By the time you are in your fifties, no one cares. You are invisible.” See Andrew Griffin, “The Grace of Aging,” *Capital Xtra!* February 16, 2001, 15.

54 Hoolboom, “Colin Campbell (1942–2001).”

55 In a letter to Greyson from 1997, Campbell writes, “Feels good, in a way, to be out of reach of my life.” Campbell’s collaboration with Travassos culminated with her co-directing his final tape, *Que Sera Sera* (2001). Details from this period were provided by Ehrlich (email to the author, February 19, 2020) and Travassos (email to the author, February 13, 2020).

embracing instead the monological format of his persona-driven tapes, they boast similarly melodramatic twists and turns as the two novels, as Colleena becomes ensnared in various plots and a heavy dose of intrigue on the continent.

Ancestors to the playful European tapes can be found in a 1986 short story called “B. Mode,” written from the perspective of a hard-hearted Reagan-era author of a “whatever happened to?” gossip column, who catches up with Robin while she is working for CUSO (Canadian University Service Overseas) in Costa Rica after a stop to help out at the Betty Ford Center. This narrative was staged in the “throwaway”⁵⁶ tape from the same year, *Bennies from Heaven*, featuring Campbell and friends playing various stars being held at the clinic, notably Liza Minnelli, Elizabeth Taylor, and Rock Hudson, who had recently been outed as gay after his death from AIDS. Campbell’s retrospective gaze is also on full display in two artist talks transcribed here. In both presentations, Campbell speaks of his personas as if they are real people whose lives continue outside of the frame, and he yields to their voices rather than claiming sole authorship of his work for himself. In the first, from the early 1980s, he reflects on his personas in terms of their unrealized relationships to the feminist movement. In the second, tied to his retrospective coming “home” to Toronto’s The Power Plant, he begins by claiming that he has lost his prepared remarks, which allows him to affectionately namecheck all of his closest friends as he describes rooting through all his belongings while searching for his lecture notes. He then gives us an update on Robin, who is in law school after her CUSO and Betty Ford misadventures, and who plans to sue Campbell for using her image without permission.

In Campbell’s final work, *Dishevelled Destiny* (2000), commissioned by the Owens Art Gallery, Campbell returns to where it all began: Mount Allison University in the early 1970s. With the help of a beret, he performs once more – thirty years later – as Art Star, travelling to Sackville and looking for traces of his younger self in the archives. (He also portrays a local historian named Colleeta Sackville-West.) If Campbell imagined that few would turn up to watch *Sackville, I’m Yours...* at the turn of the millennium – and indeed, the audience we see on-screen is sparse – I hope this collection of writings gains him further fans and ensures that the towering fame that Art Star imagined for himself can at least be fulfilled posthumously one reader

56 His precise words are that the tape is “a real throwaway.” See Maitland-Carter, “Colin Campbell Interviewed,” 35.

at a time. If writing allows us to hear Campbell’s unique voice, perhaps it is because he was his own greatest work of art, and writing is the most direct way of getting right to the heart of what Campbell created over the course of his life.⁵⁷ Writing can be seen as an artistic super-medium,⁵⁸ while Tom Sherman suggested to me in conversation that “Colin was always interested in writing and using video as a multimedia publishing form for a conceptual literature (in particular first-person, direct address).”⁵⁹ Through this expansive lens, I hope this volume encourages readers to accept Campbell’s challenge to see video as a serious (and also silly) artistic medium that the art of writing endlessly enriches, enlivens, and transforms. The final text in the book is formatted to reproduce the last group email that Campbell wrote to his friends and family before communication was taken over by his partner, artist George Hawken (1946–2016), as his condition worsened. He died on October 31, 2001, was celebrated with many memorials, and his legacy continues to animate the work of those who either knew him or came after him.⁶⁰

57 Gledhill succinctly states, “Campbell remains his own greatest invention” (“Cheezie Vogue,” 20).

58 This idea is from John Welchman’s introduction to his edited anthology of Mike Kelley’s writing, *Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003). He writes that writing “functions as a kind of super-medium (sound, talk, slogan, inscription, metaphor, critique, script, poetry, assemblage, history, polemic) binding all the others together” (xviii).

59 Tom Sherman, email to author, June 11, 2019.

60 In the memorial booklet that Greyson compiled, the most frequently repeated anecdote about Campbell is his propensity to perpetually move the furniture around; he approached interior design with the same values of open-endedness and flux as he did his understanding of subjectivity, desire, and narrative. Describing the onslaught of textual and creative production that emerged following Campbell’s death, Hoolboom writes, “Within a few months of diagnosis it was over, there was not even time to spend his last half year (which doctors warned him was all the time he had) to fill his new, beautiful, writing paper with letters to friends. [...] This is how he planned to spend his last months, penning farewells. Now that work would be left to strangers.” See “Colin Campbell (1942–2001).”

Editorial Note

Rather than relying on drafts of the scripts, I have newly transcribed all of Campbell's videos here as they exist in the holdings of Vtape. Some of the scripts in Campbell's papers are dramatically different than what ended up recorded in the final tapes, while others underwent only a change of particular words, presumably made by the actors. While it is impossible to capture all the nuances of the video performances in these transcripts, where applicable I have sought to capture the words as delivered – intentional accentuations and mispronunciations, for example. I acknowledge filmmaker Mike Hoolboom's own transcripts, which were useful as references for my own, and which he generated while researching Campbell for his feature-length *Fascination* (2006). Short descriptions of each tape are primarily drawn from Vtape's website, with my small editorial adjustments. As noted earlier, Campbell withdrew some of his titles from distribution over the course of his career. This was done in order to fine-tune his oeuvre based on an ongoing appraisal of their quality; that said, the withdrawn tapes from the mid-1970s are arguably his most confessional. Where no character or performer name is listed, the narration is by Colin Campbell (as) himself. Technical or bibliographic information is included with each entry. Notes have been used selectively to unpack in-jokes and to identify individuals, institutions, and events that might not be familiar to all; however it is assumed the reader has a general knowledge of North American art, culture, and politics of the period.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge these earlier publications of Campbell's scripts: *Hollywood and Vine* (1977) was previously published in Nelson Henricks and Steve Reinke, eds., *By the Skin of Their Tongues: Artist Video Scripts* (Toronto: YYZ Books, 1997), 14–17. *Skin* (1990) was previously published in Bruce W. Ferguson, ed., *Colin Campbell: Media Works 1972–1990* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1991), 66–80. *Rendez-Vous* (1997) was previously published in Steve Reinke and Tom Taylor, eds., *Lux: A Decade of Artists' Film and Video* (Toronto: Pleasure Dome and YYZ Books, 2000), 85–87. Ferguson, Henricks, Reinke, and Taylor have all been formative to my work and I give them my thanks.

A Work in Progress: An Interview with Colin Campbell

Sue Ditta: Colin, I read in an article that you hate interviews; that you don't like doing them because they make you feel like a ping pong ball.

Colin Campbell: In most cases the interviewer doesn't know me and consequently has me saying things I didn't say or I'm misquoted. The other thing is my obliging way of answering any question, even if I don't know what it means. Like ... "Would I like to have acupuncture?" "Well, I guess I would." So, quite often I'm too responsive and sometimes I get nervous and start making things up.

SD: You feel you have to answer seriously even if the question is ridiculous.

CC: Yes, even if it's not relevant.

SD: So, other people's fantasies and fiction come into play and then you yourself do some fictionalizing. There's also pretense in the interview format that suggests that somehow it's more documentary, it's more real than any other kind of critical piece.

CC: Yes, because an interview, unless it's on radio or television, has to be transcribed and someone else's hand then comes into it. They have a way of making their questions sound better which may make your answer sound even more irrelevant. An interview masquerades as a conversation and really it's not.

SD: You explored the importance of writing in your work in a presentation you gave for SAW's¹ "What's My Line?" series. You used your own mail and read something you had received from a notorious, fictitious art critic. Why did you use that format?

CC: For one thing I used it because I don't think I'm interesting enough to just talk about myself and why I do things. It's very hard to make that

Published in *Colin Campbell: Media Works 1972-1990*, ed. Bruce W. Ferguson (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1991), 32-55. The author now goes by Sue Ditta. Original transcription by Sue Pearson.

1 An artist-run centre established in Ottawa in 1973.

interesting because the process of making a work is, in fact, very lonely and boring. I felt that if people were there as an audience, they wanted to be entertained in some way. Creating a fictional situation for them to play off or for you to play off them, slightly subverts their expectations of “Another dull evening with an artist talking about himself.” If I told people the sources, the reasons, and the genesis of all my work, it would seem extraordinarily ordinary. So, by using a performance I thought it might make my work more interesting.

SD: You told us your story through the voice of an art critic.

CC: Yes. A fictional art critic who in fact didn't like me – who wrote about me critically, wrote about my techniques, my devices of fiction in a very critical way. But as I remember the piece – the critic eventually revealed that he wished he could be more like the characters I had created rather than being so critical of them. So, I used him to get across my points of view. It seemed a faster and more entertaining way to do it.

SD: Could that piece be published or was it strictly a performance?

CC: Actually it was going to be a three-monitor installation piece but it didn't have enough merit. It was never intended to be a performance piece although the lecture at SAW Gallery turned out to be a performance piece in the sense that I started off the lecture by bringing all my mail to Ottawa and reading it out on the chance that there might be something racy or raucous in it. Of course that was all constructed. I had stuffed all the envelopes at home and the whole thing was a fiction.

SD: I wanted to ask you about the development of writing in your life. We've talked about our earliest remembrances of artistic practice and yours in fact wasn't playing with the camera or drawing or taking photographs. It was writing.

CC: I think I went through puberty with a pencil in hand, in my bedroom writing stories and putting together fake magazines. I returned to writing almost twenty-five years later and it's become the most important thing to me again. In the meantime I had gone to art school and become a visual artist and sculptor. I abandoned that fairly quickly in favour of video. If I took the time it would probably be quite satisfying

for me to make images on paper and I teach it all the time so, it is still a part of me.

SD: Have you ever taught writing?

CC: Yes. At the Ontario College of Art for four years. I taught scriptwriting for film and performance and video and of all the teaching I've ever done, that's what I loved most.

SD: When you were young did anyone else read what you wrote?

CC: No. That's probably due to the fact that I lived in an extremely rural situation. I guess I could have sent things off to magazines but I always knew those were suspect, even in my utter naiveté, living in Reston, Manitoba.

SD: It was a private practice.

CC: Yes, it was. I don't know if my friends knew I wrote; I can't remember if I ever showed them anything. I don't think so. But it was a very satisfying process for me.

SD: You said you wrote fiction. What kind of fiction was it?

CC: It was never short stories. I've never enjoyed the short story form because it's too short. I think it was a sort of science fiction; space, other people on other planets, not so much about monsters as somehow messed up with a kind of religious thing. I really wanted to be religious and believe in God but never actually did. I didn't write plays because I had never seen a play and to this day I don't like poetry and I don't think I've ever written any.

SD: Did the writing have an autobiographical element?

CC: I don't think so. Where I grew up there were no artists of any kind – no dancers, no writers, no singers (well, I guess people sang in the choir), but I read a lot. Although I couldn't actually articulate it, I knew I wanted to be an artist and a writer. I never would have used those words, though. Writing seemed to me the most liberating, exciting kind of thing to do so I started writing. It was something I knew I could do. In my environment everything that everyone else

was doing, I couldn't do well, like be a farmer or play hockey or be a pharmacist.

SD: Weren't you a bank clerk for a while?

CC: I decided to become a medical doctor and I went in and destroyed my parents' and my own expectations of myself and failed practically everything so I became a recluse by working as a bank teller. I tried to figure out what to do and then I went and took a personality test in Winnipeg that said "What to do with your life?" They said do two things – be a doctor. I said I've already tried that. Then they said – be an artist. I said, how do I do that? And they said – you go to art school, and there's one here in Winnipeg and you should go talk to them. So I did. And that's how I came to be an artist. If they had said be a lace maker I'd probably be in Belgium right now.

SD: You mentioned when you were young, that you really enjoyed writing. Does writing still make you happy?

CC: Of all the things I do now, I would say that writing is the thing that makes me happiest – when it's achieved. Not the process of writing itself – that doesn't become any easier. But it's the most rewarding thing when something is finally achieved and the writing that's directed towards some other medium, like videotape or film I find the most satisfying. You can't get a film or a videotape without good writing so if I know the writing's solid, then I know that I can probably get a good film or videotape from it.

SD: The writing is an integral part of the whole process for you. On the other hand, it exists somehow autonomously. You've described "writing" to me a couple of times, always an open process. I think there's a distinction between that and a videotape, which your audience receives very much as a fixed product, something with a specific beginning and end.

CC: The great thing about writing is that it's completely fluid all the time and can go anywhere. I hate production; editing is a little more interesting because it's like writing again – you can start shaping and shifting – which, inevitably you have to do, because nothing goes directly from the written page to the final product. I'm always more excited to show people the writing than I ever am to show them the finished work.

SD: Is the fact that you've publicly connected your writing with your video practice – either, by creating this fictional critic or with this exhibition at the WAG where the scripts are an integral part of the installation – an attempt to resist the notion of closure that you feel people sometimes bring to viewing videotapes?

CC: Yes, I think that I've always resisted closure. I was doing that even before I came across that word. I thought – oh, closure – what a good way to describe something I try not to do. So the scripts being there functions as two things: one, to show the genesis of the product, to show how it can be very different by the time it gets transformed into a tape or film – and secondly, to remind the viewer that it doesn't just spring out of the air electronically and then transfer itself onto tape all by itself.

SD: So you don't wake up in the morning with a full visual picture in your head?

CC: Never. Recently anyway, most scripts have come literally from one sentence that some person says or one image that I conjure up and describe. That one line comes from nowhere. For instance with *Skin*, I wanted to make something around AIDS, but after months of trying all kinds of different scripts I knew I wasn't getting what I wanted. That was probably seven months of despair – even though I forced myself to write every day and I wrote volumes and volumes. I knew it wasn't working and that there was nothing to do but keep on writing until it became whatever it was going to be. In fact it turned out to be entirely different from everything I've written so far.

SD: Are you becoming a more confident writer? Do you enjoy it more?

CC: I enjoy it more and I think I become better the more I do it. That's probably true for every writer because there is a certain element of craft to it. But I think I'm also learning how to write more honestly and more directly. Within writing there's a way you can romanticize a character. It's irresistible sometimes to write witty lines or throw words together in a particularly enchanting way that just sounds great but in fact masks what it is you're really trying to say. Often you have to throw out what you know are dazzling phrases because they don't get at the core of what it is you're trying to say.

SD: You're paring things down as much as you're building a structure?

CC: Yes. It's amazing how you can avoid what it is you want to say. I mean I'm superstitious about saying what I really want to say right off because the whole thing might just collapse and go away. So I work towards it in that peripheral way. Sometimes finding the device is the hardest thing, even though you know what you want to write.

SD: Are you able to say things in writing that would be more difficult for you to say in visual language – either performance or painting?

CC: Absolutely, because I think everybody likes stories. If you can tell a good story instead of something that appears to be merely confessional or diaristic, you probably will have an audience that is interested in what you are saying. If you can somehow bind the viewer up with a persona that makes them empathetic, that's a more interesting way to do it.

SD: Are the viewer and the reader the same person?

CC: Sure. Although what I think is unusual about this show is that for the first time people are actually going to be able to see the writing as opposed to the product.

SD: So they become both.

CC: That's right.

SD: In many of the tapes, and this goes back to your earliest work as well as to a work as recent as *No Voice Over*, one of the central elements is a written document. It might be a script, it might be postcards, letters, a newspaper article. For example, *The Woman from Malibu* is drawn from a newspaper article. Even your presentation about your own work was based on an article by a critic. The act of writing, the practice of writing, the reality of the written word in a text itself is very central for you and your way of looking at the world. Can you talk a little bit about that?

CC: People's lives are not a singular kind of narrative that runs a course and all makes sense. In our daily lives, we engage in several levels of narrative, some of which never complete themselves. Some may exist only for one day. Some we go into and out of over a long number of years – relationships with friends, lovers, parents. So the device

that I've used when a postcard appears, a letter arrives, a telephone conversation occurs, sets in motion a reaction to that particular document or text. It just doesn't sit there in mid-air. Someone receives it and adds to its content, responds to it. And that kicks off something unique because people will tend to write differently than they speak. By introducing a character through their writing you can cut enormous amounts of time and situate that character in a dramatic moment in their lives. You get to know a lot about them very quickly. The written document allows you to propel a narrative very suddenly out of that kind of situation.

SD: The catalyst itself then, is something that is already constructed, something that's already been subjected to interpretation and re-interpretation. Even, for example, the newspaper article, where the woman from Malibu is talking about her husband's death – we don't know how much is left out of that interview with her, to what extent those were really her words, if she really laid them out in that way – with that amazing detail about how far he fell off the mountain.

CC: In fact she actually did. That was verbatim and what was so intriguing to me was her ability to give an emotional kind of shock with very rational, precise kinds of details around what was obviously an extraordinarily traumatic event. That's what interested me about her. I had just moved to California and I thought gee, what will happen to her when she comes back to California? That kind of detailed observation seemed like a perfect way for her to talk about the culture that I was now both immersed in and observing. She became the vehicle for expressing all the eccentricities of Southern California. She was white, middle class probably leisure class, her husband had retired, she could talk in an unquestioning, all-embracing way about the culture, the environment she was in. To me it seemed like an interesting way to comment as opposed to the artist, saying here is what this looks like. It was more fun to use her eye because she went places where artists would never go and did things artists would never do, like the Rose Bowl Parade and going to the recreational vehicle show. I imagined things that she would do and then I went out and did them.

SD: You were able to get into her character when it was on paper. *The Woman from Malibu* is often seen as a demarcation point in your work because it was the first extended narrative. Was it the first script you wrote?

CC: Yes, and I ended up playing the woman from Malibu sort of by accident. I didn't know anyone in California, I had no money – it just seemed like a natural to play her.

SD: Did you feel like the woman from Malibu when you were writing it?

CC: The six tapes were produced over about seven months so it was a fairly continuous process. I was with Lisa Steele in California at that time and we would be driving down the freeway and sometimes I would speak but it would actually be the woman from Malibu's voice or persona coming out. I became quite involved in her. That's why I didn't try to separate her from me in terms of appearance and certainly not in terms of voice.

SD: How did the process work? Would you sit down and hammer out a script before each shoot, or did you do several scripts?

CC: It was always a surprise to me that another tape was coming. The woman from Malibu would not shut up. She always had more to say. Often a script would be triggered by an event in the newspapers. For instance, in 1977 people on the freeways shooting people for no reason – or stories of transsexuals. Those events would become little markers around which I could weave another story from the Malibu woman's daily life.

SD: Were the scripts more immediate in the early days?

CC: They were more immediate and in a way they were a lot more fun to write. Production was extraordinarily easy and undemanding. It was the first time the work wasn't as autobiographical as it had been. It was like moving out into the world and playing with it. It seemed so much more open-ended and I thought several times – why didn't I think of this before?

SD: As you began to engage in a wider field of subjects you started to introduce more people, more complex characters. The works became more public, more engaged with outside issues, with other people. At the same time that very private practice of writing had become more central and important in your work. It's a bit of a paradox.

CC: That's true. I would say for me writing isn't diaristic whereas I think a lot of the earlier video work could be seen as even narcissistic.

Certainly it was about diary because no one else was involved in the process of making the work except me. It became my choice even to make it public. I could have chosen never to make it public and no one would have known.

SD: Was there a sense that because it was so personal it could be less refined, that people could either take it or leave it?

CC: It was okay then because it was called something else. It was called “body art” or the then very new term, “video art.” But it was tied to formal kinds of considerations so even though I might be doing something that would talk about my sexuality or about gender or gender blurring, it could all be talked about in very formal terms – what is the image, what is real, what isn’t? In the production I may have even talked myself into thinking that that’s what I was doing. In fact what I was really doing was trying to engage questions of sexuality and gender and stereotyping and the kinds of impact that the moving image has on our sensibilities.

SD: All of the early work has been talked about by critics as being tied to the conceptual art movements of the period and to the influences of [Dennis] Oppenheim, Vito Acconci and people like that. But I don’t think that is the only place you were.

CC: No, I don’t think so either.

SD: So the writing was part of breaking out of that.

CC: Yes. The writing came of necessity and with *The Woman from Malibu* I had to write it out. There was no way I could spontaneously do that piece. She demanded a structure and that structure was writing.

SD: You mentioned voice and finding the voice and having the voice of the woman from Malibu in your head. I wanted to talk a little bit about the voice in your writing. One of the things I think has been very important about your work has been your ability to talk about the question of gender; to do the work you’ve done in terms of transsexing² and cross-dressing and using drag in your work without making fun of women – in fact in many ways empowering the idea of the feminine.

² This term may specifically reference Dot Tuer’s “Video in Drag: Trans-sexing the Feminine,” *Parallelogramme* 12, no. 3 (1987), 24–29.

One of the ways I think you've done that is never disguising your voice. You always have a very deep, resonant male voice even when you're in drag. I wonder if the possibility of establishing a non-gendered voice comes more easily at the writing stage or whether that's why the drive to write comes up. Is it the ability to have that gender-free voice in your head?

CC: That's an interesting point and an astute one because when I'm writing I generally hear the voice, and that voice can inhabit a female character comfortably and easily. I've probably never written any male characters. I find them really hard to do because I don't know what men are supposed to be doing. I've never been very good at doing what men are supposed to be doing. It seems also I don't have a great deal of confidence about knowing what men are thinking about. I feel more comfortable writing characters that don't have to be definitively a woman or a man. I think that's because all men and women share a common voice at many points. I don't think that's unusual or unique. I just happen to end up more comfortably trying to write a woman's character.

SD: With non-visual representation you have the freedom to start playing with that. I get the impression you don't worry about the visuals at that stage. The writing can free you up to say what you want to say.

CC: Yes. It's very seldom that I would think what a character would look like and then try to write to that person or think of an actress who might play the role and try to write her. Once the writing is done I cast people against type. I try to find someone who looks just the opposite, and lisps or something.

SD: I think there's a traditional wisdom that scriptwriting and scripts in general aren't as important in video as they are in film. Certainly one of the mythologies about video is its spontaneity. Can you talk a bit about the relationship between the script and the actual video? Do you stay very close to your script?

CC: Once the script reaches what's called final draft, I stick to it right to the end. The only thing that might change is a few words or phrases the actors find difficult to say. Some of it may end up disposed of in the editing process or restructured there. I really believe that without a script the chances are considerably reduced that you'll have a satisfying

videotape or film. You have to do the writing first. Even if it's a so-called non-narrative kind of videotape or film, something still has to exist on paper before you go out with your camera. The script is the most important part.

SD: Then, it's not just the particular demands of the narrative form that require a script? You didn't have a script in the early days.

CC: No, but I only had myself to contend with. Certainly what you see all the time, especially with students who are learning to make videotapes and film is that they'll get ten people out on a cold windy day, in the middle of the parking lot and no one knows what they're doing because there's no script. Then they wonder why it's a miserable experience.

SD: The spontaneity just isn't much fun?

CC: No, it's not that much fun.

SD: And it doesn't necessarily make for good art.

CC: No. It makes for a lot of editing.

SD: There's a distinctive shift in your later work. It became more and more complex as time went on with *Dangling by Their Mouths*, *The Woman Who Went Too Far*, *No Voice Over*. There are more complex characters, more voices; the narratives are more extended and developed; there are flashbacks, different locations. Did the writing become more dominant, more important?

CC: The writing became more important because first of all I discovered there was more than one way to write. For instance, *Dangling by Their Mouths* was originally a performance piece, whereas *No Voice Over* was originally written entirely for text with no intent of its ever being a videotape. I found that I could write in different ways and that the different kinds of parameters or freedoms that one form offered were equally creative, legitimate, enjoyable. So gradually – this was particularly the case with *Dangling by Their Mouths* which was about 1980–81 – I realized that of all the processes in the production of a finished videotape, the process of writing was the part I found most enjoyable, most interesting and most creative.

SD: There seems to be more and more of an emphasis on storytelling itself as a function. There are more complex stories going on. *The Woman from Malibu* is a fairly straight-ahead single character story. So, your stories are getting more and more complicated as time goes by.

CC: One thing I discovered I really liked doing was dialogue. Dialogue is just wonderful because I can propel the narrative ahead so quickly. It's the device I use most often and it's fun. Dialogue means more than one character so it was a way of introducing and playing with more characters.

SD: The more characters you have and the more stories you're telling, the less traditional the narrative has become – the less it has a fixed beginning and a fixed end. I can even see the distinction between the whole *Modern Love* series and *Dangling by Their Mouths* and *The Woman Who Went Too Far*. I wonder if you can talk a little about the kind of disjunctures that started to appear in your storylines.

CC: Certainly there is something to say about *Modern Love* and *Bad Girls*. Those were all ad lib performances where there was no script. There would be a very quickly improvised kind of storyboard or outline about what was going to happen but then it was just a free-for-all in terms of what people might say or do. *Modern Love* and *Bad Girls* were really fun to do and were also tapes that had a wonderful spontaneity. The spontaneity of making videotape is still its amazing strength.

SD: You used to do those over a week and then show them at the Cabana Room on the weekends, didn't you?

CC: Yes, it was nuts, but it was really fun. And of course there was a story, and it was in my head, but everybody at the same time also could contribute their little part which might shift the story in another direction by the next week. But I always knew in my head what was going to go on. The work I found more interesting to do, though, was the work like *Dangling by Their Mouths*, which I think was probably the first really complex script I had written. There were all kinds of time shifts and characters stumbling across each other finding connections that they never knew existed. There was also a kind of displaced voice going on, a voice by telephone or voice by implication. There were a number of narratives contained within the piece: one narrative might not necessarily affect the other narrative but would be running parallel to it. They might never intersect.

SD: You started deconstructing the narrative so that you used the vehicle and the potential of storytelling to say a lot of different things about the impossibility of seeing life, of seeing the world, of having experience only at one level. You start to break things apart.

CC: Also it's trying to avoid closure. I just wanted my characters to go on. Do you always have to feel the characters ended when the take did, that they had nothing more to say and nothing more was ever going to happen to them? I'd try in the writing quite often to capture a moment that would open up a future or would say that our lives are not one big long narrative where we remember everything. We do have moments we actually remember, but we also have big gaps where we can't remember anything.

SD: I had suggested to you that the importance of writing has something to do with the importance of autobiography in your life. And I tried to put forward a theory that this had to do with your understanding of the feminine and, as you said, not being good at what men are supposed to do and be in the world. Diaries and autobiographies have been important in feminist writing. I think there's been a new recognition of those things within artist practice. But although a lot of your early videotapes are about very personal and private things, it's quite clear that they're not autobiographical at that daily level. They have a fiction to them but they're meant primarily to be read by other people. Do you think that's true of diaries in general?

CC: Yes. I kept a couple of diaries once when I first moved to New York – a daily diary for six months and I've kept diaries quite often while travelling. The travel diaries I kept; the other ones I just burned because I knew, even as I was writing them, that I would someday be tempted to show them to somebody and I do think diaries are meant to be read by others. The proof is the exquisite writing of so many published diaries by writers and painters. They were obviously meant to be published and read. The way that my work might be diaristic is in a tape like *Love-Life*, where I actually do read out the correspondence between various people who are writing me about what they were thinking and feeling about me. I don't think I ever really say what I'm thinking. But maybe what I am thinking is revealed by the fact that there are sometimes two or three kinds of situations happening in my life that illustrate that I am a different person to everybody that I'm involved with. That's what I think illustrates my earlier point about living spontaneous narratives.

SD: I was thinking about the discrete difference between the diary and the letter. In many ways, either we assume that the diary is totally private and meant only for the person who's writing it which is probably not true (certainly feminists would argue that in fact that was the only form of expression women had, because they were excluded from mainstream publishing) or you can look at the letter which is definitely meant to be read by someone else but by a very limited audience. I think I can see that distinction in some ways in your writing.

CC: Yes. In fact I have this war with myself all the time about the letters I write to people. One part of me tells me to send the letter off, that the letter is actually the property of the person receiving it. I am giving up ownership at that point. At the same time, with the ones I know are really good letters – I copy some and they might become material. I think that often we write in a far more personalized way than we ever speak to each other.

SD: Do some or a lot of your ideas come from stories people have told you?

CC: Absolutely, and I play around with the stories that people tell me or the stories that I know about. I find it really hard to invent situations or narratives. So they're usually based on something that I have known or experienced – or *wish* I had experienced.

SD: So the videotape itself is just another version of the story?

CC: Right. Probably the difference in terms of writing for video is that you generally know that you are writing for a very short length of time. Narrative video is not distinguished by being very long because there's some kind of myth that you can't sit for very long in front of a monitor and watch video art. Most people aim for fifteen to twenty minutes, feeling that's really pushing the limits in terms of attention span. So I found myself at one point writing shorter and shorter with that process. I could never develop a character in that time frame and have something happen. Then I thought, to hell with it, I'm going to write something that's really long and what resulted was *Dangling by Their Mouths* or *Black and Light* or even *No Voice Over*, which ends up at about thirty minutes. It takes time to build that complexity and it's not inherent within videotape. That may explain in part my desire to change to film, which has a tradition of ninety minutes. I can push those stories

through more layers of complexity. In a twenty-minute videotape, I now find I'm really limited in terms of trying to pull off anything that interests me.

SD: In some cases you've written scripts where it was clear from the beginning that ultimately it would turn into a videotape. Sometimes it was something you were writing that was going to be a performance. With *No Voice Over* you said that it was written initially to exist only as a written text. How did it come to be a tape?

CC: The enjoyment of writing *No Voice Over* was being able to write a story that was based in places like Brazil, Italy, Alaska, Japan, Toronto, New York with the absolute knowledge that I would never have to raise the twenty-five billion dollars it would take to produce the work in those environments and be true to the text. So that was a really fun way to write. Also, you can write a text-only piece in a different way than you would if you were directing the material towards something that had to be spoken or acted.

SD: Can you talk in more detail about that?

CC: Words exist on a page in a particular kind of structure. It has a visual play to it, itself, which is about the words. It also means you can backtrack and go over that phrase again if you want. I don't necessarily read from beginning to end without going back.

SD: That requires a different level of translation if you're going to put it into a tape.

CC: I think there is virtually no dialogue in the original text of *No Voice Over*. I think it's all italics and monologue. Then I got a grant and suddenly it became possible to think about producing it as a tape – which was really challenging because it meant going out on location – for the first time since *The Woman from Malibu*. All my work from then on pretty much had been studio production where the environments are tightly controlled. I remember being really excited about doing location shooting again. So much of my work was backdrops painted to create the location. Suddenly it meant I could actually go to Italy and shoot there and that was really exciting.

SD: *Dangling by Their Mouths* is very expositional. It reads like a short story, particularly the introduction by Sean when he's talking about

babysitting Mora. Can you talk a little about that particular script and where it came from and why you think it reads that way?

CC: The script comes from a piece that was actually a performance piece called *Third World Blur*³ where I was the sole performer. It was about a fifty-minute performance and the other characters who existed in that performance came in on audiotape through speakers but I never did Anna, the central character of the performance. She would have imaginary people sitting at a table with her and she would talk to them but they would never say anything back. There's a videotape of that performance and it is just amazingly dull. So I needed to introduce other characters, that could give real form and content. The very first story told by Sean is actually a true story that a friend of mine in New York recounted to me. When I was searching around for a voice other than Anna's to start speaking I thought of the story and it seemed a very personal, dramatic, unpredictable kind of short story. But in the telling of it the person reveals all kinds of things about himself. So I started writing for the tape, right at that point, having no idea really what was going to happen next.

SD: You started it with Sean's story, not with Anna's story.

CC: Right, because I thought if I can get interested in these other characters, and then somehow put them on a collision course with Anna, that would be really interesting because they are coming from two really separate kinds of narratives.

SD: The storytelling became the vehicle for adapting the performance.

CC: That's right.

SD: *Black and Light* reads much more like traditional film script. There's more emphasis on dialogue, the dialogue is used to push the plot along and to introduce characters. There's a much more elaborate setting of the scenes. In many ways it reads more like a play. That's obviously not only because of the length, but there was something that was moving you towards an emphasis on dialogue and less on straight storytelling, monologue, soliloquy. Can you talk about that?

³ Performed and published as *Peripheral Blur*. This was perhaps a transcription error in the original.

CC: I went up north with John Greyson – we both had scripts to write. I started writing the script having no idea what it was about and within a day I realized that what the script was about was what I was actually doing.

SD: So you're saying the reason why *Black and Light* reads most like a script is because it is a story about writing a script.

CC: It actually did turn out to be that way and it was written out in Northern Ontario and there was nothing going on there. So I decided to make *that* the basis of the writing of the script, at the same time knowing that I was going to bring in other characters who were based partly on my own life and also totally fictional kinds of things, but also trying to make that juxtaposition which I think every Canadian writer has to do – and that is deal somehow with the mythic north. I actually do think we're very involved in that in our psyche and although I didn't think of it at the time I think that the writing is about that mythic quality of what going up north means.

SD: The great Canadian writing muse will visit you from the woods knocking on the sauna door. In some ways that was your most ambitious script, partly just because it's feature length. Did you know that when you started, that it would be a big piece?

CC: I didn't know when I started but probably after a few days I could tell by the pacing. The draft came in at about fifty pages and I remember feeling a kind of chagrin because in my mind I knew there're sixty-minute videotapes and that's it. Anyway, I gave in to the idea that it could be a very long script and I'd come to the problems of production when I came to them.

SD: I have a sense that it was a very process-oriented piece.

CC: My writing changed as technology has changed. That piece was laboriously typed on a typewriter and I am a very slow typist. When I was writing that, I remember I was loathe to change the way it had been cast on the page because retyping was painful. That work went practically as first draft. I was staring at the pages piling up and I thought: You better be right about this the first time. Now of course, I write on the computer and there's no such thing as first draft on computer.

SD: Does the computer give you more freedom and pleasure in the writing?

CC: Absolutely. I like the script of *Black and Light*, but I think that if I had had a computer it would have been more refined, and it would have been a different script.

SD: Certainly the beginning of *Skin* reads poetically. I think in many ways it's your most evocative writing. The writing in *No Voice Over* works in a very considered way, I think, with the opening visuals. For me, it's perhaps the piece in which the text and the visuals have the most direct relationship – although I don't mean direct in the sense of one to one – but where you really molded the text and the visuals to create a certain product. Could you talk about the poetic quality at the beginning of *Skin*?

CC: I had written characters' scripts; I was writing without knowing what I was writing; all I knew was I wasn't getting to what I wanted to say. Then I discovered the women in Montreal. They were speaking at the World Health Organization Conference on AIDS. The whole piece I'd been trying to write was around AIDS but any dramatic situation I tried to set up just fell to pieces, just seemed contrived. Suddenly there were these women speaking in a very evocative, moving personal way. They were saying things so much truer than the characters I'd been trying to write. So that solved the first problem. I heard them speak and I thought, this is the means to getting the piece done. But I still wanted to write a script that was not strictly documentary. I wanted to do what you call a docudrama or dramatization.

SD: They were real stories. Did you have tapes of the talks they gave?

CC: No. I did it from my memory of their presentation. I did hear one of them speak twice about the same experience. I had a pretty accurate memory of what they said. However, if it wasn't going to be a documentary then these very different women's stories had somehow to be linked in a way that was not my voice linking them, but another kind of device. So I sat down and I started writing what is now the narrative voice that runs through the film – out of pure frustration, out of not knowing whose voice it was but trying to condense the sense of emotion, trying to make the writing speak more universally and consciously trying to make it poetic.

SD: Why poetic?

CC: Because I felt any time I tried to speak, to write it straight, it just came out as dogma, or it came out as philosophizing. To write it poetically seemed like the only way to get at it.

SD: I think it's very effective and one of the reasons why the film works is because that poetic voice opens people up to thinking about AIDS in a way that other devices might not.

CC: I chose skin as a mirroring device. It's something that everyone can relate to. That text, once it was written, forced me to go back one more time and push the characters down to the bone, to not have them speaking in a detached way about what they were experiencing but to try to give voice to what was as close to their experience as possible.

SD: So you were, in a way, trying to recapture what you had experienced when you saw them speak in Montreal. What about the connection, then, of the written script to the final product? You have so many voices going there but not in the same way you've had before, in terms of the complexity of the characters. Instead you have this overall voice linking them.

CC: The *Skin* script was longer and was shot quite a bit longer than the film actually ended up. In the process of editing, a certain amount of script was discarded and it was almost entirely reordered. When we edited the film, we took it and cut it to shreds and then started pasting all over the place.

SD: Was that the first time you did that?

CC: Yes, because I had decided that I wanted to discover the process of making a film. The process is you hire an editor who is not just a flunky who pushes buttons when you say so but actually puts a personal stamp on the material by shaping it according to the way they feel it should go as opposed to the way you have written or even shot it.

SD: So in the film, you're moving away from that "sticking-strictly-to-the-script" for the first time.

CC: Yes. I suppose that's always happened within videos as well but never to the degree it did in the film. The reason that it changed to that

degree is that I had an editor who had very particular and extremely sensitive opinions that she wanted put in place. I responded to them because I had hired her to do exactly that.⁴

SD: Several of your scripts have been “published” as documents accompanying the installation of this exhibition. When I had them in my hand for the first time, I envisioned you as a playwright. I was thinking about the whole tradition in theatre where the performance piece lives as a literary form. We study plays in English Lit. but we don’t study film scripts outside of film school or cinema courses. How would you feel about somebody else producing one of your scripts, directing one of your scripts?

CC: I think I would really enjoy that because it would relieve me of the bother of producing them myself. I know that some people want to be writers and directors and could never separate themselves out. I don’t know if that is the case with me but I’d love to give it a try.

SD: And you would concentrate your attention on the development of the concept and on the execution of the script.

CC: Yes. Maybe the writing process would also change in the sense that I might have to respond or do rewrites according to whoever was producing. They may not just take it exactly as I’d written it. As an exercise, once I took the script of *Black and Light* to submit to FUND as a possibility for television.⁵ Well, there’s no comparisons at the end. It was just ridiculous.

SD: But you told me you had a positive experience with script readers for *Skin* – that you actually ran that script by other people and that it was one of the first times where you had done that.

CC: Yes, that’s right and I would always do that from now on because in terms of writing film scripts, most of it’s done in a collaborative way. There’s usually at least two people writing a script together and there’s a logic motivating that. You get mired down – especially in something that’s ninety or one hundred and fifty pages – and you’re bound to lose sight of what is going on at some point. So I would always pass my work by others.

4 Campbell is referring to Lori Spring, Canadian artist (b. 1953).

5 “FUND” is likely an error in transcription or typesetting in the original.

SD: You have a counterpoint. Do you think more video artists are moving in that direction?

CC: Absolutely. In the last five years the Ontario Arts Council and I believe, the Canada Council – now demand a script from people who want to receive funding to make video productions whereas up until then you could just outline a proposal.

SD: Can you say things in writing that you couldn't say in other ways?

CC: Yes. Especially if, as I often have, cloaked or disguised my persona within another character and then made that character say what I really, actually believe myself. Also, as I may have said earlier, I'm getting older, although I don't feel old. But I can more easily say what it is I want to say and consequences be damned.

SD: You've done some non-fiction writing, articles and reviews. How do you see that writing in relation to the scriptwriting?

CC: The most difficult writing for me is the review or article writing. I find it's extraordinarily hard to do. At the same time, I find it really rewarding. The reason I find it difficult is because I can't fictionalize, I have to actually record and the only freedom I have is my opinion. So I find it pretty restrictive. But, painful as it may be to do that kind of writing, I find it does help my scriptwriting. Any writing that I do, of a serious nature, propels and feeds my craft for writing fiction or scripts. Very often the letters I write to people become like little scripts, I start playing around with the form.⁶

SD: Did you read a lot of mystery and romance when you were younger?

CC: I actually started off on dog stories, and I read every dog story for boys ever written. Gradually I moved on to Hardy Boys – who I found far less interesting than Nancy Drew and Cherry Ames and then I moved on to adult mystery novels. I guess that was always under the guidance of my parents – who had many bookshelves of books which they gave me to read. Then I started making my own choices about

⁶ In correspondence with John Greyson during their relationship, Campbell repeatedly re-imagined scenes, dynamics, and in-jokes of their romance as scripts or storyboards, such as the undated "The Movie of the Same Name." Another undated script seems drawn from recurring arguments and conflicts between them, with the characters "Campbell" and "Greyson" asking for cues for their lines and providing meta-commentary on the script they are in.

fiction and discovered this wonderful novelist all by myself named Ayn Rand.

SD: There goes your reputation.

CC: There goes my reputation. But, you never know what's going to fall into your hands. I think it could have been almost any novel. I think what it was was wanting to make the choice on my own about what fiction to read. Then no matter how bad it was or how improbable, at least it was yours, claiming your own sense of what literature was.

SD: You told me once that you used a fictional device to talk about yourself because rather than straight autobiography, fiction allowed you to be more people than you could ever possibly be. Do you ever write just for pleasure without any thought that it might be a tape or a script?

CC: No, in fact I don't. All the writing I do is directed, in some way, to a project because there is just so little time. It's all about work.

More Voice-Over



Video still from *The Woman from Malibu*, 1976

Stories of Reston

Florence

“Forty-six, and she never got laid.”

That was how one of the guys put it that night in Charlie and Jim’s Cafe on Main St.

Florence was the telephone operator. She was tall, thin, dark-haired, and wore glasses. She was single. I liked Florence. She was quiet and shy, and had a warm smile. She used to come over to our house to borrow books from my mother. Mysteries, mostly. Sometimes Florence and my mother would have a drink together.

If the fire alarm rang, you could phone Florence to find out where the fire was. She always knew, because the fires were reported to her, and she would ring the fire bell.

It was snowing heavily when the car went into a skid on the stretch of road referred to as “death strip.” Florence and her mother died instantly.

About two months later, the phone company converted over to automatic dial phones. You could now call someone without going through the operator.

Victoria Day

It was a big event. The newly formed Reston Chamber of Commerce had spent a huge sum of money for Reston’s first official fireworks display. It seemed like the whole town had gathered in the empty field north of the schoolyard that night.

Everyone was a bit worried, because there was a lot of lightning that night, in the southwest. But the rain held off, and everyone agreed that the lightning had added to the overall dramatic effect.

Steve had wanted to go to the fireworks display, but that field had to be plowed. When his wife came from the display, Steve wasn’t back yet,

Undated. Unpublished. In an October 30, 1987, letter to John Greyson, Campbell wrote, “I had this sudden memory of this time of year in Reston when I was a teenager, and how that was the only time I could make myself imagine I wasn’t there, but in Hong Kong or something. It was the only time of day I liked. I also imagined all the wolves creeping in from the forest to the edge of the town to snatch away teenagers like me (there were no forests, and no wolves). And I’d rush home and go to my room and turn on the lights and maybe read *Cry of the Wild* [sic] or something. I knew I was a lucky person, and that my life would be really interesting, but just couldn’t figure out how to escape, so imagined being eaten by wolves, kidnapped by aliens ... just anything that didn’t cost money, because I didn’t have any to buy a bus ticket out of town, to ride through that formidable dark horizon.” Excerpted in Greyson’s “The Singing Dunes: Colin Campbell, 194[2]–2000,” *C Magazine* 74 (2002), 31.

so she drove out to the field to pick him up. She found his charred body sitting upright on the tractor. He had been struck by lightning.

I remember wondering which roman candle had been Steve's.

Suicide

"Died suddenly," was how the *Reston Recorder* put it. It was a hot July day. Roy went into the barn and found him hanging by a rope. He had stood on a bale of hay, and kicked it over.

He was fourteen years old.

No one ever talked about that too much.

He was Reston's first suicide.

No one ever mentioned the fact that he had been wearing his Mother's clothes.



Video stills *True/False*, 1972

TRUE/FALSE

1972, 9 minutes, black and white; "In *True/False*, the artist makes a number of potentially revealing statements about himself, then verifies each statement as 'true,' and disqualifies each statement as 'false.' A play on the adage that the camera does not lie (but the artist probably does)" (Vtape).

[Campbell sits in profile.]

I like Sackville. True. False.

I have false teeth. True. False.

I smoke grass. True. False.

I still masturbate. True. False.

I am part Jewish. True. False.

I have seen a psychiatrist. True. False.

I have had crabs. True. False.

I snort coke. True. False.

I collect pornography. True. False.

I recently attempted suicide. True. False.

I am heterosexual. True. False.

I am part Indian. True. False.

I want to be a star. True. False.

I have committed bestiality. True. False.

I'm an exhibitionist. True. False.

Colin is my real name. True. False.

[Campbell turns to face camera.]

I like Sackville. True. False.

I have false teeth. True. False.

I smoke grass. True. False.

I still masturbate. True. False.

I am part Jewish. True. False.

I have seen a psychiatrist. True. False.

I have had crabs. True. False.

I snort coke. True. False.

I collect pornography. True. False.

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I am part Indian. True. False.

I want to be a star. True. False.

I have committed bestiality. True. False.

I'm an exhibitionist. True. False.

Colin is my real name. True. False.



Video still from *Sackville, I'm Yours...*, 1972

SACKVILLE, I'M YOURS...

No, no I ... I couldn't do anymore interviews today ... No, no, I can't see my way clear. Right. Well, sorry, but not today. Yeah. Fine, we'll be in touch. Yes, yep, ok.

1972, 15 minutes, black and white; "An amusing portrait of an Art Star, toughing it out in rural New Brunswick" (Vtape).

Oh, now ... what was it that you wanted to know?

My name? I thought everybody knew. My name is Art Star. Art. Star. Yes.

Uh, Sackville ... living and working in Sackville? Well, uh, Sackville is a ... it's a great little town, it's really, uh, Sackville is, uh, living and working it's uh, a great town. Just a great, a great little town. Yes, oh yes.

What does one *do* in Sackville? Well ... many things, uh. I ... Well I can say frankly that there's nothing that I haven't done or seen in this town. For instance, uh, well, uh, I've, uh, been to the dump. It's a great dump, a great little dump – I would say that it's probably ... one of the best dumps yeah, yeah I spend a lot of time out there. Yes, oh yeah.

It's a great – well, other things? I've had a tuna fish casserole at the President's house. The President – the president of the university, yes, and uh, well, uh, we minority groups, the minority groups, we get together. And uh, spend evenings ... talking. Well, uh, by minority I mean, uh, I'm the only Art Star in Sackville – you can check it. Well you can check the phone book. Uh, I'm the only one listed in the phone book and it won't take you long to check. Uh, the reason I say that is my wife during the last election, I think it was a provincial election, she was phoning, uh, all the people from N to ... N to Z, y'know, half-an-hour phoning, y'know, saying vote NDP, half-an-hour, so it wouldn't take you long to check. Yeah.

Well, sure I have friends – minority friends mostly, I would say, are my best friends. Art Gallery – very dear friend, Art, he's the custodian of the Owens Art Gallery, yes. Yes, Art and I are friends, we talk.

Well other minorities ... my very very good friend Linda Trentini, yes, well, she's a ... a *racial* minority – I mean we can't all be celebrities in that sense – but our common ... common thing, our friendship is – she's a minority, she – well, she's Italian. Well I'm not really sure that she is Italian, really. She's married to one, though, which, y'know, there's not many in Sackville. I don't think there's any others.

Yes, yes, she's very interested in my work. Of course, everyone in Sackville is, yes, I have tremendous response, almost down to the last child, to my work. Tremendous. It's very very gratifying and of course that's one thing that keeps me here is this “go to it Art Star” attitude, and everyone waits for my latest work almost breathlessly. Really, it's very difficult to, well to leave Sackville – they don't like to see me take trips out, they're afraid they'll lose me, actually, I guess. Yes, it's a wonderful environment, yes, oh, very warm, yes, and, uh, yeah.

Am I known? Well yes of course I'm known outside – I have many *close* friends, uh, in the art scene all across Canada, I mean right from Corner Brook, Newfoundland, to, uh, out west there. Montreal, Winnipeg, uh, Regina, Calgary, Vancouver ... yeah, and right down the west coast to the States of course, to California, Los Angeles.

Annie? Yes, yes of course, I know Annie, she, uh – a dear, a really dear, sweet girl. Annie. Well, uh, Annie Brodzky¹ and I well, of course, we've known each other for some time. Uh, we've ridden at *least* I would say ten floors on an elevator in Halifax – I mean how much more can you say? Of course we're very good friends.

Yes, oh, hmm-mm? Very soundly. Uh, Dorothy? Oh, yes, Dorothy and I have known each other for, well, decades, you know, decades. Uh, yes she's a winner and you know she really knows how to pick them too. She – infallible, y'know. Yeah, well we met in 1966, uh, this is 1972, well we've known each other a considerable time. She's been a guest in my home on different occasions, yes. Very very kind, generous, warm woman, yes, Dorothy. And, uh, Art Bank,² of course, is a good friend of mine. Well, yes, he used to live in Sackville. I can't understand – no I don't know why he would want to leave, yes, it *is* puzzling, I can't think

1 Anne Trueblood Brodzky (later Williams) (1932–2018) was editor of the magazine *artscanada* from 1968 to 1982.

2 The Canada Council Art Bank, established in 1972. Luke Rombout (1933–2000) became director of the Art Bank in 1972 after serving as director of the Owens Art Gallery in Sackville.

what could lure you out of this place? This wonderful, wonderful town. It's true.

Well of course, sure, being Art Star in Sackville, I do get special treatment. Well, I can park my car, uh, almost anywhere on campus for short periods. Uh, anywhere in town – I'm a friend of the chief, the chief of police here. And, uh, no, I wouldn't say I get *special* privileges in terms of parking in Sackville, I wouldn't take advantage of my position that way.

Uh, no, no, uh, I've never done that in Sackville – I don't think they *allow* that. Well, you see there's no place, really, to drink. I mean you can't really just go out and buy a drink – you have to buy a drink and dinner say at the Marshlands Inn, which is, it's just famous. It's famous! It's probably almost as well-known as I am, all across Canada, North America probably. It's very very nice, it's, uh, unusual, yes, and warm and friendly and wonderful. Reflects very much the spirit of this ... town, yes. Uh, great food, yeah, and quite nice drinks, yeah. But, no you can't do that, no. Well it's frowned on. Well I can understand it in a sense, I suppose that if you lived in Toronto no one would think too much about it but they do here ... yeah, yeah. Yes, it is unfortunate isn't it?

Uh ... oh yes, well [looks repeatedly to his (naked) wrist] I do have to leave – I don't have a watch do I? But I can tell, I can tell time – you can tell time in Sackville *instinctively*, uh, because well, it's so quiet and such a nice slow pace that, uh, y'know, when you're moving and doing things you know you can just sense what time it is. It's *timeless*. It's a *timeless* quality here. Really timeless – the countryside, the ocean, goodness it's just so timeless. Time just goes *by* in Sackville. And ... it's wonderful. Well, yes, I have enjoyed doing this too.

Oh yes, sure. Fine ... anytime. Anytime at all. Sackville is my home. Sackville – uh, what can I say? I'm yours.

LOVE-LIFE

1974, 26 minutes, black and white [withdrawn from distribution]; Excerpts from intimate letters play against contemplative, lyrical images seen through a summer window. From a series of tapes that were "autobiographical and questioning, incorporating either incidents from his life or friends' comments and letters. The seven tapes have a physical resemblance, all being montages of fixed-camera shots with voiceover narration; the tempo is languid, thoughtful, the tone introspective" (Peggy Gale).

Relate: bring into relation, put in perspective, connect with, gear to, gear with, apply, bring to, bear upon, link, connect, entwine, tie up with, tie, frame, provide a background, compare, liken, proportion, symmetrize, parallel, balance, equalize, establish a connection, draw a parallel, find an example, reason, make a reference to, refer to, touch on, allude to, mention, index, supply or furnish with references, indicate, indicate, indicate, indicate.

[Music: The Moody Blues' "When You're a Free Man"]

Colin – you know how I feel about you. We could be lovers, but I would hate to ruin a good friendship.

I'm enclosing your key to my studio, it's the very one you used. And my house will be your home anytime you put the key in this lock. Pardon the sexual metaphor. I love you.

I was not too convinced by what I read between the lines of your letter. I am convinced that more or less all the time I tend to view the activities of man from a more or less empirical view. Something I tried to dissolve when I was around you because you did not. When I think about it, I have a vision of a huge crowd of people that I am hedging around, indecisive about whether I want to join the crowd or remain on looking. You come and go steadily, often disappearing, looking for people who are convincing to you, but they are never convincing to me. To them you are part of the crowd, to me you only appear so.

One week – I can hardly believe so much has happened in just seven days. Not in facts, but in a sudden and new understanding of what feelings are and can be. I feel very grateful to you for that. Although gratitude I'm sure is the last thing you want. Just what you really want and what I may want are the two biggest questions, I guess.

I am now feeling that I don't want to live without you, which is different from not being able to live with you. I am still unsure of this and don't want you to feel that this is a certainty. I am still quite unsure and confused, but I seem to be more in touch with my feelings than I have been



Video still from *I'm a Voyeur*, 1974

I'M A VOYEUR

[Sing-song] I'm a voyeur. Here's looking at you. There you are. There you are. I'm watching you. Watching you ... smoke your cigarette. Smoke your cigarette. Where'd you go? Come back. Come back. You're going to type a letter. Do you know that I'm watching you? Do you know that I'm watching you? Whatchoo gonna write? Whatchoo gonna write? Typing away. Is it a letter? Is it a script? What do you do? I think you're a writer. Do you know that I'm watching you? I've watched you for a long time. I know you pretty well. But you don't know that I know you. Sitting here ... watching you type. [Sing-song] Da dum, da da dum. I'm a voyeur, I'm a voyeur. Watching you type, watching you type. Watching you smoke, watching you smoke. Da da da da, don't know I'm here. You don't know I'm here, you don't know I exist. Do you see me? Do you see me ... watching you? You're unaware, unconcerned. Where'd you go? Where'd you go? There you are. Another letter. Another evening as I sit and watch you. Is this the same letter to the same person, or is to someone else? Can't you feel me watching you? Hey – just now? No. I'm watching you. I want you to know that I'm here. I'm going to show myself. Pretty soon you'll become aware.

Going back to watch by my camera. Waiting until you come into view again. There you are. You're going to type another letter? Who to this time I wonder? I feel tonight you might become aware that I'm watching you. Can't you feel my eyes? Can't you feel my eyes? There! Do you see me? Do you see me? You're coming to the window. It's too dark in here you can't see me. I think I'll play a song for you.

[Music: The Three Degrees' "When Will I See You Again"]

Wonder what you're doing tonight. Wonder where you are. A shadow! You're coming to the window again. What are you doing? You've just washed your hair. I think I'll play some more music for you. Here it is.

[Music: The Three Degrees' "When Will I See You Again"]

Wonder if you'll see me this time. I'm a voyeur. I'm a voyeur. Come on ... let's see more of you. Come on! Where are you? There! Drying your

1974, 15 minutes, black and white; "An ironic flip/flop between voyeur/exhibitionist tendencies, where the subject is the object – they are one and the same person exploring the necessarily cooperative choreography implicit in such a relationship. The tape title, finally, is a misnomer. A tease. It should be called 'I'm an Exhibitionist,' however this is subverted by making the viewer complicit with the 'Voyeur' of the title" (Vtape).

hair. Unaware. Ah! Do you see me? You're modest, putting the towel over you. Gonna come and get me?

That was nice. You in the bathroom ... that was nice. I'm a voyeur. I'm a voyeur. You saw me again, didn't you? In the bathroom? But you don't know I'm watching you now. Gonna come back? Gonna come back? Yeah. You look frustrated. Boring evening? Boring evening? You smoke a lot? Bet you don't see me. Unaware again. Unaware again. What are you going to do?

Pace the room. Look out the window – I'm not there, I'm not there. I'm here, I'm here! You won't see me there. Can you hear my breathing? [Deep breathing.] Uh. Uh. Why don't you do something interesting? I've got to take a piss. Why don't you – you're taking off your socks? I'm a voyeur. I'm a voyeur. Why don't you take off your pants, while I play you a song?

[Music: The Three Degrees' "When Will I See You Again"]

[Sing-song] Step right up. Pay your money for the show. Fifty cents. You know I'm here. Turn on your lights. Come to the window. See him looking ... at me!



Video stills from *California: Myth/Reality*, 1974-75

CALIFORNIA: MYTH/REALITY

1974–75, 28 minutes, black and white [withdrawn from distribution]; Possible answers to the question “Why did you come to California?” interspersed with stories, remarks, landscapes, and friends. *California: Myth/Reality* is from a series of tapes that, according to AA Bronson, “accumulate rather than develop, accumulate the emotional fall-out from the events of [his] daily life through the strong distancing screen of this intimate medium.”

Why did you come to California? It may be hard to tell it, but I'd like to know. I left for Los Angeles February 4th. En route I visited my parents in Banff for five days. I travelled by bus to Los Angeles in fifty-six hours. I arrived at the Los Angeles bus terminal at 5:30 p.m., February 11. It was with a combination of exhaustion and elation that I saw your face for the first time in four years. We drove down the Santa Monica Freeway to Venice, the non-landscape fractured by your shattered windshield. You were alone now. I was alone. Your decision had been made. Mine? It was pending. How do you deal with the loneliness? Very badly, you reply.

Why did you come to California? To get a tan, for a rest, to see Michael [title card: myth/reality], to perfect a ritual. You came to borrow the camera. You do copy for Sunkist orange TV ads. You say you can get behind the product. Your smile is warm and open. It almost obscures the pain you have experienced. We exchange therapy techniques like recipes over Michael's kitchen table. Mine is basically involved with Jung. I've always thought that sounded like a very humane form of therapy. I'm just getting into it. How about you? Mine is best described as eclectic, I guess, with a little emphasis on behavioural and gestalt. How do you like gestalt? I find it difficult to see my mother as a chair. Yes, I did too – primal seems more direct. I don't think I would be very good in primal. I have underdeveloped vocal cords. Did your therapy help you? Yes. Why did you stop? I declined the privilege of giving myself electric shocks. I'm afraid of pain. That huge spider you made out of chicken feathers that blocks your entire window – it is very frightening to me. Colin, you are mythologizing, you never said that to me. I know but I saw it from the street. But you never mentioned it. I never saw you again. Why do you find it frightening? You are mythologizing, Joan, you never said that to me. I never saw you again. The night I arrived, Michael and I had dinner at Puce – beautiful crêpes. Michael's studio was much more elaborate than I had imagined. He had moved an entire fifty-foot wall back eight inches in one piece. The workmanship was ambitious, precise, clean. Michael has a clear Plexiglas toothbrush. I observed this as I showered for the first time in three days. I had unconsciously removed a layer of myself. Unaware,

I stepped from the shower as part of my epidermis sucked down the drain. The shower has a triangular frosted Plexiglas window in it. The window is hinged and can be swung open to dispense the steam. Pressed against the sand by the sky, the breaking waves in the distance, an audible reminder of why I was here. I slept for twelve hours every night. I would rise late and go out to the beach beside Michael's studio and walk along the shore to the breakwater. The water was bone-chilling. I observed that the surfers wore wetsuits. I would come back for wine, cheese, an orange. I removed my shoes and socks and left them in the studio, another layer removed. Barefoot, the floor of the studio is concrete and cold. The pavement and the sand hot. The damp sand is cool, the water is cold.

I was sitting in the sun outside Michael's studio [title card: myth/reality]. The boy who worked at the liquor store up the street walked toward me from the ruins of the amusement park. He held two starfish – he offered me one. I chose the smaller of the two. It was about seven inches across. Later I went inside and placed the starfish on the counter. I deboned the chicken for dinner. As I rinsed my hands in the sink, I was surprised to see one of the starfish arms slowly – almost imperceptibly – rising. I had assumed it was dead. The chicken meat had to be pounded flat for even cooking. I used a can of soup as a mallet. By the time I was done the can was dented, and bits of raw flesh clung to the can and to my fingers. I rinsed my hands in the sink again and saw that the starfish was now lying flat on the counter, the final death-spasm was completed. I feared the starfish would begin to smell and decided to put it out in the sun to dry. I touched it. An arm began to rise; the arm was thick and fleshy. Although I had carried it into the studio bare-handed, I suddenly could not bear to touch it. I felt isolated, threatened. A shiver crept up the back of my neck. I had to kill it. Mutilating the raw chicken flesh now seemed rather matter-of-fact, although I had occasionally shuddered as the crushed meat stuck to my fingers. The starfish had to be dealt with. Grasping a paper towel, I touched it. It didn't move. I tried to pick it up – I couldn't move it. It was firmly attached to the counter. I drew back my hand. It was stronger than I was – I couldn't move it. It was stronger than I was. I went and picked up a chisel. I felt faint – I wished Michael was here, at least to watch the ordeal. I felt I needed a witness. There are other clues for mastering the ritual. The sound of the surf breaking and the subsequent hiss of the foam as it washes up the shore. But it is silent as it rushes the last twenty feet towards you. The shore birds are your best bet.

Why did you come to California? To see you again. To try and understand what had happened to you. To learn survival. You didn't find the same thing, you replaced it with something else – another form of happiness. You were a survivor. I approached the counter. The starfish seemed pressed closer to the surface, ready for the struggle. It was determined to survive. I gently inserted the blade of the chisel between the countertop and the arm of the starfish closest to me. I pushed on the chisel – hard. The blade advanced about an inch. A sickening sound of tearing flesh – I stepped back. The blade had severed several suckers, still firmly attached to the counter. The mutilated arm pulled itself closer to the centre of the creature. I drew inwardly to myself. But what was the ritual? It was a basic form of physical activity. Day after day I walked along the shore to the breakwater. At first I always got my feet wet as the water rushed over them or forced me to retreat up the shore. Gradually, instinctively, I was absorbing signs, sounds, visual clues. Near the end of my period there, I could walk three miles along the shore and never get my feet wet. I never had to step out of the way of the surf. It always stopped ... right at the end of my foot. It always stopped ... right at the edge of my foot.

Why did you come to California? To gain ground, to try to learn how to let go. Perhaps to lie in your arms. Over coffee one morning in Santa Monica, I am silent. You gently let me down. You ask if I am reflective in the mornings. Ah, so, it is already the past, to be reflected upon. I'm not ready. I want more. How can I know from one night? I feel I need you. I suspect you need someone else. Our last evening, playing records. My fears spill out. You stop me. I decide to reserve myself for you, at some future date. I try unsuccessfully to pull myself together. I banter you, I plead with you, I admonish you, I threaten you – nothing works. I need you. Later we'd walk along the beach, in the blackness. Absently I go [tongue click]; you answer back [tongue click]. My being stops. You are my sonar. Your hat looks very jaunty. How can I combat that? I decide I can't live without you, and leave the next day.

Why did you come to California?

To Kathleen. To Michael. To John. And to Joan, who just went away one day.

[Music: Roger Daltrey's "Giving It All Away"]



Video still from *Hindsight*, 1975

HINDSIGHT

1975, 22 minutes, black and white; "*Hindsight* was produced in New York City. *Hindsight* employs texts by the artist, Peggy Gale, and Tom Sherman, which discuss 'second sight' experiences by the use of short stories, archaeological documentation and personal revelations. The texts are accompanied by visuals composed and framed through windows that look into interiors, or windows framing other windows, that serve to enhance the discussion of the intangible, the invisible 'felt' presence" (Vtape).

He couldn't be honest, or it would be taken too literally. Reflections – I see you. You know I know you go back, go forward, showing one way or the other. Let me take over here outside, looking there inside. It closes and cements itself over.

Colin – your letter explaining the bizarre experiences you have been having in your apartment kind of took me apart on this end. I am always very skeptical of that kind of description of reality, but I just want to say that I believe that it is happening. I just don't have any place to put that type of experience into my person.

The first time – this is hindsight. The first time I really became convinced was very late at night, January 29th. I was lying in bed with my face towards the window. My mattress was slowly pressed down near my feet. My feet tilted. I lay there, staring out the window, unable to look down to my feet, afraid of my second sight.

Dear Colin – there are people and places with vibrations. The movements enter the body apparently through the skin, touching immediately the heart in the warmth of emotion or the shiver of fear. The intellect follows along later, trying to systemize this knowledge and prepare it for rational explanation. Use what is known already to explain the unknown. It is not mysterious phenomena that are a mystery to me, it is the cold logic of the unfeeling that I cannot accept or understand.

[Music: Pachelbel's Canon]

[Tongue clicking/suckling noises occasionally throughout.] I am outside. It is cold. It is lonely here. You know some of my thoughts, but how can I know yours? There are clues. I remain outside. You are uncertain. You make the rules. The rules can change. I am not alone, but I am isolated, enclosed within and excluded from. You're cold. When I come too close, I must not touch. Outside it is cold. I know how to prepare a mummy. You draw the brains out through the nose with a special hook, pack the vital organs in a separate jar, and fill the body cavity with aromatic herbs. Sometimes the pitch or tar used to fasten

the winding cloths would so fuse that the layers could not be removed while leaving the body intact. I am repelled by death and carnality, and can hardly handle raw meat without gritting my teeth. Yet stories of putrefaction fascinate me. I know a lot about witches and evidence of the supernatural. I understand madness, though I have not been mad myself.

[Haltingly.] I'm not sure I really understand how it happened – it just seemed that it was necessary. It seemed like an act of faith, an act of love almost. But the next day, the next day, I began to wonder and the third day after the bandage came off and I washed it, and it remained, I felt it somehow was sinister. I couldn't really understand – we hardly spoke of it but it was related to, it was related to my ... force – gaining force from you when you were being ... my puppet. And I suddenly realized that the pattern, now imprinted on my arm, which exactly matches your natural markings on your arm in the same place, was somehow more than just that.

Pay attention to your dreams and remember that dreaming with the eyes open is what we lose when we get older. It is something I have found again. Play it out and understand it. Talk to yourself. Colin, John – would you like to go for a ride in the car? Come on, you two – you have to go. It isn't so bad in the backseat, each one of you has your own window. I'm glad that these windows go all the way down, instead of only halfway for safety. You could reach out and hit the dog on the head as he sprints along barking madly at the wheel. You two have brought along your diversions and only barking dogs would distract you from your work.

It is a big backseat, and all your objects are out on the seat – warm, bright from the sun. Little cars and bodies of little people. Next thing you know, you're on the floor of the backseat and you hear the portable radio hit the floorboard in front. The big car has just hit a telephone pole with a small bang. The car is dented, and everyone is ok. Thank God, everyone is alright.



Video still from *Passage*, 1976

PASSAGE

He had been on the road for more than three decades. The more he had learned, the more his fear had increased. The passage of time had forced on him a cloak of optimism. Its hem swept the ground, never resting. The hood cast a shadow over deep-set eyes, eyes turned inward, clawing like rats into crevices. Approximate truth was his preference. Too much truth made one dishonest. He believed in the intangible. The intangible became his constant companion and eventually his servant. He considered the sky that morning. The morning provided an even light. There was a certain elegance to the clarity of that morning. He hovered near the edge. He travelled from place to place and the people were awed by his unusual garments, for he clothed himself in words and images. Sometimes the words he wore were his own, but he preferred wearing the words of others. Some merely found him smartly dressed, but others would move close to him and take pleasure in the textures of his garments. He had about as much social conscience as anyone else, in that he looked after his own interests while voicing concern for everyone else's. The whole process made the achievement of his goals somewhat devious but he usually managed to get what he wanted, as did most of the people he knew. He was getting older. Lying on his side, the flesh on his face would slide over, the years giving gravity a hand. His white hair no longer seemed like a genetic flaw. People lied to him when they said he looked younger than he was. He thought the lies were well-intentioned but missed the point. He didn't feel threatened by age – his or anyone else's. I'm so rational that I keep saying, "What does all this mean? It must mean something." And I pace around and around in a circle, turn up the radio and direct my thoughts to the heavens, and nothing happens – no answers. Sitting by the fireplace, he falls asleep into dreams of Hermes and Aphrodite, Mercury and Venus. The union of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis in the water so blue. He is sleeping in those waters, those waters where man and woman become one being. A primitive creature again, once just the desire of the beautiful Salmacis. I am roaming and prowling inside now. These floods and fires, fevers and sweats, suns, rains, tides – I'm with each in its turn. I am nowhere – you seemed like water in my hands, and you ran through just that fast and with no evidence. And I keep turning around and asking, "Are my hands wet, and did this happen?" He sat, staring at his insides. The light in the room was

1976, 17 minutes, black and white [withdrawn from distribution]; "A montage of tall windows with gently billowing curtains, views of sunshine and shadows with intercuts showing the artist within this space, gazing pensively away from us or moving with a sense of abstract pattern on a sheeted surface. There is voiceover throughout, and a persistent bell-like music, as we are given a carefully considered evaluation of character and personality, all in the third person [...] It seems a summing-up, a clearing of sight lines" (Peggy Gale).

so intense. He watched with detached curiosity as his heart was laid in a saucer. He felt no physical pain, only an emptiness inside. From that void sprang tears that seeped down his cheeks, then evaporated and rose as steam before his eyes. At dawn, the sky met her eyes. There were no clouds. The sky blankly returned her gaze. Discontent with the empty sky, she produced a vision. Her powers were such that she could make her visions visible to others. It was a dangerous task. When I touched you, it was like touching a beautiful animal. And I've never touched anything like that. I felt the same myself. I put my hands in the earth to try to get that feeling, because I am afraid of the animals. They run away so easily, and when I touch I feel so open. All the centres of my cells can run out, just pour out onto the ground, and then where would I be? I would be happy to be there – most of me would.

I CAN NEVER THINK OF ENDINGS

I can never think of endings.
Conclusions don't interest me.
They don't exist.
Moments interest me.
Short periods of time where one's senses are
finely tuned.
It may take 30 minutes of tape to investigate a
2 minute event.
Things happen very fast.
Simultaneously occurring sounds and images, which
may or may not be a literal interpretation of one
another, are a part of my work.
I never try to distinguish between acting and
not acting.
They are the same to me.

Artist's statement
published in *Video by
Artists*, ed. Peggy Gale
(Toronto: Art Metropole,
1976), 41.



Video stills from *The Woman from Malibu*, 1976



THE WOMAN FROM MALIBU

1976, 13 minutes, black and white; "The first in a series of six tapes about a woman who lives in Southern California and talks about her life and the lifestyle of Los Angeles, which she documents through obsessive detail. This tape recounts the death of her husband in the Himalayas" (Vtape). Campbell portrays the Woman from Malibu.

They made ... some progress on the 15th, but it snowed very heavily that night ... and was cold and windy. The next morning Ben and Graham ... made some progress going up ... but they encountered difficulty at about 22,000 feet, and backed off. Between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., I was looking from my tent ... and I saw them moving slowly as they began to come down ... but after 1 p.m. I did not see them. The next thing I saw was my husband on the ridge of the peak, just below the summit. He was walking towards the summit, but I don't know if he made it to the top. Then I saw John on the ridge. They began to descend together. They came down to about 22,000 feet, where Ben and Graham had difficulty earlier. Then I saw them fall. They slipped. Down they went, 3,000 feet, to about a height of 19,000 feet. So I put on my boots to look down the glacier to see if they were moving. But I just saw their two bodies, and then I saw the other two bodies, of Ben and Graham. And I knew they had gone also. It was 4 p.m., it was too late for me to do anything. About 1,000 feet below, on the 17th, I noticed some porters. I whistled, and I thought they had seen me, or heard me. But they turned around and went back down again. I was very disappointed, but as it turned out, they had gone down to the base camp to get help. Fortunately, some Italian climbers from a nearby mountain had gone to the base camp. The next day, the 18th, three Italians and one porter came up, and they helped me down to the base camp, and they fed me, and took care of me. Then they climbed up to the 19,000-foot level, where the bodies were, and buried them. It took me several days to descend to the Himalayan foothills. I returned to Malibu in early November.

[Music: The Platters' "Twilight Time"]

Didn't I tell you ... that we would have Swiss steak? The Women's Committee for the Democratic Party *always* has Swiss steak for their fall luncheon. Oh! And we had a salad too. Let me see ... There was one piece of tomato, Boston lettuce, a green onion - not chopped, five pieces of celery, a square of green pepper, and two black olives.

[Title: she spent the entire afternoon photographing.]

[Title: then they dressed, got in the car, and drove the 27 miles to Malibu]



Video stills from *The Temperature in Lima*, 1976



Contact sheet of production stills from *The Temperature in Lima*, 1976

THE TEMPERATURE IN LIMA

Woman in black shirt:

It was ... a gradual thing. I would stand in the bathroom every morning, longing to throw away the eye shadow, the mascara, the hairspray, the tweezers, the perfume. I began to imagine a great bonfire of all my frilly dresses and blouses, ribbons and bows. I practically starved myself to stop my muscles from growing and bulging. The burning stench of hair removers began to nauseate me. I was tired of shaving and searing my chin with astringents to close the pores and plastering it with pancake makeup to hide the five o'clock shadow. One night, I went down to the local McDonald's alone, just to get a hamburger, and I suddenly found I couldn't get out of the car. I was terrified of being called "Sir" again. The fear just paralyzed me. I knew I needed help.

Man in car:

Well then, you tell me baby – just what is it? It had a double mastectomy, it's taking male hormones, and it can grow a beard. But, does it have the *other* male equipment? Can it produce sperm, or does it still have a clitoris? *How*, I ask you, can we have him or her or whatever it is, teaching kids? What toilet do I send her into? I mean would you want your little girl in the powder room with it?

The Woman from Malibu:

The temperature in Lima at 7 a.m. was 64 degrees. It was cloudy. I've been back in Malibu for two months. Things have changed for me; my life is very different now. Oh, my physical surroundings are the same, my poinsettia bush did especially well this year. I phoned a friend this morning to see if she wants to go to the Westwood premiere of Barbra Streisand's new movie *A Star Is Born* and watch the celebrities arrive. It should be very pretty because they're all going to wear white. She was asleep when I phoned. I couldn't help but notice that her voice was so ... relaxed, even though she had just been awakened – she was still half-asleep, but she sounded secure and at-ease. That has always been a basic difference between she and I. I just requested to have my phone changed to an unlisted number. I've had so many calls about my husband's death in the Himalayas. His name was published in *The Times* so people started looking the number up in the book. Not all of the calls have been kind. One man in particular – he has a very distinct

1976, 10 minutes, black and white; features the Woman from Malibu and other unnamed characters, all portrayed by Colin Campbell. This tape is part two of a six-part series. Two stories are told: in the first, a trans woman with her back turned tells of a traumatic event. Then the voice of an unseen man questions whether a trans man should be allowed to teach in public schools. Second, the Woman from Malibu speaks of receiving persistent phone calls following her husband's death.

voice – has phoned three times saying he would like to have sex with me, because I must really need it now that my husband is dead. After his call this morning, I decided to get an unlisted number. It will be changed by 6 p.m. on Friday. The police say they can't do anything about things like that. They say people like that aren't really dangerous.



Video still from *Culver City Limits*, 1977

CULVER CITY LIMITS

1977, 9 minutes, black and white; "This tape is the third in a series of six tapes about the same woman from Malibu. This woman chronicles her life and views of her society, not in a broad way, but through 'fetishistic' details" (Vtape). Campbell portrays the Woman from Malibu.

I had just been to the Pick 'n Save to get some artificial ferns for the study. I was waiting for the light on the Lincoln Boulevard entrance to the Santa Monica Freeway. I looked in the rear-view mirror and noticed this man in the car behind me writing down something on a piece of paper. It gave me a funny feeling because I think he was copying down my licence number. The light turned green and I got into the fast lane. A few minutes later, near the La Cienega exit, I heard a car honking persistently to my right. I looked over and it, it was the same man that I had noticed earlier. He was looking at me, and only occasionally watching where he was going on the freeway. When he seemed satisfied that I had noticed him, he cut across the three lanes of traffic and got off at the next exit.

This pain is so noisy. Valium – I want ... I am really hurt that you are doing this to me ... so unfair. Do you see the poinsettias there, in Barbra Streisand's hair? Behind her head ... I think she looks so beautiful. The lights are hurting the insides of my eyes. Everyone is dressed in snow white for the premiere. I don't understand why. The noise is hurting my eyes. Perhaps it is an avalanche – oh, he is turning over now, over now so slowly. He is upside down now. It will hurt his head when it is crushed against the glacier. I can hear the ice crushing inside my head now. It is turning red with your blood. Poinsettia red. Why are you doing this to me? Wait – I need a minute. What is that that you put in my eyes? So soft ... sticky. Oh, it's mine. Oh, no, please, not again – it hurts my eyes too much. The freeway smells burnt and soft. I think this is really unfair. I'm dead.

The San Gabriel Mountains were visible all the way from Santa Monica this morning. As I turned off the Pacific Coast Highway and headed east, the traffic wasn't too heavy. My window was down and the sun was very warm on my arm. I turned right onto the San Diego south-bound. The San Diego Freeway was much more crowded – it is always crowded. I was going to the new Fox Hills shopping mall. I edged over to the outside lane. Suddenly he was very close to my right – too close. I braked and was forced onto the shoulder, and he still came closer. And as I stopped, he pulled in front of me and stopped, and leapt out

of the car, and ran back to me. He has something in his hand. I look up at the sign beside the road: Culver City Limits. He shot me twice ... I did not know him. The police have not been able to establish a motive. I was pronounced "dead on arrival" at the hospital.



Video stills from *Last Seen Wearing*, 1977

LAST SEEN WEARING

My daughter gave me very short notice that she was coming for lunch, so I made my “hurry-up lunch special,” where you grate Velveeta and put it on top of asparagus spears that have been drained and placed on slices of bread spread with mayonnaise and Miracle Whip. You roll them up, fasten with toothpicks, and put under the broiler to brown, turning them to be sure that they don’t burn. My daughter had to be at the Tickled Pink Boutique for a fitting by 2:00, so it was a very rushed lunch. She left at 1:15. That was two months ago, May 18. She simply disappeared.

I described to the police what she was wearing: “last seen wearing,” as the police bulletin put it. She had on her Farrah Fawcett-Majors wig – her real hair colour is dark brown – and her Western-style wash-and-wear leisure suit that she bought in Arizona. It has “Las Vegas,” “Reno,” “Los Angeles,” “Denver,” and “Phoenix” embroidered in silver thread on the back of the jacket. She had on her pink, high-heeled sandals, and she was carrying her Texas leather handbag with a scene of the Rocky Mountains embossed on the front with the gold clasp forming a sun. She looked so pretty. She was wearing her mood ring. I remember that because we both commented upon the fact that it was black that afternoon. She was in such a hurry that she forgot her sunglasses. No trace has been found of my daughter. Not even her car – a 1977 Pacer, white. I’ve done all I can do. I placed an ad in *Missing*, the nationwide magazine of missing persons. The only photograph I had of her was five years old. It didn’t reproduce that well. I’ve had no replies.

1977, 22 minutes, black and white; “The Woman from Malibu’s daughter disappears, and she later recalls a mysterious close encounter of the third kind in the desert” (Vtape). Campbell portrays the Woman from Malibu.

[Title card: The landscape was photographically still.]

[Title card: It made no sound.]

[Title card: The object was dark. Darker than the shadows around it.]

[Title card: It was brighter than the sun in the sky.]

[Title card: On the ground, it was darker than the shadows around it.]

I've had very persistent headaches for many weeks now, and I have trouble sleeping at night. My doctor gave me sleeping pills, but they don't seem to work. I keep waking up night after night ... some terrible kind of dread. But I could never remember anything – until last night. It was so silent. The birds had stopped singing. That was strange, I thought, because it was broad daylight. My car radio was playing too loud so I reached over to turn it down, but it was already turned off. And then I remembered that I had never turned it on. This puzzled me. I was just coming back from my friend's ranch near Coso. She had just found four of her cattle mutilated that morning. Neither of us heard anything that night. The sheriff had come so I decided to drive back to Malibu in the daylight, since it is a five-hour drive. I didn't like to leave my friend but she assured me that she was alright. I had an appointment at ten in the morning in Santa Monica so I had to leave. The sheriff had arrived to investigate. I was wondering why anyone would want to mutilate my friend's cattle when suddenly the car radio blared up again, some kind of disco music by Neil Diamond, I think. And as I reached again for the radio, the car stopped. I was alarmed because it's a very isolated area. I was turning the key in the ignition when suddenly I felt this hand on my arm. I'm sure he said his name was "Mr. Mould." I can't remember how I got there, but I suddenly felt the sand between my fingers. I looked around me, and discovered I was on top of a very high sand dune. He was standing over me. He had on coveralls and black, shiny, pointed shoes. He told me not to be afraid – but I was. I was afraid he was going to molest me. The sun was so bright around me. I tried to crawl away from him on my back. I looked to either side of me, but the horizon is empty. I begin to crawl on my hands and knees but I am too afraid and I fall down with my face in the sand. I feel his hand on my wrist. I try to call out, but no sound comes. He has a knife of some kind. It is about five inches long, but it seems to have no handle. He scraped it across my wrist. Then he placed his finger at the base of my ear. I didn't see the needle at first, drawing my blood out. I must have fainted or passed out. The next thing I knew I was driving on Route 66 outside Victorville. It's a two-hour drive from where the man attacked me. Last night was the first time I remembered all these details. It makes me very anxious. I have not told anyone about this. I don't know what it means.

[Music: The Platters' "My Prayer"]



Video stills from *Hollywood and Vine*, 1977

HOLLYWOOD AND VINE

1977, 18 minutes, black and white; "Hollywood and Vine" is the final tape in the Malibu series. The Woman from Malibu character tells anecdotes about her late husband and then walks off into the Mojave Desert in search of pony skeletons to reassemble in her basement" (Vtape). Campbell portrays the Woman from Malibu.

I almost ran over Liza Minnelli today. I had just got back from Chrome City. I had been to the funeral of an old friend who had been fumigated to death, accidentally. Her house had termites. She was upstairs when the fumigators came. They sealed off the house and pumped it full of poison gas. They found her next day, slumped underneath her hairdryer. The workmen claim that they knocked several times on the door to see if anyone was home, but they received no answer. It is a two-day drive to Chrome City, and I was very tired. I was at Hollywood and Vine. I had the *National Enquirer* on the seat beside me, with the Farrah Fawcett-Majors headline. I just glanced at it when suddenly she was right in front of me. I slammed on the brakes and I managed to stop the car. I rolled down my window and I tried to explain to Miss Minnelli that I had just glanced at the Farrah Fawcett-Majors headline, but she just smiled and didn't seem to want to hear my explanation ... She's not as pretty as her pictures! I was pleased when the young couple from next door asked me to go to supper with them at the Schiff's Restaurant. I especially enjoy going to Schiff's Restaurant because each table has its own toaster, and the service is very efficient. I don't really approve of young people living with each other when they're not married. In fact, I suggested several times that they do get married, but they just laugh at me and say that I'm old-fashioned. I've always thought of myself as being very modern.

Sometimes I come out here to the Mojave to look for the skeletons of dead ponies. I have continued my late husband's hobby of assembling the skeletons of dead animals. I would like to find a pony skeleton. I have not yet tried to assemble anything by myself, but I'm sure with practice that I could become quite skilled. I used to help my husband all the time. He was very good, especially with the very delicate bone structures of the vampire bat and the frog that he assembled. Oh, and there are specimens of several large insects that are mounted as well. The tarantula is the most impressive. We were out camping at Joshua Tree National Monument. I found it in my sleeping bag as we were about to go to bed one evening. We killed it by sticking one of my insulin needles through its head so as not to damage it. I may start assembling the rat bones, but they are so small. That is why I would like to find a pony skeleton. There is enough to keep me busy.

Sometimes, when I can't sleep at night, I go down to the rec room and look through all the shoeboxes with the bones of separate animals in them that have yet to be assembled. It is a comfort to me to think of my late husband's hobby being carried on. My best friend finds it a morbid idea. She calls my basement, "the little mortuary." The bones of the pony skeleton will be bleached very white by the sun. It is very hot here today in the motel, but I have brought plenty of water with me. I am hopeful that today I will find one.

[Music: The Platters' "Enchanted"]



Video still from *Shango Botanica*, 1977



Production stills from *Shango Botanica*, 1977

SHANGO BOTANICA

Excerpts; 1977, 42 minutes, black and white; "The Woman from Malibu watches the parade from her friend's RV" (Vtape). Woman from Malibu: Colin Campbell; Friend: Lisa Steele; with Yrene Asalde-Brewster.

[Title card: It's a terrible tragedy when a dog has long hair – a man on Pacific Avenue]

Yrene Asalde-Brewster:

It was 17 of May in '66.¹ I was downtown Lima getting some jewellery in this old part of town – a very old part of town where the streets are narrow. Well I was talking to these ladies – there were two old ladies, and suddenly this horrible noise – it was terrifying. It felt like a war was going on, it sounded like bombs dropping. I was so afraid of the sound that I didn't realize that the earth was moving, until I felt it and I went outside, and these two ladies were behind me trying to run off the street. So I grabbed them and I told them not to leave the room, that they had to stay under the door, and they were just trying to push me away and I was trying to wrestle with them, to try to leave them right there where they were. So I look in front of me and there was this wall, this short wall – it wasn't too high, but it was wide – and the wall was breaking and falling in front of my eyes. I looked at the road and the pavement was just jumping out. So I told the ladies to stay there because the buildings were so old they would probably fall and smash. So I left them because I couldn't take care of them anymore, I had to go home and try to find a way home. And of course there were no transportation. So I walked and it was madness, buildings were actually falling. And dusty, people screaming and crying, and women underneath, praying God to just stop it but during that time it was still moving. It was terrible. So I had to walk home between all these people and the dust and this, this terrible thing. So I finally got home after an hour or so at a run, sometimes I didn't know where I was going but finally I found myself at home. I went home and I found that – we live on the third floor – it happened that my mother was in the house and she was locked inside the house on the third floor. So I got there after my youngest brother had already opened the doors and got my mother downstairs. But when I got into the house, the lamps fell on the floor, the windows were broken, the walls were broken – it was something really terrifying. I can never forget it. You have no control of it, so you

¹ The 1966 Peru earthquake (8.1 Mw) actually occurred on October 17.

think that's never going to stop. And you live like that for days and days and days ...

Woman from Malibu:

Cli, Clint, Eass, East, Clint East – wood. I. Is. The. The E. En. Oh, I don't know. Clint Eastwood is the en – forcer? Those skywriters are really something, aren't they? Clint Eastwood is the enforcer. I wonder what that means?

Friend:

It's a new movie.

Woman from Malibu:

A movie, oh. I've never seen any of his work.

Friend:

Look the C is gone already.

Woman from Malibu:

The wind is quite strong today.

Friend:

Know how much that costs?

Woman from Malibu:

The skywriting? I have no idea.

Friend:

\$500 for a half-hour.

Woman from Malibu:

\$500! Well that's very expensive advertising, that must be more than television even.

Friend:

Oh well, it's cheap!

Woman from Malibu:

The crowd is very lively now, I think the parade must be almost ready to come down. They said it started – it must say in the paper here ...

[...]

Friend:

You see, I've got the curtains pinned back with the self-adhesive strips – it's very nice.

Woman from Malibu:

Oh that's such a good idea.

Friend:

They're flame-retardant.

Woman from Malibu:

Oh, well that's very important, it's very important.

Friend:

Well you pay extra for that kind of thing.

Woman from Malibu:

Do you? Do you? The autumn colours in your RV are just, just – they're all earth tones.

Friend:

Oh I don't have a single blue thing in my house.

Woman from Malibu:

I think it's very, very striking.

[...]

Friend:

Look at all the people lining up to go to the bathroom.

Woman from Malibu:

Oh my God. We're so lucky to be here in your RV, honey, you have such a lovely bathroom. And you know I've never seen one of those flip-down toilets before, I think they're just wonderful, and they fold right out of the way so that when you want to have a shower it's not in the way, I think it's wonderful.

Friend:

It's very convenient, it is, it's very convenient. The interior of the bathroom is all one piece, it's molded plastic.

Woman from Malibu:

Is it?

Friend:

Yes, it's very easy for cleaning.

Woman from Malibu:

There's no mildew or anything, which can be a problem. The crowd seems to look restless now. They've been here for ... eight hours now? Eight hours? It's another band coming up. I think if I'm not mistaken, maybe the Grand Marshall's float coming up.

[...]

Woman from Malibu:

It's quite a bossa nova band or something – it's modern stuff, it's not military – it's very ... I suppose that's what they play at the discos now.

Friend:

Hm-mmm. All the bands play this modern music now, they don't play the military thing ...

Woman from Malibu:

I guess it's the young people, they like to keep them ... happy. Oh it's Roy and Dale Evans!²

Friend:

She looks terrible, oh look.

Woman from Malibu:

Oh, there's so much glitter on their costumes. Oh, they're so lovely-looking.

Friend:

It's all money.

Woman from Malibu:

So lovely. She's put on weight though, I think. He looks wonderful.

2 Western entertainer couple Roy Rogers (1911–1998) and Dale Evans (1912–2001).

Friend:

You can see the tucks [points to eyelid] ... only up close, really not from this distance.

Woman from Malibu:

She looks really, really very nice.

Friend:

Well that was nice.

Woman from Malibu:

What a thrill. I wish I'd had my Flash-O-Matic, I would have been out there to take their photograph.

Friend:

It's much nicer in here though, really, you get out there and you just ...

Woman from Malibu:

Oh the crowd is so unruly-looking, and that little Mexican girl who keeps running out and taking the flowers off the floats! You wouldn't want to be involved in that kind of thing, I mean they could throw you in jail.

[...]

Woman from Malibu:

How about if we turn on the TV? That remote control is just wonderful.

Friend:

You can turn it off and on whenever you want.

Woman from Malibu:

Well I can see you pushing that button. Well what's here now?
Oh the colour is wonderful.

Friend:

It's a little too yellow.

Woman from Malibu:

Oh, I think it looks fine. Your colour TV came with your RV, didn't it?

Friend:

No, we had to pay extra for this, it wasn't one of the included accessories – we could have had black and white, but what's the use really?

Woman from Malibu:

I think it looks very nice.

Friend:

It's a little too yellow, you see, you look at the sky and it's very green.

[...]

Friend:

I can't understand how you've lived here this long and never seen the parade.

Woman from Malibu:

Well it's such a distance from Malibu to come out here to Pasadena and I just didn't know about standing for so long. I think this is wonderful, though, coming in the RV and just sitting here and it's warm and comfortable as can be. But I've only watched it on TV dear and I really appreciate you bringing me –

Friend:

It's different, isn't it?

Woman from Malibu:

Oh, it's very, very different. I like the idea of being able to watch it on TV and out your window at the same time. That's a wonderful idea.

Friend:

I had a shower this morning right after we came.

Woman from Malibu:

How much does that use up? Is that your grey water?

Friend:

That comes from the grey water holding tank – only about five gallons for a small shower.

Woman from Malibu:

Wonderful, wonderful.

Friend:

Well we'd been up late last night for the New Year's Eve party – it's very refreshing.

Woman from Malibu:

I think that's wonderful.

[...]

Woman from Malibu:

Lawry's Fiesta.

Friend:

That's the seasoned salt.

Woman from Malibu:

Oh I use Lawry's all the time. The seasoned salt is just a godsend, let me tell you.

Friend:

It really unlocks the flavor. Look at that.

Woman from Malibu:

Isn't that stunning?

Friend:

It's funny, isn't it, they use some flowers to –

Woman from Malibu:

Imitate other flowers.

Friend:

The reason I like it since we've had the RV is to watch it on TV, when we used to just come and watch it live, it was never as good.

Woman from Malibu:

Yes, yes, I know.

Friend:

It looks much more plastic when you watch it from the street, but on TV it looks just beautiful.

Woman from Malibu:

Oh, it's so beautiful. You can see it better, I think that's what it is, at the distance, you get the whole – when they go by the window they're so big.

Friend:

And really, you know, you have only one view.

Woman from Malibu:

Yes, they get all the angles, it's wonderful. Well maybe we should turn down the sound.

Friend:

Ok. It's good to watch it without the sound too.

[...]

Woman from Malibu:

Disco music is just wonderful. It's the *Hour of Power* float. Oh!

Friend:

It's probably thirty feet high.

Woman from Malibu:

It's wonderful.

Friend:

It's almost a psychedelic effect. I wonder how they did that?

Woman from Malibu:

I have no idea.

[...]

Yrene Asalde-Brewster:

Last fall I was working in my office, it was in the middle of the morning, I believe it was November, I exactly don't remember. My office is in a big building here in Los Angeles, and I was talking to this woman who is probably forty-seven or fifty years old. And I had been talking to her for maybe five minutes or so and then I feel this shake in my desk. So I jumped up and I asked her, "go to the door" or "leave" or do

something so I jump and I run to the door. But she thought that I was crazy or that something got to me. So she said, "What happened?" And I said, "There is an earthquake, something is going on." And she said, "Well what are you going to do? There's an earthquake, ok, but do you remember that you're on the fifth floor?" And she said, "The only way you can get down is if you take the elevator." So I said, "No, no." When I first came to work in this building, I made sure where all the escape doors were, and I knew exactly where to go if this thing happened. So she said to me, "No there isn't any doors here." And I said, "Yes there is a door here a few yards from our office." So she didn't believe me, and so she walked with me and we saw this door. But I don't think she was prepared to encounter these kinds of things, and she couldn't believe how I get so afraid and I'm almost out of my mind, and she couldn't believe the reaction that I had. And I couldn't believe her reaction either.

Woman from Malibu:

I was sitting in the parking lot of the gas station waiting for my friend to make a phone call from the phone booth. The Black man was sitting in a big, blue '77 Ford. His eyes were concealed by mirror-lens sunglasses, but I could tell by the movement of his head that he was watching all the movement within the gas station – very carefully. He looked like some kind of hitman. I imagined he was a hired killer. I imagined him slowly getting out of his car and walking very deliberately to where I was sitting. I imagined he'd been hired to kill me. He pulls out a gun. His face shows concern. He is afraid I'll be uncooperative. He smiles at me to reassure me that he will be very efficient. I smile back at him, I have great confidence – that is why I have hired him. He places the gun to my temple, and squeezes the trigger. He doesn't know it is I who have hired him. I didn't know it would be today that he got me. [Bump.] Oh! What was that? I think – Hello, I'm calling from Malibu, and I'm – oh it's a recording, they sound just like voices. Hello, I'm calling from Malibu and I want to know if we've just had a trembler! Well, yes, I can hold.

Yrene Asalde-Brewster:

It was May 17 when I was in Lima; it was the middle of the afternoon and I went shopping, my mother stayed in the house alone and I had to do some shopping. And I went to this old part of town in Lima, very, very old, and I was talking to these two older ladies that own this shop when suddenly I heard this horrible noise. It was like a bomb's dropping, this deadly kind of sound, and I run near the door and these

two ladies were behind me trying to go out on the street, so I held them – but they were trying to push me away, but we were already outside at the door, and when I was holding them I looked to the wall that was right across the street. Streets are very narrow in Lima, and buildings are tall, the older ones. I look at the other side and I see this door cracking before my eyes, and falling and moving and shaking, and I look at the pavement and the pavement is just jumping out. It was terrible, it was frightening, and the worst thing that I could think was that it was never going to stop. That nobody had any power to stop it. So I asked these ladies to stay in the shop and I couldn't take care of them anymore so I left and tried to get home. There was no transportation of anything so I had to walk home. And it was desolation or fear, crying, people were just running and not knowing where to go. So I finally got home after maybe an hour of walking and running, I got home and I found that my mother had been alone during all this time. And that she couldn't get out the door because the doors were locked. And she was alone, she's an old woman. So I got to the house when my younger brother got already in the house and let my mother out. And it had also destroyed part of the house, and we heard later on the radio that lots of people had died, thousands of people had died. And then we lived with the fear that something like that is going to happen because a thing like that, the earth keeps moving and shaking and you just live with that fear. That fear never leaves you, it's always there. It's a very bad experience, it's a horrible experience.

Colin Campbell (off-screen):
That's great.

LETTER TO JOHN BENTLEY MAYS

Unpublished. Mays's article on video art was published in *Only Paper Today*. It is reproduced in this collection as an appendix.

576 Rialto Ave.
Venice, Ca. 90291

April 7, 1977

Dear John,

Well, I can say that I agree with the first line of your article in *Only Paper Today*. You might have added "wordy"... i.e., "the rude swain who in the flow'ry dell doth all hearts gladden with his untutor'd song." Goodness, John, I know hardly anyone who writes like that anymore. Let alone talks like that. But this may be mere nitpicking.

I can't say I agree with much else you have included in your article. Thank you for breaking it down into 17 sections. That makes it easy to refer to.

Section 5:

I imagine you are one of those people who claims to never watch TV. Sally Kellerman¹ claims she never does either. But I guess you must have watched some TV in order to have formed such a strong opinion. Since I believe you to be a scholar (people have assured me that this is so), I should imagine that you have watched a considerable amount of TV before arriving at such a forceful conclusion ... "utter crassness" leaves few question marks. Since the article has just been published, I imagine you have watched considerable TV recently. I really don't know what all this has to do with video art (your TV viewing habits), so I think that was just a little self-indulgent of you. Practically all TV programs are filmed, by-the-by, not taped. So I guess you are referring to the films on TV. Which takes us even further afield from the subject at hand. Shall we move on?

1 American actress (b. 1937).

Section 6:

I've already commented on this section as much as I dare. I am not terribly familiar with that form of language.

Section 7:

Honest, John, I never was a member of the "peace and love generation." I've done around 30 tapes, and only used a Portapak once. Hope that doesn't ruin too many of your theories. I think it is very vulgar for people to be saying all those things over and over again. I'm surprised to find you in their midst (being a scholar, and all).

Section 8:

"Videotapes I have seen" ... last line. Well, obviously, you should give up TV and go out and see some more work. Your viewpoint sounds uninformed to me.

Section 9:

Quite juicy. Hope I do it justice. You don't need talent, experience, technical expertise, or intelligence to do video tapes, painting, prints, drawing, sculpture, or, heaven help us, writing. I know this John, because you see, I used to teach at a university, where there were whole rooms full of people producing video tapes, paintings, sculpture, prints, and writing about it ... lacking all the qualifications you have mentioned, which was really awfully nervy of them, I guess. Or perhaps it was too liberal a school. Do they not allow things like that at York?² "there are no rules" ... well I hope not. "appropriate subjects" ... well I hope not! "undesirable" ... well, not quite, John. You see, I've sold a number of my works. Perhaps you mean undesirable to some people at some times.

Section 10:

"preoccupied with neither serious moral or aesthetic questions." Well, obviously, you have some in mind, John, and I think you should put them forth.

Section 11:

"narrowness of emotional range" ... your article being not a bad example. The phrases "pathetic boredom," "psychopathological syndrome" (whatever that means), and so on, could hardly be described as "shrill" in tone. I mean, do you really care, John?

2 Mays taught at York University in Toronto.

Section 13:

“monitor is stationary.” Well, let’s see. Perhaps we could put it on wheels, attach a little seat and motor to it, and you could drive it around. I know what you mean though ... I’ve really enjoyed all those flapping paintings, and chatty etchings they are doing now. I will admit that the sculpture that just ran by my window as I am writing this did startle me. But at least it wasn’t in one of those too too dreary quiet galleries. Like video tapes are. All by themselves.

Most knowledge of all art depends on hearsay and critics. It wasn’t until I was in New York that I saw a number of paintings in the MoMA collection that I thought I probably really liked, and in fact, now do really like, because I actually experienced them in a manner other than written information in a text, or a tiny photograph. Here is the scoop. Most art can only be seen at specially arranged “viewings.”

Actually, John, I know quite a few people who are employed, and somehow do manage to view a lot of video tapes. I had no idea that this was such a victory for video ... the employed viewer, but I am most certainly going to keep records from now on. In fact, I may even restrict my audience to an “employed only” status.

Section 14:

Quite an undertaking for only 19 lines.

Section 16:

“Neither is there a history for video art”

I guess I don’t understand what you mean by “history.” I know the history of video art. It is quite readily available. Check your library.

Section 17:

I like the work of Darcy Lange.³ I could say “too,” but I’m not sure you do. I mean you never actually say you do. You imply. And then leave us hanging there.

As I said in the beginning of this letter, John, I don’t agree with much you have said in your article. There is hope, I would think. You couldn’t have possibly written all that from a position of boredom, or tedium. It seems to me that you are interested in video art. Or at least interested in something. I think you should give it another try. You should try to say what you mean. There is always an audience for that.

Sincerely,
Colin Campbell

3 New Zealand artist (1946–2005).



Video still from *Rat's Country*, 1978

RAT'S COUNTRY

1978, 12 minutes, black and white; "A suicide is chronicled" (Vtape).

[All text appears as titles.]

He did succeed.

If you can call it that.

Success.

He successfully placed the shotgun in his mouth.

His finger successfully found the trigger.

His street didn't have a name, just a number.

... and his number was up.

He successfully placed his brains on a good deal of the wall, hardwood floor, edge of the carpet.

Three painted plaster mallard ducks hanging on the wall flew in a determined formation through the congealing blood.

DAVID BUCHAN: LAMONTE DEL MONTE AND THE FRUIT COCKTAILS

The Dress Rehearsal

Published in *Centerfold* 3,
no. 1 (1978), 29–32.

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

The recycled-one-more-time Dr. Brute Screen;¹ the sets decorated in musical notes, stars and circles; the last three all painted in Day-Glo. An involuntary shudder. Carefully painted in Day-Glo. To look nice.

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

A young Lauren Bacall lookalike husks the question.

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

"Soon. Please try to be patient."

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

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

"What am I saying?" queries Lamonte.

"Don't worry. I'll make you sound great," soothes Red Sublime.²

1 Dr. Brute is a figure in the imagined cosmology created by artist group General Idea; his motif is leopard skin.

2 Performed by Steven Davey, key figure in Toronto's music scene of the time.

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

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

It is six hours before the performance.

There are twenty-six people in the production (not counting the technicians), and Lamonte has not had a chance to run through the entire performance with everyone there. Some of the performers are missing. Others soon have to go to jobs. One of the chorus girls has forgotten her machine gun in the washroom. Well, no, she can’t get it because The Clichettes are rehearsing there.³ Admittedly, it could be a formidable errand to interrupt Elizabeth (“You Don’t Own Me”) Chitty rehearsing in the washroom. The machine gun is retrieved by a braver soul.

“Just what kind of a show is this ... like I mean, what could we use as a visual tie-in theme (a ‘bumper’ in TV lingo)?” the TV producer asks Lamonte.

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

Johanna Householder, the camera lights flashing off her ’50s sunglasses, comes out, does the splits, and tells Lamonte that The Clichettes have to do their rehearsal now because they have to leave in a moment, and would like to get the feel of the stage at least once. They do their number and leave.

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

Three and one-half hours before the performance, Lamonte finishes the second run-through, filling in for detained performers Murray

³ The Clichettes were artists Elizabeth Chitty, Janice Hladki, Louise Garfield, and Johanna Householder.

(“Privilege”) Ball and Anya (“My Heart Belongs to Daddy”) Varda. Lamonte and Red decline an invitation to dinner:

“We have to do the cue cards.”

Before the Performance

The lobby is filling up. Suzette Couture⁴ missed *Geek Chic*, and is excited at the chance to see David’s new work. “I hope it’s the first performance,” she says hopefully. Lori Ental (one of the chorus girls) asks where the stage door is. “Can’t see a THING without my glasses,” she assures everyone. Suzy Lake, sporting new curls, offers a cheek (kiss), the other cheek (kiss), tells how she is showing Chantal Pontbriand and a friend around her new city. “And I don’t even know where I am most of the time myself!” exudes Suzy, newly moved here from Montreal. “I’ve had my fill of video for today,” replies Peggy Gale drily, in response to why she wasn’t on the other side of the door watching the video tapes playing before the performances. A.S.A. Harrison sends someone into the men’s washroom to retrieve John. “He must have fainted or something.” “Gee, I wonder how much longer those tapes are going to be playing?” inquires someone anxiously, peering through a crack in the door. “Don’t worry, they’ll just cut them off if they run overtime.”

The tapes do run overtime. They cut them off.

Between Performances

The High Art context has been achieved by Clive Robertson and Tom Sherman’s two performances. The audience is buzzing while the lights are up and the Day-Glo sets are being positioned.

“I thought Clive’s was just fabulous,” says Ron Gabe.⁵

“Tom has such a lovely voice,” says AA Bronson.

4 All of the figures that Campbell names in the article are artists, writers, curators, and others involved in Toronto’s Queen West scene.

5 Better known as Felix Partz (1945–1994), one of the three members of artist group General Idea alongside AA Bronson (b. Michael Tims, 1946) and Jorge Zontal (b. Slobodan Saia-Levy, 1944–1994).

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

The Performance

Lights down.

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

“And these are my fruit cocktails.” He drinks out of the lookalike crock. He’s a tease.

“Just kidding folks, it’s really fruit juice.”

He’s sexy.

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

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

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

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

Red Sublime reads the credits and sends us all home.

Lights up.

After the Performance

Lamonte, now dressed down in a white sport coat and pink carnation, mingles with the thinning audience accepting compliments, but there is not the adoring response that occurred when he was on the other side of the footlights.

Young woman:

"I loved the performance."

Companion nods in agreement.

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

"Why?"

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

Afterthoughts

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

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

Oddball Art as opposed to Serious Art.

Low Art as opposed to High Art.

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

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

And then follows through.

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

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

VIDEO '79 – ROMAN STYLE: ART IN THE BACK SEAT – AGAIN

One is tempted to begin this report with a wine list. And perhaps slip in a recipe or two for a fabulous pasta dish. The conference in Rome *Video '79, Video – The First Decade*, was a little dry. Not that it lacked flavour. The problem was the consistent flavour. The puns are intended. What was the intention of the conference? As stated in the catalogue “... the time seems ripe for an assessment of past experiences ...” to examine the past ten years of video production by independents. With a view to the future. Somehow, it missed the present. The majority of work there was quite dated. A lot of the work focused on disadvantaged minorities (Blacks, prisoners, people in mental institutions, etc.), made by, some claim, another disadvantaged minority (independent video producers).

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no. 6 (1979), 303–4.

There was also some video art. A lot of it quite dated. The video art was rather hard to see. Finally, a few of us video artists got our nerve up and requested to see our *own* tapes. Like there wasn't a lot of demand at the video conference to view video art. So a few of us sat nervously in a darkened room clutching our tapes, hoping to beat the clock. Knowing that in a half hour the emerging rights of women in China was going to preempt us.

Most people assured me that the difficulties involved in organizing a conference in Italy in general, and Rome in particular, are enormous. It's not hard to believe. The first day of the conference was cancelled after the opening panel discussion because of a strike. We couldn't stay in the building because it was a government building staffed by government workers guarding government video equipment, and the government was on strike. Which was too bad, because the panel discussion sort of dealt with that old bug-a-boo question: What is Video Art? The discussion limped along (no one suggested we look at some), but got side-tracked by that older and bigger bug-a-boo: What About Access? We pulled into that siding and stayed there the rest of the morning. The lineperson in this case was Martha Stuart (courtesy of the Ford Foundation) rather blithely urging us to take trips to the out-backs of “emerging” nations and get the people out there to make their

own tapes on Quad talking about *their* problems. Almost everyone in the room (at the risk of appearing too emergent) wanted to know what Quad was. That explained, everyone wanted to know where they could pick up their Quad units. It seems you can't. At least not yet.

That was the last time video art was discussed formally, and we couldn't look at any that day because of the aforementioned strike. Later that week the government reclaimed a lot of the equipment for a party the President was throwing so he could entertain his dinner guests with a private screening of *Holocaust*. A lot of people had to leave the conference early (a lot had arrived late because the strike had closed down the airport), due to the fact that the Italian Alpinist's Society had really managed to get themselves organized and booked up every hotel room in Rome for that weekend.

The majority of interesting discussions (this is a completely biased report) occurred during the lunch hour – which was from noon to 5:30 p.m. Which is where the wine lists and menus come in. Along with discussion about video art. There isn't much video art being produced in Europe, and hardly any in Italy. Nobody can afford to own equipment, or there is very little access to equipment. The output of work in Canada is staggering in comparison. Judging by the bulk of the tapes on hand for viewing at the conference, the majority of work produced in Europe addresses itself to social/political problems. The major impetus of the conference seemed to be structured around this work. The conference was organized by people who are interested in video's capability to deal with these issues. Fair enough. But if you wanted to find out about the state of video art today, you were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The problem with video conferences both in Canada and elsewhere, for me, is that there is usually so little attention given to video art, and so much implied. One continually goes to video conferences in hopes of seeing new video art, and inevitably is frustrated in that pursuit. The solution to the problem probably lies in video artists organizing their own conference to first view, and then talk about video art. Period. Which will probably never happen. Because artists are invariably as bad at organizing conferences as they are at being organized by a conference. Obviously it would be rather difficult to convince funding bodies that we wanted a bunch of money to talk about aesthetics instead of about access, broadcast, cable, technology, and changing the social conditions of mental institutions, etc. We would just want a pile

of money in order to look at our own work and talk about ourselves. Perhaps pay some critics and curators to come in and talk about *us*. No workshops. And no manifestos. Discussions on how to get paid for the *content* of your tapes instead of the *length* of your tapes. Just lots of narcissism, self-perpetuating egoism and fun stuff like that. No pricks of guilty conscience about not knowing what makes those reels go around. Maybe a quiz game called “Name Your Parts” with pieces of disassembled deck held up for the mystified contestants. A door prize for the person with the shortest co-ax cable and oldest functional obsolete video deck. Sounds dreamy.

MODERN LOVE



COLIN CAMPBELL

Published as Colin Campbell, *Modern Love* (Toronto: Art Metropole and Los Angeles: Foundation for Art Resources, 1979). This was Campbell's second artist book published by Art Metropole, following *The Woman from Malibu* in 1978. It is an adaptation of his video *Modern Love*, 1978, 86 minutes black and white; "*Modern Love* is the story of Xerox operator, Robin, who falls in love with a sleazy show-business type named Lamonte Del Monte. Their disastrous love affair is paralleled by a frustrating relationship between Heidi (who only speaks German) and Pierre (who only speaks French)" (Vtape). Robin: Colin Campbell; Lamonte Del Monte: David Buchan; Heidi: Rodney Werden; Pierre: Susan Britton.

MODERN LOVE



COLIN CAMPBELL

ART METROPOLE, TORONTO, & THE FOUNDATION FOR ART RESOURCES, INC., LOS ANGELES, 1979

This book reproduces excerpted transcripts from the videotape
Modern Love, by Colin Campbell, 90 minutes, b/w, sound, 1978.
©Colin Campbell, 1979

SCENE: The Beverley Tavern, Toronto. Robin is joined by La Monte del Monte



Mind if I sit here?

No not at all. Did you like Martha tonight? She gets better all the time. I'd really like to know her ... I've never known anybody like her.

I know her. I've spoken to her a few times.

You know Martha?

Oh yeah, sure. I've seen her at a couple of parties, and, you know, you see them around. Most of my friends are in show business

Really? What kind of, like, musicians ...?

Oh...music, film, T.V., design ... that sort of stuff ...

I've never known anybody like that ... are you, are you ..., what do you do?

I'm in show business too.

Cigarette?

I don't smoke. My those are unusual cigarettes!

Oh, yes, they're colorful, aren't they?

I've never seen anything like that before.

I've always liked lots of color in my life.

I don't have any matches, because I don't smoke.

It's OK, I've got a lighter.

So what do you do?

Oh, I perform. Sing. Dance. You know, T.V. Radio.

It all sounds very glamorous.

Well, yes. It's a lot of hard work. Jeez, what do you have to do to get a drink around here? Wally!



Wally! Wally!

Banana Daiquiri.

Nuh. Don', non.

OK, OK, just give me a large black.

Banana's Daiquiris . . . I never heard of . . .

Oh it's OK, just put it on my tab.

Thank you very much.

So what do you do for a living?

Oh I, um, I work . . . uh. I just have an office job, I do. uh . . . I do Xeroxing for, for a uh . . . I work for a . . . uh, a stockbroking firm.

Oh yeah?

Yeah. I work, . . . I work for an agency . . . and the agency gets me jobs . . . different jobs . . . and uh . . . and then . . . they phone me up and I decide if I want to do it . . . and what I'm doing right now is

running the Xerox machine for a stockbroking . . . you know, it's not, it's really, it's not anything like show business.

I used to have a couple of secretaries.

A couple of secretaries?

Yeah. In Los Angeles.

In Los Angeles. Gee! You've really been around!

Oh yeah, sure.

What are you doing in Toronto?

Oh, working on a T.V. show. Doin' a special . . . for Anne Murray.

With Anne Murray. I really like Anne Murray.

Oh yeah, she's had a couple of real big hits you know. She's got quite a hit now. No. 1 in the States.



Well, the closest I ever got to show business was my boyfriend said with me being such a tall girl, if I'd been born in New York City I could have been with the Rockettes, or something, you know, but I'm from Thornhill.

Thornhill? Is that near here?

Yeah. Just north of here. Martha's from Thornhill. Although I never knew her in school.

Would you like some Cheesies?

Oh I'd love some Cheesies. I... I didn't know that you could get Cheesies here.

Oh yeah, Wally keeps a few things behind the bar ... special-like.

I guess he knows you're pretty important in show business. MMM. I haven't had Cheesies since Thornhill.

Oh, well, I love them.

So do I! I just love Cheesies and beer.

So, uh, maybe we should get together sometime... you could come over to my place ..show you my scrapbook, autographed pictures of the stars.

Oh I'd really love to see your scrapbook.

I've got lots of really great photos. Lots autographed by the stars.

Gee. When would you like me to come over?

We'll talk about it later. Potato-chip?

Oh! Thank you!

SCENE: Parrish and Heidi meet



Ca va?
Ein cigarettten?
Yeah. Oui. Take Heidi. Take.
Take.
Licht? ...Danke.

SCENE: Robin works the Xerox machine at the TD Centre.



So did you do anything exciting this weekend?

Yeah. Oh yeah, I went to...uh to the Beverly...To hear Martha and the Muffins. Do you know them?

Well, I think I've heard about them.

They're really, really great. And I met ... I met this most wonderful man ... he's in, uh, he's in show business ... his name is Lamonte Del Monte.

Oh.

Very very exciting.

A singer?

Oh, he does everything...he's really, really, really talented... he sings, he dances... he acts, and, uh, he's doing a T.V. special for Anne Murray.

Oh.

Which is really a big deal. He's a really sweet guy. He's... I'm quite a bit taller than he is ... but ... I don't think people in show business really care about stuff like that..

Well, they're always bigger on the screen anyways...

He has a really terrific presence. He looks REALLY big. He has great clothes ...Anyways, he said that ...that he was going to try to work up a couple of numbers for me ...or work me into a couple of numbers..

You're an entertainer?

Oh no...no. But it would be just such a great break after doing this report for three years to get into show business...I would meet interesting



people ... like I'd love to meet Anne Murray ... like she's from a small town like I am ... you know ... and she's made it big. And working with Monte ... he's such a sweet guy ...

Well, you know you're the best Xerox operator we've ever had in here Robin.

Oh, gee, thanks ... Well, I do my best ... but ... I really am getting sick of this job ... especially Betty pulling numbers on me like this report ... you know ... it's hard on a girl

Oh the Xerox machine is jammed. I'm never going to get out of here tonight.

I'll probably miss Martha and the Muffins.

I can't believe this is happening to me.

I'll have to call the repair man.

Gee, Saturday with LaMonte ... I can hardly wait to see his scrapbook.

SCENE: Robin visits La Monte del Monte at home



**Over the lips,
over the gums,
look out tummy,
here it comes.**

What's in this, some kind of wine?

**No no no ... this is a martini ... I've
had tee many martoones in my
time.**

Oh Monte, you're so witty.



Ed Byrnes.

77 Sunset Strip. ED BYRNES. Cookie

Kookie.

Kookie.

Remember that one?

He's great. He's so cute. Such wonderful teeth too!

They're all his, too. I'm sure.

And his blue eyes!

'Course they might not really be blue, you know. There's lots of things you can do in show business

To your eyes?

Mmm-Hmmmm. Colored contacts, dye jobs, face lifts....

Really! It's just Hollywood. How exciting!

Half these guys are sporting rugs.

Rugs?

Toupées. We call them rugs in the business.

Really?

Haven't you ever played 'Spot the rug?'

Doris Day! Do-Do Day.

I just love her. Pillow Talk was one of my favorites.

Annette Funicello!

Mmm-hmmm. Beach Blanket Bingo.

Oh that was one of the best movies I ever saw.

I just had a bit part in that one, but you know, you've got to take what comes your way.

She's so cute. Is she really this cute?

Oh yes. She's always been a looker.



I've saved up a little money, and was thinking, you know, of picking up something a little sexy for the bedroom. I've been looking through this catalogue and I just love these briefs. It's the **Fredericks of Hollywood catalogue.**

Fredericks of Hollywood!

And we have different models here and what I'd like you to do is to help me pick one. See what you think.

These ones?

Mmmm-hmmm. Now there is this one....

"The Least"! Oh Monte! He can wear for **MANLY** support. Padded jock strap. Nylon. One size fits ALL.

Not bad, eh?

It's quite daring!

I have one something like this, but I'll show it to you later. Next we have....

Bold bikini. For the man who has everything. Assorted nylon prints; Small, Medium, Large orExtra Large.

Mmmm-hmmm. I'll let you guess which one I am.

Oh Monte!

SCENE: The washroom at the TD Centre



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

SCENE: Pierre and Heidi part.



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

SCENE: Robin's apartment.



Oh Monte. Cheesie?

Don't mind if I do.?

Monte. There's something I have to tell you. We can't go on meeting here any more. My landlady saw you leaving here the other morning and I've been evicted.

That's too bad.

I know your place is cold since they lost your cheque and turned the heat off on you, but I was wondering if maybe I could just crash at your place for a few days... you know how hard it is to find a place in Toronto.

No no no. We've talked about this. I'm sorry, but it's not possible. I have my own life to live, and you have yours. It's out of the question

Oh. Would you like some of my beer?

Monte. You know. You remember that

day you didn't untie me until noon?

Boy! Do I!

Well, they fired me at work. They said I was unreliable, coming in so late. I said I'd been really tied up all weekend. But anyway, they fired me. Well, I suppose I could get another job through TEMP*STAFF, but I know I won't get a recommendation. I was sort of hoping that maybe, well, maybe you could work me into something like the Anne Murray Special that you're doing?

No no no. We talked about that. It's just not possible. There's no room for you... We just can't work you into the act. I'm sorry, but what are you going to do? Knit them all ponchos?

Oh. Monte.

Now what is it?

Monte. I really love you. I just really do.



I'm sorry. I'm sorry. We talked about this. Remember? Modern love.

But what about Romantic Love?

That's a bunch of bullshit. Get with it. This is 1978. Modern Love is where it's at. We're just like two buses that pass in the night. Modern Love, well, it's like an orchestra, there's a horn section, but no strings, that's how I want our relationship to be, ...no strings attached.

Do you mean then that I'm just like some sort of side order in your life? Like a salad?

No no. You'll always be more to me than French-Fries on the side or onion rings, really. But it just can't be.

But what about commitment?

I'd never commit you.

No but I mean...being with each other.

We can be with each other. You know, I get a little time off. I'll be in town..Now and then. Sorry. It's just not possible.

Does this mean that it's over?

Only if you want it to be. Sorry, but I think what you want and what I want just aren't the same thing. I just ... I don't know I think I should go. I think I should leave. You know? You understand. Bye-bye. See you around.

Monte!

* * *

Gee. It sure is quiet. Modern love. I guess I could get into it. Once I find another room. Another job. But there will never be another Monte.

Published in a limited
edition of 500 copies.
The first ten are signed
and numbered with an
original photograph by
the artist tipped in.

BAD GIRLS

Robin:

Gee I just love the Cabana Lounge. [...] Did you see those bowling pins up over the stage? [...] They're so great. Do you know what I heard? Well I heard somebody say that it was an *homage* or homage or whatever it is those people say to Michael Snow's geese in the Eaton Centre.¹ [...] Have you ever seen a goose fly... backwards? Well sometimes, like, when the wind's blowing through the Eaton Centre, one of the geese flies backwards. But, you know, I guess it's just, like, modern art. Oh I just love modern art, I love everything modern like this. [...]

Ginger:

Why does she call herself *Ms. Susan*, why not *Miss* or *Mrs.* or something?

Robin:

Oh that's easy. Well, if you call yourself *Miss*, it means you're single – y'know like us, swinging singles. If you call yourself *Mrs.*, it means you're married – y'know. If you call yourself *Ms.*, it means you're bisexual. Lamonte Del Monte told me that and he should know. I mean, he said like people in show business have to be really flexible. He should know. He's the only one I ever met who has a Mixmaster in his bedroom.

[...]

Robin (on phone):

Hello? Ms. Susan? Hi, it's Robin. How are you? Oh, you're so sunshiney. Well, it's kind of a gloomy day today, so I was wondering if you would like to come over for dinner tonight? Yeah! Well, I do something really, really special with Hamburger Helper. Everyone raves about it. Yeah, you've never had that? Well wait 'til you see it – and taste it. That would be really great, and I'll get some wine, and we'll just have a really great time. Ok? Great. Well, about eight o'clock? How does that sound? Ok, bye-bye.

Excerpts; 1980, 72 minutes, black and white/colour; "*Bad Girls* chronicles the rise and fall of Robin and Heidi in the world of rock music. Robin makes it big at the Cabana Room in Toronto, goes on talk shows, does nude photo sessions, and gets fired" (Vtape). Robin and Newscaster: Colin Campbell; Heidi: Rodney Werden; Ms. Susan: Susan Britton; Ginger: Anya Varda; Gigi: Granada Gazelle; Photographer: Tim Guest.

¹ Michael Snow (b. 1928), *Flight Stop*, 1979, sixty suspended fibreglass Canada goose forms surfaced with tinted black-and-white photographs, 32 × 20 × 16 m, Toronto Eaton Centre.



Contact sheet from *Bad Girls*, 1980



[...]

Newscaster:

Good evening. Here is the News News News: Final Edition. On the national scene, five hundred boat people were officially welcomed to Winnipeg today. As a special treat, the provincial government hired the paddle boat *River Queen* to take them on an all-day cruise on Lake Winnipeg. Several were seen jumping overboard as the *River Queen* pulled away from the dock. On the local scene, local celebrity Ms. Susan, manager of the stylish Cabana Room, has been taken off the critical list in Toronto General Hospital. Doctors have described her as suffering from extreme mental and physical exhaustion. As Dr. Pin Wan stated, “her system is just generally fucked up.” And still, another item concerning the Cabana Room, Adele Freedman² of the *Globe and Mail* has brought a \$1 million suit against Ms. Susan, claiming slander, libel, and defamation of character due to Ms. Susan’s alleged statement that Adele Freedman is, and I quote, “a member of the geek press.” Ms. Susan, in a coma at the time, was unavailable for comment. On the international scene, OPEC announced today that the West had better let the sun shine in.

[...]

Gigi:

Hi ladies, and welcome to another episode of *Girls’ Talk* – and we know that they do talk. We have a great show for you this afternoon. Mona will be here later for her exercise program. Don’t worry, it’s simple, it’s only thirty seconds of standing up off your couches and having a little stretch. Those of you who went shopping this morning – you don’t have to do anything, you’ve had your exercise for the day. Don’t we know it. Julia will be here later – Julie Meathook – our resident cook, and she’s doing what you can do with turkey leftovers. For those of you in mixed marriages, you know your husband likes the more exotic kind of food, you can roll it in grapevine leaves, and she’s got a wonderful recipe for us. But I’ve been saving the best to last. We have a hot new group, they’ve come in for an interview this afternoon. I’m sure all of you have heard about them. It’s Robin and the Robots. Robin and Heidi, let’s give them a warm welcome.

² The *Globe and Mail*’s longtime architecture and design critic (b. 1946).

[...]

Gigi:

I bet they do more than just look at you when you walk into the Cabana, from what I've heard they're just attacking you when you go into the Cabana.

Robin:

It's true, it's true. Oh, sometimes it's quite frightening.

Gigi:

I bet.

Robin:

I mean I nearly had this ripped off my bosom the other night.

Heidi:

They really grab you, Robin.

Robin:

Yeah.

Gigi:

Oh, that's too bad. When you're a beautiful singing star like yourself, Robin, how do you keep the men away? I mean you must have a real problem with this?

Robin:

Well it is kind of a new problem for me.

Gigi:

Well, new problems are good problems.

Robin:

It's true ... I believe in love.

Gigi:

Oh, well don't you get love from these people? They seem to love you.

Robin:

Well I seem to get a lot of different offers about things and, you know, I just try to keep my wits about me.

Gigi:

Is it true what they say about rock 'n' roll stars, that you just have your choice of anyone who's there?

Robin:

It's true, it's true. Um, lots of guys, you know, I'd pick and choose at the stage door every night if I wanted to, but Ms. Susan is really concerned that we don't involve ourselves in any scandals because the press is there, that kind of thing, so she said, "just keep your noses clean."

Gigi:

Well I'm sure it's good advice because you could probably end up with some very horrible things happening to you. I mean you read a lot about it in the papers so it's true. Heidi? Is Heidi alright?

Robin:

It's her allergies, Gigi.

Gigi:

Oh. Does she need a tissue or anything? Perhaps Heidi could tell us what kind of men she likes? She doesn't like men?

Heidi:

Policemen.

Gigi:

You like policemen. By your outfit, I'd think you might like army men too. Is that true or is that just for *Apocalypse Now* that you have that?

Heidi:

I like fortunate soldiers.

Gigi:

Fortunate soldiers?

Heidi:

Uh, Black men.

Gigi:

Mm-hmm. Do you miss European men? I hear they're so sophisticated and suave there.

Heidi:
I like mailmen.

Gigi:
Mailmen?

Heidi:
Mailmen, yeah.

Robin:
Heidi is just so continental, you know, she's so exciting. She just likes all kinds of men, you know it's just really sophisticated over there in Europe.

Gigi:
Well that's good –

Heidi:
I like hard-working men.

Gigi:
That's very nice, well perhaps we can get on to Robin. I love the clothes that you're both wearing, you're obviously having a ball being out [...] as rock 'n' roll singers. Where do you buy all your clothes?

Robin:
This is French.

Gigi:
Oh, it must be from Paris, then, it's really lovely.

Robin:
No, no, no, it's from Montreal. This I got at Le Château. That's French you know – Montreal?

Gigi:
Right! Oh great, is this the costume you perform in most of the time?

Robin:
This is what I was wearing the night I first went to the Cabana Room and got in on the Twist contest and, of course, as they say, the rest is history.

Gigi:

Now there's a question we always ask our guests, I hope you won't mind if I'm being a bit rude. But it's just something that I feel a lot of women have a problem with, and especially women who are in show business can tell us a bit more. What deodorant do you use, Robin?

Robin:

I use Right Guard. Unscented. Keeps me dry.

Gigi:

We're all concerned about something that's influencing Europe at the moment a great deal – it's the terrorists. I think people just must live in fear there –

Robin:

Oh, they do.

Gigi:

The whole time. Have you had any trouble, Heidi?

Heidi:

It's really rough.

Gigi:

It's rough?

Robin:

Oh, the terrorists are very rough.

Gigi:

They are. Yes, I would think they are very rough.

Robin:

Oh, they blow people up, they blow up airplanes, you know. I'm so glad we don't have terrorists here.

Gigi:

Yes, I am too, I must admit.

Heidi:

They hide in the rafters.

Robin:

They do, don't they? They hide in the rafters. You never know where they are.

Gigi:

It's hard to be rich in Europe now, I mean they just –

Robin:

They just kidnap you – probably rape you or something.

Heidi:

Make you give head-jobs.

Gigi:

We just don't have too much more time, Mona has to come out and take the ladies through their exercises.

Robin:

Well, exercise is very important. That's how I got my bust, you know? Those exercises. I don't have too much to work with, so ...

Gigi:

Oh that's not true, it's beautiful. You have a beautiful bust, lovely cleavage.

Robin:

Exercise, girls, you can do it too. That's my tip.

Gigi:

Maybe you can show us the exercise you did, that helped you?

Robin:

Well I don't have my machine here.

Gigi:

Oh I see, it wasn't just simple with a doorknob or anything, no.

Robin:

I'm really into machines.

Gigi:

Oh. What kind –

Heidi:
A flanger.

Gigi:
A flanger?

Robin:
Oh, Heidi.

Gigi:
What's a flanger?

Robin:
She's just being silly. It's like what we use in the business for our music.

Gigi:
Oh, I see, I've never seen a flanger.

Robin:
You can't flange your bosom.

Gigi:
You can't, oh I'm sorry. Well that's it, we'd better cut to our sponsors.

Robin:
Ok!

Gigi:
We'll be right back.

[...]

Robin (voiceover):
I remember that night so well when we came to his studio and, well, he told me that nude photography was, you know –

Photographer:
Well, Robin, you know, the most important thing is for you to just relax, just be yourself, just relax, let your whole body go limp. Like you're at home in the swimming pool, lying on your air mattress and it's a warm sunny day.

Robin (voiceover):

He said that but my body was just as tight as a string.

Photographer:

Robin, just relax. Relax, don't think of this as pornography. Don't think of this as any kind of sleazy operation, just trust me. I'm your photographer and you're a wonderful model. And it's gonna be fun and exciting. And most of all, these photographs – they're not pornography, they're art. A lot of artists employ nude models, it's all throughout history. So I want you just to relax and think of your body as a musical instrument.

Robin (voiceover):

When he said "pornography" I just thought, well what if my mother knew? But then I told him about, you know, doing my bust exercises and I really hope that –

Photographer:

You really know how to model, have you done this sort of thing before?

Robin (voiceover):

He was so flattering.

Photographer:

Robin, Robin perfect. Now I want you to look dynamic. Look dynamic. Nice smile but I need a bit of dynamism.

Robin (voiceover):

I just started to ... I don't know what came over me but I really just started to get into it, you know? Like he was so exciting.

Photographer:

I think you've got a lot of potential in this business.

Robin (voiceover):

It really seemed like fun.

Photographer:

Who does your hair, Robin?

Robin (voiceover):

But then he told me to –

Photographer:

I think it's time maybe you should get rid of your clothes.

Robin (voiceover):

Drop my pants. I was so worried. And then, you know, he said it was art, and I really wanted to be sure, and I did believe I was an artist.

Photographer:

Keep going, Robin.

Robin (voiceover):

My hands were shaking so much, I wasn't sure I could get all my buttons undone.

Photographer:

Don't be nervous, just think of your body as a musical instrument.

Robin (voiceover):

I just, I couldn't bare my bosom in front of him so I turned my back and struggled with the buttons and thought –

Photographer:

I'm waiting for you, Robin.

Robin (voiceover):

I told him I thought, well, that it was too chilly in here maybe, but hoping I would maybe be able to get out of it, but –

Photographer:

That's right, Robin. No, a bit more, bit more. Little more off the shoulder, thank you. Ah, ok now we're going places.

Robin (voiceover):

I was paralyzed with fear but he was so handsome and so flattering.

Photographer:

Wonderful Robin, just smile like that, yeah, perfect, perfect.

Robin (voiceover):

I smiled at him but I was so afraid.

Photographer:

Keep going, Robin.

Robin (voiceover):

My hands were shaking as I, you know, tried to undo my bra.

Photographer:

Robin, you know, we don't have all day, come on.

Robin (voiceover):

He was getting impatient.

Photographer:

Come on, Robin.

Robin (voiceover):

I was so nervous I couldn't get the snaps undone. I was so embarrassed. I finally had to ask him to come over and help me. He slapped me on the back. Oof, the touch of his hand just suddenly made me so hot.

Photographer:

Robin, you're really hot tonight. I can tell you've got a lot of potential in this business.

Robin (voiceover):

Something came over me, I think I turned into ... a tart!

Photographer:

Perfect, Robin, wonderful.

Robin (voiceover):

I winked at him.

Photographer:

Wonderful, we're really going places. Excellent. This is fun, this is excitement. You know you've got potentials to being a really top model.

Robin (voiceover):

Then he told me to turn around and –

Photographer:

Come on, turn around.

Robin (voiceover):

Let me see, you know –

Photographer:
Let me see your –

Robin (voiceover):
What I had.

Photographer:
Nipples.

Robin (voiceover):
He complimented me on my nipples and I, you know, was so embarrassed. I guess it was the exercises.

Photographer:
Beautiful, very cute. Sort of perky. Ok Robin –

Robin (voiceover):
But then the hard part came.

Photographer:
Now it's time for the pants. The night's not over yet!

Robin (voiceover):
When it fell to the floor I thought I'd die. Because the next step was, you know, to drop my pants, just like he said. Those were his very words.

Photographer:
Just drop your pants now.

Robin (voiceover):
I knew it. I knew this was really me.

Photographer:
I need a little sort of X composition here, X formation. Now just hold your hands above your head like that, right, and sort of push your legs apart a bit more.

Robin (voiceover):
Like this, I said?

Photographer:
Well, just a little bit more, Robin, just a little bit more. Oh perfect, wonderful, wonderful.

Robin (voiceover):

I was so into it, I don't know what came over me.

Photographer:

I think you're really a prize, Robin. We might even get you published somewhere.

Robin (voiceover):

In fact, I think I was almost *wet*.

Photographer:

Perfect, Robin. Oh, Robin, this is just wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. It's all fun and excitement.

Robin (voiceover):

For art, I said, for art, as long as it's for art. But something I had noticed was I thought the camera seemed aimed rather low.

Photographer:

Perfect, Robin. Excellent, excellent, Robin, wonderful. You're really a treat!

Robin (voiceover):

Are you sure my face is in the picture?

[...]

Robin:

What if I really am bisexual? My feelings are so confused, especially down there. I mean, with men it's so different, so direct. They're so hard and hot, so muscular. I mean, that time Monte made us go to bed on the waterbed in our wetsuits, I could still feel his hard, hot body even through all that rubber. But Ms. Susan is so different. That first night I just cried and cried – I just couldn't stop myself. It was like being in bed with a swan. Her fingers just felt like feathers running over me, over my throat, my eyelids, my nipples. And just so confused. If only there was somebody to talk to.

VIDEO: THE NEW AUDIENCE

A talk at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, November 4, 1980. Unpublished. The event took place on the evening of the American presidential election.

What I generally do is make videotapes, then I show the tapes, then I answer questions at the end of the screening. I seldom use the lecture format. So, what I've done for tonight is approach this lecture somewhat like I make a tape. This lecture has already occurred. What I am doing now is narrating it to you. This will not be a linear narrative. That was "Video: The New Audience," Take 1.

Take Number 2

I sent off the title "Video: The New Audience" to Barbara London¹ this summer with a promise that, although the title didn't really evoke images full of poetic nuance – in fact one could never label it as being a snappy title – it was central to some of the ideas I was concerned with in my current video production. As I dropped the letter into the mailbox with the aforementioned title, I found myself wondering just how I might expand on that notion. Too late. I was worried that the title might say it all. The mailbox snapped shut. And my letter found its way through the strike-bound Canadian mail system to Barbara's desk, and before long I saw this ad in *The Village Voice* saying I was indeed going to be talking about Video: The New Audience. A very sobering thought then forced its way into my mind. It seemed to me that there was a certain hazard involved in including the word "audience" in a lecture. Suppose, I thought, no one comes to the lecture. In other words, no audience. Then the case I'm making – or at least trying to make – seems rather abstract. Trying to be optimistic I then thought, well, what if two people come? Will those two people be willing to assume the responsibility of being the new audience? Was it, in fact, too much to ask of just two people? Then some really chilling information came to my attention: November 4th ... is election night. Well, I thought, scrap the idea of Reagan and Carter being here tonight. I hope everyone votes early. Then I lifted my spirits by thinking that, at least at some point we would all be watching a television set or monitor tonight, together,

¹ Founding curator of MoMA's video art collection (b. 1946). She acquired several of Campbell's videos for the museum and included his work in exhibitions, notably *Video Art: A History* (October 3, 1983–January 3, 1984).

the information on the set here tonight will probably vary wildly from what's going on at home, but at least we didn't feel completely out of step with the rest of the nation tonight. Who is the new audience? Well it would be nice if we could identify the new audience for video by certain physical characteristics, for instance if one spotted a group of people which included three bag ladies, six art students, twelve New-Wavers, maybe seven Europeans, then you could rest assured that we had run across the new audience. Or perhaps just sixty people clustered in Danceteria clutching dog-eared *TV Guides*.

Take 3

My video art evolved through what was essentially formalistic concerns. I was a sculptor. I started making videotapes. I called them "sculpture," even though they were video. All I knew was that I was an artist trained, educated, inclined towards, however one is inclined to say it: sculpture. In fact, the first tapes I made were narrative. Even though there was no plot, no dialogue, and generally only a singular event occurred. But, in fact, they were narrative. All events happen in the future. It is only through narration that we comprehend what has, in fact, occurred. Videotapes necessarily narrate. Take television. Take tonight's, quote, "live event": the election. It is a narration. Something has already occurred. We all know that people voted, what is left is the narration of the event. We all know the basic plot. The conclusion is probably already determined. It merely has to be narrated to us to make it comprehensible, or if Reagan wins, to make it incomprehensible. Or take a sport event, like hockey. A goal is scored. The audience in the arena suffers a certain anxiety until it's officially narrated that a goal has, in fact, been scored. Even though one's eyes have witnessed the event. Consequently, many people come to the arena with radios to help the visual information be confirmed by the narration of what has actually happened. Of course the TV audience has the ultimate advantage by staying home. The whole game is narrated, and further verified by instant reply. The instant narrative, in slow motion. Seeing is faith. Narration is believing.

Video: The New Audience, Take 4

At first video was pronounced to be sculpture, then installations, then body art, then conceptual art, then finally video art, with categories of

synthesized video, installation video, TV video, documentary video, dance video, and with the coining of the phrase “narrative art,” narrative video. The camera isolates the event, the monitor narrates the event.

Video: The New Audience, Take 5, or Video: The Old Audience

Once video had been accepted as an art form, however grudgingly, it had found its audience. Video made by artists was – what else? Video art. The audience for video was of course the art audience. It was all terribly predictable. Video art was watched in art galleries, art museums, art situations, and even began to be produced in art schools. There were video curators, video shows, video distribution, and so forth. Video artists hasten to say that video art was not TV. Well, scrap that audience. Video artists hastened to say that it was not a cheap way to make film. Scrap that audience. I began to wonder about that. Was there not a certain safety factor in narrowing one’s audience to the predictable realm of aesthetics? So that if the audience came to see a work in an art gallery, it could be assumed it was for aesthetic reasons. If the audience walked out halfway through the tape, one could be comforted by the fact that it was for aesthetic reasons.

Take 6

A year ago I made a tape called *Bad Girls*. It was shown at a New Wave bar called the Cabana Room in Toronto. The tape was, in fact, produced specifically for the Cabana Room. It was, in fact, about the Cabana Room. I shot two segments a week and screened them each week for about eight weeks. Each weekend brought a new sequence. The sequences were never repeated so you had to be there each weekend to get the plot, which was quite loose and open-ended. The sequences were screened in-between sets of the New Wave bands. This structure necessitated a fairly tight, fast, snappy delivery of content. It also had to be entertaining, and each sequence had to end more-or-less on a cliff hanging situation or a moment of elation. The audience reaction varied, from complete attention to the tapes to hostility, and complaints that they hadn’t come to a bar to watch TV. There were no brochures at the door stating that video was not, in fact, TV. The work was not video wallpaper. It demanded attention, and was given its own time to do so. Some nights, the

drunks won. Some nights, the tapes won. Sometimes, nobody came. Sometimes, it was standing-room only. Everyone had a right to be pleased or pissed off. They had all paid their \$2.50 at the door. The tape I'm showing tonight was also first screened at the Cabana Room. I'm not particularly interested in acting, nor in linear narrative. The most takes in any part of the tape we're about to see was seven takes.

Take Number 7

My lecture is on crumpled paper because I had to smuggle it into the country. When the customs agent dropped my tape that I'm showing tonight on the floor, I had to remain casual because I don't have a green card. And also because it was labelled "classroom methodology," and I said I was showing it to a colleague who teaches at NYU. When asked why I was coming to the States, I said to attend a lecture at the Museum of Modern Art. When asked what my occupation was, I said I was a lecturer. If Reagan wins tonight, I bet it would make me real nervous to stand here a year from now and say this. If we are still all here. The new audience tonight possibly is at home.

Take Number 8

He's a Growing Boy – She's Turning Forty, it's 38 minutes long.



Video still from *L.A. Flex*, 1980

L.A. FLEX

[...]

Woman on phone:

Vernon! Great! How are you? I'm ok. Yeah, I'm ok, everything's ok. Yeah, how are you? I'm ok, well, you know, I could be better, I guess. Uh, well ... I've been *bleeding*. It's really weird. Like my *feet* were bleeding, and my *face*. It was like – I thought I had Allegheny Airlines Flight Attendants' Disease. They were like – remember it was in the news – they were bleeding like spontaneously. That's what I thought I had, but it isn't that. Yeah, well it isn't that. My feet were bleeding – I went to the doctor. I went to the doctor. See it doesn't leave a scar or anything. It happens just all of a sudden for no reason at all, and then there's like a bruise or something – it doesn't leave like a *wound*. It's like, uh ... well it happens um, it seems to be – it happens when I'm watching the *news*. Whenever they talk about *Iran* that's when I start bleeding – I mean I've realized this is the pattern, ok? Well the doctor thinks I'm cra – he said I ought to have X-rays made. But I just haven't got around to it. I mean, it's really freaking me out. I guess that's what I should do. Well it happens when I'm watching the news, whenever they talk about Iran – it's like sympathetic magic or something. Well it's like stigmata. So you know you start bleeding on Easter Sunday because you're being crucified, you know – you think you are – I mean for just no reason at all. Well my palms are bleeding now – it's been a couple of months. Well, I don't know, when's the last time I talked to you? It's longer than that. Like five or six months. Well I think – I don't know – I think it has something to do with Iran – I'm serious! Whenever they talk about it on the news that's when it happens. Yeah, well I don't know, I don't know what to do – I'll get X-rayed, it's really freaking me out. Ok, yeah, listen, well it's my turn to call you so it's my turn, I'll call you back – really soon. Ok? Ok, so long. Bye-bye.

[...]

Excerpt; 1980, 22 minutes, colour; A series of oblique vignettes chronicling life in Los Angeles juxtaposes Gary Numan's song "Films," Colin Campbell schmoozing at an art opening, a male nude being sketched, a drive on the freeway, a strange late-night phone call, and a woman describing a mysterious medical ailment. Laura Kreps portrays the woman on the phone.



Video stills from *He's a Growing Boy - She's Turning Forty*, 1980

HE'S A GROWING BOY – SHE'S TURNING FORTY

[...]

Ricky:

So Uncle Harry, how's your arm doing?

Uncle Harry:

Not bad, not bad, I'm getting more movement back and, you know, starting to feel a bit better. This will be off in probably a couple of months or so. I'm sure it's a lot better shape than that guy's jaw that I flattened in the parking lot. He was – speaking of parking lots, you know how my apartment looks out over this parking lot across the alley from me?

Ricky:

Nice view.

Uncle Harry:

Yeah, well. At night it's you know like really brightly lit so I guess people don't get mugged or something. I was looking out just last night and saw this guy and this girl sort of leaning against the trunk of the car, right directly under my window. Necking. I thought oh that's a nice spring night, you know? Then I realize they're in a kind of funny position because I could only see the backs of both their heads. And so I look closer and Christ he's fucking her like from behind, I can tell by the way he's moving his hips. So I thought shit, these guys, right in the parking lot, there's other cars there – they're going to get caught. So I'm watching them and he finally pulls out of her and she turns around and she has no clothes on at all. She's like completely naked and I thought well at least they're done now, they won't get caught. But they weren't done. He takes her over to the car door, opens the door for her and she jumps in and he proceeds to rip off all his clothes so he's like totally naked. And Christ you should have seen the schlong on this guy – like this is a big guy. And so they put the seat back, put it down and he jumps on her and they start fucking away, and the car's rocking away you can see it just like broad daylight because of the spotlights on the

Excerpt; 1980, 39 minutes, colour; "Two main characters, a young gay man, and his female (heterosexual) boss exchange stories about their personal problems: his difficulties about being gay, and his fears about losing his job because of it; she talks of her neglectful husband whom she suspects is having an affair with another woman" (Vtape). Ricky: Tim Guest; Uncle Harry: Colin Campbell.

cars. And I'm thinking shit, this is amazing. And what was also amazing was his staying power because I kept waiting for them to finish and he keeps fucking her, and the next thing I know there's three guys coming up into the parking lot and sure enough their car is the one right beside where these guys are fucking their brains out. So the three guys sort of stand and look in the window and these guys are so into it they don't even know anybody's standing there. And finally they sort of like laugh and when they get into their car and slam the door and start the car up this guy looks up to see what's going on and never missing a stroke, I mean he keeps right on plowing her. And the car drives off so they just continue, it's just amazing and they go on for another ten minutes. Meanwhile other people come get in their cars, and this car is rocking away, and no one else goes over to investigate. And I'm thinking shit. So finally he comes and climbs off her and jumps out of his car and pulls his clothes on and they drive off and she's sitting there no clothes on with her legs up wiping herself, you know? As they drive out of the parking lot. Just incredible scene. I get hard every time I think about it. Does that make you horny? Shit.

Ricky:

Oh, Uncle Harry, you know ...

Uncle Harry:

Oh hi! Look we should get back to the office but I'm going to say hi to Karin over there, you know she has the nicest pair of knockers in Toronto. I'll be right back.

[...]



Performance stills from *Peripheral Blur*, Montreal, October 30, 1980



COLIN CAMPBELL

Peripheral Blur

Scenes I and II

BACKGROUND (Scene One)

STAGE DIRECTION

COLIN dressed in black pants, boots, black coat, black hat, carrying one bag of luggage enters from theatre door.

Pause

ACTION

COLIN: Let me see... I've got my drivers license, SIN card, OHIP, VISA card, my passport.

I've got my hat, I've got my coat.
I've got three changes of clothes a day,
they're all black so the dirt won't show.

I've got dimes for phone calls, I've got my B Stress
Tabs, fortified with Vitamin C.

I've got my address book, I've got my travel alarm.
I've got my ampicillin in case of a dose.
I've got my eye drops, my Halston cologne.

I've got my travel iron, I've got my outlet
converter adapter, my hair dryer, dental floss.
Shick II razor blades.

I've got my sights set, my mind made up,
my thoughts organized, my hopes raised,
my ideas honed, my priorities ordered.
I've got myself together.

Hulk it. Stop. Something's wrong.
Something's missing.

Published as Colin Campbell, *Peripheral Blur: Scenes I and II* in *Performance Text(s) & Documents*, ed. Chantal Pontbriand (Montreal: Parachute, 1980), 176–81. The performance dates from 1980, ran 52 minutes, and was staged at Adelaide Court Theatre, Toronto (Factory Theatre Lab) and Parachute Performance Festival, Montreal.

ACTION

Pause

I need my background
I need my background

I never travel without my background

Listen

Let's not get confused. Let's be clear.

Let's not go down the garden path. Don't mix me up
with your reality. Stop using your imagination.
Don't go with the flow. Let's Keep the edges sharp.
I need my background.
Let me fill in the peripheral blur.

This is Yonge Street. This is where I live.
This is my beat. Main street Canada. My front yard.
I live between the Burger King & Macdonald's

Nourishment is just a step away. In either direction.
My cockroaches think they're in heaven

My street is high on tech. Low on style.
Short on grass. Beyond the Valley of the Suburban
Dream.

Look I can't talk right now.

No. I'm talking to you even though we stopped
speaking last week at the Cabana Room when
you found me on the fee escape with the woman
whose name will never pass through your lips again

Look, I have a whole mob here for Mexican brunch.
It's my birthday today, so I decided to turn over
a new leaf and go vegetarian for the day, well
actually I did it for Tanya, and Elizabeth Chitty needs
another martini, John Greyson is out of papers and
just smoked my last cigarette. Rina Fraticelli has burst
into opera in my bathroom... it's just too hectic to
talk.

That's nonsense. Goodbye.

COLIN

Last season we all (by all I mean me and all my arty
friends) we all chose November as the month
to stop speaking to one another.

Shit lists were drawn up. Reputations were
dragged down. Rumours were beefed up.
Dinner engagements cancelled. Invitations ignored.

TAPE

(telephone rings)
Colin?

Colin? Are you sleeping
with Shelagh?

Colin? Colin are you
seeing Robert?

I hear you're on Shelagh's
sleep list.

ACTION

Brunches turned down. Cocktail parties boycotted.
Names removed from address books. Tears cried.
Gifts returned. Names blackened. Hearts broken.
Associations disbanded.
Friendships ended. We all loved it.

Okay, she said one of two things.

A. The train for Cologne is departing on track nine or
B. Terrorists have detonated a canister
of deadly gas, evacuate this area immediately

STAGE DIRECTION

COLIN:

pulling out air
tickets, audio
cassettes, catalogues,
maps, video tapes,
passport, etc.

COLIN | I call my travel agent and
tell her I have to meet my maker

COLIN: Brussels.Brussels
—what am I doing here?

I don't look good against canals. Don't confuse me
with cathedrals. I'm not after a religious experience.
I can't read the menus. I can't read the signs.
I'm getting my signals crossed. I'm missing the boat.
I'm not what I seem. I'm not what you see.

TAPE

ACHTUNG

ACHTUNG

(announcement in German)...

Announcement

Announcement. It is time to go
and meet the International Trans-
Euro Art Curators.
Have your products ready.

Have your products
ready. Be pre-
pared to understand
nothing. Be prepared
for precisely
nothing. Be prepared
for anything. This
year, you may be IT.
Loto Arto. This
year is Triple Treat.
Time. We have the
Venice Biennale,
the Basel Art Fair,
and the Paris
Biennale. You can't
afford not to be
here. We are lusting
for your culture,
your products, your
gasps of pleasure
when you see our
Kunsthalle, Kunst-
museums... never
mind
that you can't pro-
nounce it. Will
that be Paris,
Amsterdam,
Cologne,
Venice, Brussels,
London?



Colin Campbell as Anna in Scene II



Colin Campbell as Anna in Scene II

Colin reaches out
and says:

ACTION

Look. I'm just standing here. On these cobblestones.
Trying to keep my balance
Trying to keep my edges sharp
She looked at me. Her hand touched my neck.
She leaned over. She inhaled.
She said: What scent do you wear?
Why do you wear perfume?
It reminds me of someone dear to me.
I used to buy perfume for her.

Ahhhh. I thought, there may be a story here.

TAPE

'Smoke Gets In
Your Eyes'

(Scene Two) 1. ANNA

I feel — how do you say? I feel very European.

Did you hear the Cathedral bells yesterday morning
—Ascension Day — they sounded so lovely
— I opened my French windows just a little —
in order to hear them better.

But tonight is much more lively. you know. I love
to stroll our boulevards — our canals — stopping
for a café au lait — a cigarette — I often smoke
American cigarettes in the morning —
but in the evening — I prefer my Gauloises.

I spent this morning arranging the flowers that
Paulette sent me — but she made a mistake —
she included iris in the bouquet — I don't like
blue flowers — so I removed them and re-arranged
them again — everything has to be just right
— you know.

This afternoon I stopped in the little perfume
shop in the galerie — you know the one — of
course the perfume I bought was too expensive —
but it is the best — you understand.
Ah, there's André... "Bonsoir Bonsoir" — such
a nice ass — so good in bed. yes, it's true. I slept
with him. no — it was nothing serious. we were
young...but it is...not a problem...it is our history...
like that Cathedral...love makes us smooth — like
these cobblestones...it is not serious...not
like the war...no...I no longer go to Germany...
well but of course...I speak fluent German...
I had to learn it in school as a child...remember
...but I feel the accent does not suit me.

French Love Song:
Je veux de l'amour.

"You made a mistake. I ordered a '71 chablis. Ah.
Bonsoir Yvette... but you look so charming tonight.
Have you been keeping secrets from me?"

ACTION

I've never seen that silver scarf before. you look so wistful. ah — a new lover. well, yes, I'm alone no — I prefer to have no company tonight. I'll ring you this weekend. We'll meet at the art gallery. but it's perfect my dear. love and art is the perfect mixture. we'll talk about your new love over the Picasso's. chow. cino.

She slept with André too. well — he broke her heart. he left her for a rich American. from. how do you say. San Francisco. well, it's too amusing. a rich American philosopher. can you imagine. she would have been better taking a book by Foucault to bed. One European on paper is better than two Americans between the sheets.
PROJECTOR II on

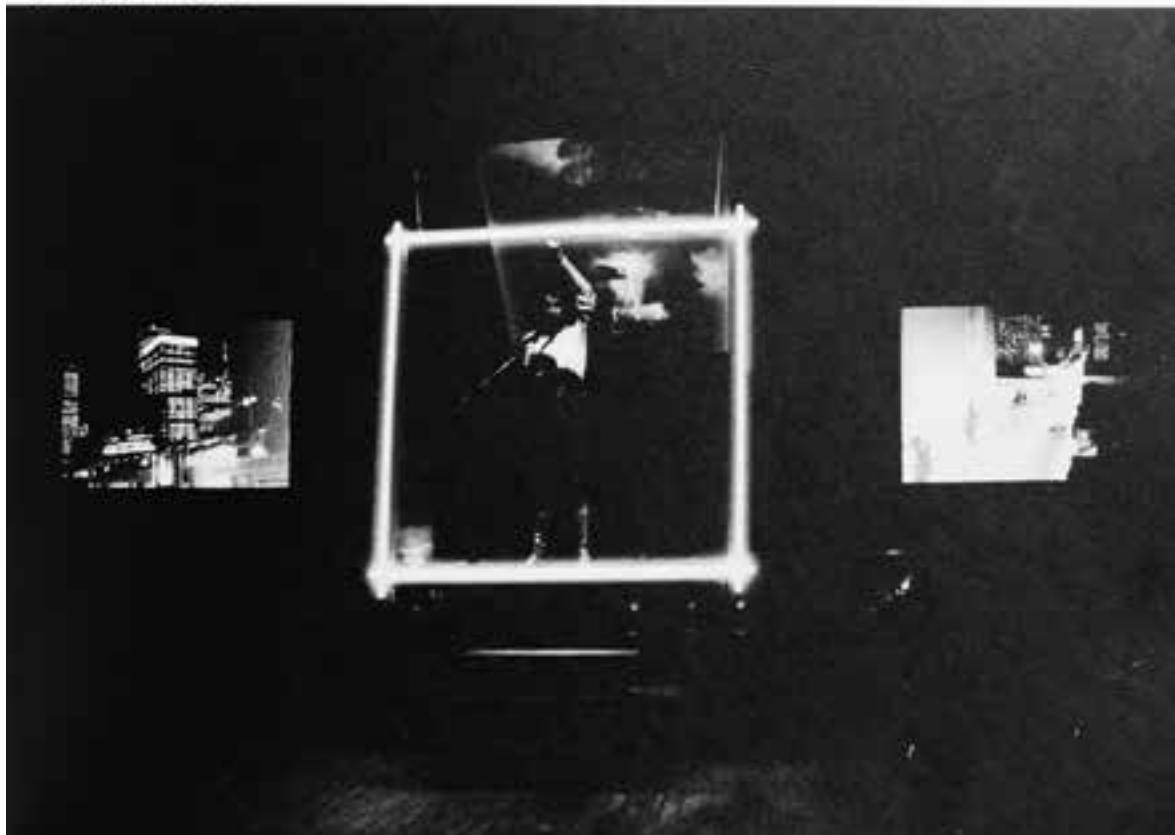
Go away. leave me alone. I have nothing more to give. I gave everything to you. I am empty now. I am exhausted. My flesh feels dead. I have to survive. You can't come back. I must go on.

TAPE

Anna, Anna. Anna.

Take me for a walk.

Colin Campbell in final scene



PERIPHERAL BLUR [CONT.]

1980, 52 minutes, Adelaide Court Theatre, Toronto (Factory Theatre Lab) and Parachute Performance Festival, Montreal. Adapted from a transcript generously provided by Mike Hoolboom. This transcript represents the material that follows what had been published in *Performance Text(e)s & Documents*.

[...]

Colin:

What are you saying? You are too weak. You cannot walk. If it were possible, we could go out and crawl on the ground on our hands and knees together, that is the most we could do. You ask too much.

Woman's voice on tape:

Then tell me about your walk.

Colin:

I only take short walks now. I'm trying to stop running away. I just wish, I wish I could stay in bed all day, just never get up. Never get dressed, never answer the phone, never answer the door, never read a letter, never write a letter, just stay very still. It's terrible. I burst into tears on trains, in restaurants, for no reason it just floods over me and I guess I know the reason. But I can't prevent myself. And I hate it because I'm a woman and I'm crying in public and people watch me and they think that I'm weak. I don't go for walks anymore.

Woman's voice on tape:

Then come.

Colin:

Then come, Anna. Come, Anna. Did you come Anna? Can you come Anna? That's what all the men say. I have immense hatred against these men, these lovers of mine. Men are babies, they want a shoulder to lean on, but they just want me to surrender. They like to make love to strong women but if I'm weak they vanish. Men, men enter me so far that finally there's no place for me anymore. And if that's not enough, men enter my head, so there's no room for my thoughts anymore. Then they buy you a drink. I must have silence. I must be alone.

I must dance now.

[Music begins, lights down, they dance to electropop. Music is abruptly cut off.]

Woman's voice on tape mixed with Brian Eno's *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*:

I saw friends that day. They tell me about their difficulties. I met my mother later that day in Brussels. She asks me to talk and how am I doing? I never talk. We sat there. The next morning I meet my lover, we make love. He leaves for work, I will come sit later. I try to find a pharmacy. My lover returns. I make love to him. Later I massage his back, I say nothing. The next day I'm going to tell him I'm ill.

Colin:

You began to wear perfume.

Woman's voice on tape:

Yes, I needed it to hide the stink. You rot and you stink in the process.

Colin:

I can't remember if we ever made love. We did so many different things together it all gets mixed up. Look. I'm not depressed. I'm not sad. I'm just trying to figure out what happened, that's all. You know? Just what happened.

Woman's voice on tape:

We women die with a giant vagina, it becomes bigger and bigger as the hour of death comes closer and closer. Dying is the most overtly sexual excitement.

Colin:

I slept at the foot of her bed for two months. One morning I woke up, I was hungry. On my way out I leaned over and she bit me on the ear. When I came back she was dead. [He unfolds letter and reads it.] Dear Colin, Have you forgotten your European friend already? Why don't you answer my letters? I told you all about my [thunderstorm audio starts] love, my grief, our history, our art but perhaps it is too much for you to understand, for you to feel. We are after all more experienced in these matters, in our world than in yours. What else could I expect? Anna

[The lights have gone down, a slide showing a cityscape and then lightning bolts are shown on the ceiling.]

[Music: Marianne Faithfull's "Guilt." Campbell steps to microphone and mimes singing.]

DANGLING BY THEIR MOUTHS

Sean:

You look perplexed. Perhaps I should explain in more detail what influenced my decision to leave New York. I occasionally played squash with Phillip Sterm, he was a Wall Street stockbroker. I met him at a party I went to with a friend, also an actor. We were both between jobs. And Phillip found out that I – aside from being an actor – was a pretty good carpenter, so he asked me if I would do some work for him on his loft in my spare time, as he so diplomatically phrased it. Well I was completely broke so of course I was quite happy to accept. While working on his loft, we became friends, and we would play squash together on Saturday afternoons. Well after that summer we lost touch. Several months later, he called me again, asked for a game of squash, and said that he had a proposition for me to consider. I think his instincts told him that I was in my usual unemployed New York actor situation again. So after the game, he asked me if I would consider spending three nights a week in his loft keeping his wife company. He explained that he often worked late, and that his wife, Mora, was nervous about being left alone at night. Well it sounded simple enough, and the pay was extremely attractive, so I agreed to do it. Now he explained that Mora was not well, and that there were a couple of rules which I must remember: I was not to engage her in conversation, and I was not to touch her. She was very depressed and preferred to be left alone. So I agreed to do it, and he handed me the keys and he said that I should be there on Wednesday night, about 7 p.m., that Mora would be waiting for me. Well Mora was waiting for me. I let myself into the foyer and I saw her crouching on a table pressed into the corner, tightly wrapped in a blanket. She was staring at me, wide-eyed and silent. “Hello, Mora. Remember me? I’m Sean.” I was astounded. The last time that I saw Mora she was studying to be a psychoanalyst. She was a vivacious, articulate woman. Now she seemed more like a child. “Are you alright?” I asked her. She very slowly nodded yes. “Well, I’m going into the living room to read in case you need anything.” I’d been advised that I shouldn’t play the stereo or watch television. So I went into the living room and I sat down and I started to read. Then I heard her whispering my name very softly from the foyer: “Sean ... Sean.” So I went over to her and I said, “Did you call me?” She nodded yes. So I said, “Can I get you something?” She nodded. So I said, “What can I get

1981, 62 minutes, colour;
“This tape tells in flash form the story of a European art critic and her relationship to three people: her lesbian lover who died of cancer, a Canadian actor/director in theatre, and a young performance artist who adopts her persona in a performance. The tape deals with sexual roles, love relationships and women's views of themselves in social/sexual relationships with women and men” (Vtape).
Anna: Colin Campbell; John: John Greyson; Sean: David McIlwraith; Anouk: Kerri Kwinter; Son: Neil Campbell; Yvette: Tanya Rosenberg [Mars].



Video stills from *Dangling by Their Mouths*, 1981





Production stills from *Dangling by Their Mouths*, 1981



you?” And she opened her mouth and made these ... sucking sounds. “Are you thirsty?” She nodded. “Can I get you some tea?” She nodded. “Alright, I’ll go and get you some.” So I went into the kitchen and I looked up at the clock, and I still had two hours to go. So I made some tea, and I poured a cup, and I took it back into the foyer, and I put it right on the edge of her table. Then I went down and I sat down again, and I watched her. Very, very slowly, her hand emerged from the blanket and reached out for the cup, which she brought painstakingly to her lips. She slurped at it noisily. Then she put it down and she sat there staring at me. Well I pretended to read under her gaze. Then I heard her whispering my name again. So I walked over to her and I asked her if she wanted another cup of tea. And she whispered, “bathroom.” “You want to go to the bathroom? Do you want me to take you there?” She shook her head no. “Well alright, you can go to the bathroom.” I decided to treat her as a child. So I sat down again, where I could watch her. Almost imperceptibly, she began to slide across the table. Once she reached the edge, it took several minutes for her feet to touch the floor. Her progress across the floor to the bathroom was excruciatingly slow. It took her twenty-five minutes at least to reach the bathroom door. Then she closed the door. And silence. But it was a silence that stretched into minutes. When a half-an-hour was up, I began to worry. I thought, well, there might be a razor blade in there. So I walked over to the door and I tapped. “Mora, are you OK?” I almost heard her say, “I’m stuck.” “I’ll help you.” I thought I could hear whimpering, and I began to become quite concerned. “Mora, what’s the matter?” “I’m stuck.” “Can I come in?” I was praying that she hadn’t locked the door, so I tried it and it opened. And I found her sitting on the floor, her legs all wrapped up in the blanket. She repeated, “I’m stuck.” “Do you want me to carry you back to your table?” She nodded. So I carefully picked her up and I carried her back to her table, and then she inched her way back into the corner. And then I sat down and I actually started to relax a bit. As bizarre as the situation was, I felt that I could handle it. It was like babysitting – I was a high-paid babysitter. And my fears about the bathroom proved to be groundless because the bathroom door lock and the medicine cabinet had been removed, so she couldn’t hurt herself there. So I settled down and I became absorbed in my book. At first, I thought it was a siren. The scream started very low, then reached a high, prolonged wail. I was horrified to realize that it was Mora. I jumped up and I ran to her just as the second scream started. It was blood-curdling – you could have heard it down the block. “Mora!” I reached out for her. Then the third scream started – more powerful and truly terrifying. It stopped my hand in mid-air. I was frantic. I was

afraid she was going to, I don't know, attack me. But she just sat there emitting these horrifying screams. Then, just as suddenly as she'd started, she stopped. I stood there looking at her in stunned silence, waiting for the next onslaught ... it never came. I was shaking. I sat down again, feeling as though I'd been battered. I don't know how long I sat there. I didn't hear Phillip come in. "So, how did your evening go, Sean?" he asked.

John:

Let's see ... Got my driver's licence, my SIN card, OHIP,¹ Visa, my passport, traveller's cheques, my video dubs, my video catalogues, Halston cologne, two Xerox copies of the lecture, my Belgian francs, my hotel in Brussels is confirmed ... oh yeah.

John:

I fear there may have been some difficulty understanding some of the dialogue. I realize the references in the videotapes pertain mainly to North American culture, and in some cases nostalgia. I can appreciate that if English is not your first language, a lot of this work may have been lost on you. Are there any questions? ... Yes?

Anna:

Yes, I have a question ... May I buy you a drink?

Anouk:

I saw friends that day. They tell me about their difficulties. I meet my mother later that day in Brussels. We share a hotel. She asks me to talk. At first I don't talk. Then I talk. We share a bed. The next morning I meet my lover. We make love. He leaves for work. I become sick later. I try to find a pharmacy. My lover returns. I make love to him. Later, I massage his back. I say nothing. The next day, a doctor tells me I am ill.

Sean (voiceover):

About a year after I returned to Toronto from New York, the theatre company I was with was sent on a European tour. That's where I met Anna, in Brussels. It was after my matinee performance. I was excited.

1 SIN: Social Insurance Number; OHIP: Ontario Health Insurance Plan.

I was relieved to be out of Germany. I was a little drunk. And I saw this woman standing alone at a bar near the Galleria. In a combination of French and English – mostly English – I asked if I may join her. If she was taken aback, she didn't reveal it ...

Sean:
C'est magnifique!

Anna:
You may speak English, your French sounds a bit uncomfortable with you. Are you North American?

Sean:
Oui – I mean yes. Would you like a cigarette?

Anna:
Ah mais non, I prefer my Gauloises.

Sean:
Ah, of course.

Anna:
It's alright. I will confess that in the mornings I often smoke the American cigarettes – the Marlboros – it's just that later in the day, I prefer my Gauloises. It's a habit, it's nothing.

Sean:
I understand.

Anna:
Merci.

Sean:
Well, I think Brussels is a charming city. So many beautiful cathedrals and buildings.

Anna:
Ah yes, did you hear the bells yesterday morning?

Sean:
No, I didn't, I only just arrived today.

Anna:

Oh, that's too bad. It was Ascension Day yesterday. All the bells were ringing – they woke me in the morning and I got up and opened my windows just a bit to hear them more clearly. Then I lay back in bed to listen to them – it was so peaceful. But it's much more like the Brussels I love tonight: people are out, so beautifully dressed. It's more – how do you say? – like life, hm?

Sean:

Lively?

Anna:

Lively – you must excuse me. My English – I only began to speak it since ... six months, I'm not very good, perhaps.

Sean:

On the contrary, I'm impressed. You speak it very well.

Anna:

Well you flatter me, I'm sure. I have learned English because, well, it's more and more – how do you say? – required of me in what I do. It's the international art language is more English, and I must speak it, it's difficult for me but I try.

Sean:

What do you do, if I may ask?

Anna:

Well, I'm very fortunate. I'm an independent critic – I do what I wish! I review film, music, art, performance – whatever catches my eye.

Sean:

Ah, well perhaps you'd be interested in the piece we're doing now at the Palais des Beaux-Arts.

Anna:

Ah, so, you're an artist?

Sean:

An actor.

Anna:

But surely that means you're an artist? You see in Europe we consider actors to be artists, not just the painters are the artists here. I knew you must be an artist, I could tell by your face – it's very sensitive. Tell me, where are you from?

Sean:

Canada. Toronto?

Anna:

Ah yes, I've heard of Toronto. When you return to Toronto, you must declare yourself to everyone that you're an artist. Tell them, Anna says so.

Sean:

Alright, if you say so, but I think it will confuse everyone.

Anna:

Well frankly, I find the North American habit of always having to put things into categories and separate and be efficient more confusing. I think it would make me feel – how do you say? – uptight? Oh my God, there's André – bad luck. Perhaps if we appear to be more intimate it might discourage him. Do you mind?

Sean:

Not at all. Which one is he?

Anna:

The one in the white pants, he looks like a gigolo. He's standing by the door. Is he still there?

Sean:

Ah yes, I see him. Perhaps we scared him off after all, he's leaving.

Anna:

Good.

Sean:

An ex-boyfriend?

Anna:

Almost an ex-husband. We were very young and we thought it was the real thing. I don't like to think of it, it puts me in a bad mood. And you, are you married?

Sean:

I was, I'm not anymore. Obviously you're not?

Anna:

Obviously not, it's an abhorrent idea – ah, but excuse me, you have nothing to drink! Would you like cappuccino, an apéritif perhaps, some wine?

Sean:

Wine, please.

Anna:

But that's very simple. Deux Chablis, s'il vous plait? Merci. I ordered white – c'est bon?

Sean:

That's lovely.

Anna:

Did you just come directly from Toronto to Brussels?

Sean:

No, I just came from Germany. And I confess I did not like it much there.

Anna:

Germany ... I no longer go there.

Sean:

Why not?

Anna:

The war. It's just that, when I'm there I feel uncomfortable and resentful. You must excuse me, I usually make light of it, I usually say, no,

Anna no longer goes to Germany because when she speaks German she feels the accent does not suit her.

Yvette:

Ahhh bonsoir Anna comment vas-tu? Quelle chance. Je voudrais bien te parler – ça fait si longtemps!

Anna:

Yvette, Yvette – en anglais, my companion – he's North American. Excuse us – your name?

Sean:

Sean.

Anna:

Sean. Yvette.

Sean:

Pleased to meet you.

Yvette:

Enchanté.

Anna:

But you look so charming tonight, Yvette.

Yvette:

Thank you, and you too, Anna, like always!

Anna:

I try. But tell me, Yvette, have you been keeping secrets from me?

Yvette:

Mais, non!

Anna:

About this scarf! I've not seen it before and it's my favourite colour!

Yvette:

Oui?

Anna:

But I think there's something else, Yvette, the eyes – a special light, I know the look, it's ... tell me?

Yvette:

L'amour, oui?

Anna:

Ah, l'amour.

Yvette:

Yes, excuse me. I must tell you –

Anna:

Yvette, not here! It would be ... inopportune. I know – this weekend I'll ring you and we can go to the Malevich exposition.

Yvette:

Malevich?

Anna:

But it's perfect! Love and art – I think it's the perfect combination. Well don't you? I'll ring you up and we'll get together. Besides, I saw André in here tonight and I'm sure that you don't want to speak to him.

Yvette:

No.

Anna:

I'll ring you.

Yvette:

Ok, bye.

Anna.

Ciao ... Ah the wine, merci. Oh, let me help you, oh those are French francs. It's complicated I know but we are used to it. Well – to Toronto! I must tell you, Yvette, she slept with André too. He broke her heart.

Sean:

That's too bad. She's lovely. What happened?

Anna:

Well, it's most unusual, he left her for a rich American.

Sean:

The American, was she –

Anna:

He, the American *he* was, well, I find it too fantastic. He was a philosopher – can you imagine? I can see by your expression that you probably can.

Sean:

Well we do have some good writers in Canada.

Anna:

Sure, but she would have been better off taking a book by Foucault to bed with her ... Ah, the time – I must go.

Sean:

Oh, what a shame.

Anna:

I'm sorry.

Sean:

I so enjoyed our conversation, I wanted to buy you a brandy.

Anna:

Well, why not? My lover has a passion for brandy *and* American writers. She may like you. If not, you'll soon know. Come.

Anouk:

What are you doing?

Son:

My legs are an alligator eating the wind.

Anouk:

That's funny.

Son:
Have you ever seen an alligator, mother?

Anouk:
Yeah, but I've never seen one eat the wind.

Son:
Would you like to see a magic trick?

Anouk:
Ok, but only one.

Son:
I put the rope around my neck, and I cross my arms, then bring one end around, tie a knot, and then when I pull these two ends I'll strangle myself, right?

Anouk:
That's a good one. Where did you learn that?

Son:
Tommy showed it to me at school. Would you like to try?

Anouk:
Ok.

Son:
Tie your hair back so it doesn't get tangled up.

Anouk:
I don't know what ...

Son:
Around your neck, cross your arms, you pull one end around, start to tie a knot, and then pull!

Anouk:
Ow!

Anna:
Anouk. I'd like you to meet Sean. He's North American.

Anouk:
How long are you staying?

Anouk:
As I Lay Dying.

Sean:
Pardon me?

Anouk:
Your American genius, William Faulkner.

Sean:
Ah yes, Addie and Anse.

Anouk:
Well I'm sure you've forgotten the part where he lets his dead woman speak.

Sean:
Well it has been some time since I read it.

Anouk:
I know it by heart. [Recites from Addie's monologue in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* starting, "So I took Anse" and ending, "It doesn't matter what they call them."]²

Anna:
What perfume are you wearing?

John:
Halston.

Anna:
Ah, Halston. Why do you wear a scent?

² See William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930) (New York: Random House, 1964), 163–65. The title of Campbell's video is drawn from this passage: "I knew that it had been, not that they had dirty noses, but that we had had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream" (164).

John:

I guess because I like to.

Anna:

If I seem forward it's just, well, it reminds me of someone I once loved.
I used to buy perfume for her.

John:

Was it a friend?

Anna:

A friend, yes. My lover. She died three weeks ago.

John:

Um, how terrible, I'm very sorry.

Anna:

I can tell by your reaction that someone you have loved has never died.

John:

Yes, I've been very fortunate never to have had that experience.

Anna:

Yes! A person dies and something happens to you, like it happened to me. It's difficult to sort out. It's more difficult to love her now that she's dead. You must forgive me, my mind is uncontrollable. I try to sift through the facts and there's – how would you say? – no narrative order. What happened last is what I remember first. To merely remember facts is to be cold-blooded, don't you think? To remember what one felt is different from remembering facts. Don't you agree?

John:

How did she die?

Anna:

Cancer. She died of cancer.

John:

I see.

Anna:

It's not what you see, it's what you *smell*. Cancer stinks. You rot, your body devours itself. So you smell ... you smell. So she began to wear perfume, to hide the stink. Every day I would sponge down her entire body head to foot with perfume.

John:

How long were you together?

Anna:

Constantly. Does the rest ever matter? Towards the end, towards the end she became very demanding. I would eat and sleep at the foot of her bed. I was with her all the time, it was too much. It was too much. She asked too much, you know? I would go out and it would be, "Anna, Anna don't leave me." It's too much, you know? I went to the apartment today, to the room she died in. It wasn't to torture myself, I wanted to know how I felt. Do you know what I felt? I felt anger ... anger. It's unfair, she shouldn't have died. I burned all her clothes. I did that because I couldn't bear to see anyone else in them. I got rid of her furniture. Nothing remains except her diary. I kept her diary.

John:

That must be very hard to accept.

Anna:

I need silence. [Long pause.] I must dance. [Leaves and returns suddenly.] The last thing Anouk said to me was, "Don't let me die in jealousy." Then she bit me on the ear. "Don't let me die in jealousy."

Anna (voiceover):

Tell me about your childhood. Tell me about your first lover. Do you get off playing other people? Does it give you a kick to play women? What are your nightmares about? How old were you when you first had sex? Do you masturbate after you create a work? Do my questions frighten you? What do you think about when you're making love? What kind of images do you see when you have an orgasm? Do you feel like a woman when you are dressed as one? Do you imagine what it is like to be a woman being fucked by a man?

Man:

Hello? What? Oh, ok, just a minute. It's for you, it's the overseas operator.

John:

Hello?

Anna:

It's Anna.

John:

Oh Anna, hello Anna. How are you? How did you find my number in Los Angeles?

Anna:

It's not important. How are you?

John:

I'm alright. The tape isn't going well. It's the middle of the night here, what time is it in Brussels?

Anna:

I have no idea what time it is, I can't keep track. I can't sleep. I can't do my work anymore. I'm depressed. I want to live a normal life again, you know? I don't know how. I can't eat.

John:

Is there someone there you can talk to? Someone you can see?

Anna:

Yes, but it's not the same as you, you know? I must stay in contact with you. Do you understand? Do you know what I mean? Why don't you answer my letters? Do you think I'm crazy, is that it? Do you not want me to write you anymore? Are you my friend?

John:

Of course I'm your friend. Anna, you sound awful. It's important for you to talk to someone there that you can trust. You must get some sleep, you must eat. Perhaps a doctor could prescribe some Valium for you. You've really got to start taking care of yourself.

Anna:
Why do you sound so nervous, so stilted?

John:
I'm not nervous, I'm concerned about you.

Anna:
I think I can't talk anymore. Goodbye.

John:
I'm sorry, I don't know what that was.

Man:
It's ok, turn the light out and we'll go to sleep.

Anna (voiceover):
All men are such cowards. Why are you so afraid? Why are you a hypocrite? Why don't you answer my letters? You know how painful it is for me to write you. I keep a pail by my desk as I write so I can vomit into it. I will not write you anymore.

John:
I know that I'm beautiful. I know that men desire me. What, after all, is the difference between friends and lovers? To share one's sexuality with a friend is no more than that, an intimate exchange between friends. Are friends not intimate? Is not the attraction between friends a sexual attraction? Does it matter to you whether I'm a man or a woman? I must have intimate knowledge of you.

Sean:
Alright, that's very nice. Now I think we should take a break, relax a bit and clear our heads. I know that working one-on-one like this can be very draining. We'll get back to it in a minute. May I look at this?

John:
Yeah ... So whatever happened to her?

Sean:
Who?

John:
Mora.

Sean:
Ah, well, when her husband and doctor decided to let her listen to records again, there was only one record that she requested to hear.

John:
What was that?

Sean:
Thomas Mann reading in German.

John:
What an amazing choice! Does such a record exist?

Sean:
Oh yes.

John:
Did they get it for her?

Sean:
No.

John:
Why not?

Sean:
Because Mora doesn't understand a word of German.

John:
So what happened to Mora?

Sean:
They put her in an institution. I don't imagine she'll ever get out.

John:
Unless she learns German.

Sean:
Ha, yes, unless she learns German ... Intimate.

John:
I'm sorry?

Sean:
Intimate, the word *intimate*. It occurs three times in this passage that you read. Why don't you try approaching it that way?

John:
Like how?

Sean:
Well, I'd like you to try it again, only this time I want you to imagine that you're sitting at a table, and imagine that I'm you listening and that you're – what's her name?

John:
Anna.

Sean:
Anna, right. No, actually, I'll be Anna and you imagine that you're yourself sitting at the table listening to Anna, and I'll try and show you what I mean, alright?

John:
Ok.

Sean:
“I know that I'm beautiful. I know that men desire me. What, after all, is the difference between friends and lovers? To share one's sexuality with a friend is only that, an intimate exchange between friends. Are friends not intimate? Is not the attraction between friends finally a sexual attraction? Does it matter to you whether I'm a man or a woman? I must have intimate knowledge of you.” You see?

John:
Yeah, yeah.

Sean:
You have to find that point in yourself where it's you who are speaking but you're speaking through Anna, you're *being* Anna. You know, I think it would probably be best if you were to tell me something about Anna: who is she, where did you meet her? Who is Anna?

Anna:

I have immense hate against these men, these male lovers of mine. Men are babies. They want a shoulder to lean on. If I am weak, they vanish. It is better that I not have relationships with men, but you've left me no choice. You know? Men like to make love to strong women, but they just want me to surrender. Men enter me so far that finally there's no room for me anymore. And if that's not enough, they enter my head. So there's no room for my thoughts anymore. Then they buy you a drink.

Anouk:

We women die with a giant vagina. It gets bigger and bigger as the hour of death draws closer and closer. Dying is the most overtly sexual excitement.



Video stills from *Conundrum Clinique*, 1981

CONUNDRUM CLINIQUE

John:

The first thing I do in the morning, sometimes even before I put the coffee on, is put on a cut by Talking Heads. Sometimes it's even a specific one, like "Great Curve." I like to wear as little clothing as possible in the lab. Thinking about outer space all day – it's hard to keep in touch with one's body. It's the feel of that polyester rubbing against my nipples, keeps me in touch with my true gravity ... Sex. I became addicted to makeup after I appeared on the *Today Show* with Jane Pauley.¹ Jesus, I just never knew I could look that good. So, I mean, why not look good in the lab too? I used to tell the salesgirls at the Clinique counter that I was buying it for my wife, but now I just say it's for me. They think I'm from outer space. Little do they know. Mmm ... cream. If I ever get stranded on Jupiter, I want it to be with a cassette of the Talking Heads. When Jane Pauley asked me what my favourite kind of music was – this was the human-interest angle, I guess – I just couldn't say *The Planets*, even though I thought that'd make her and those viewers happy. I mean Jane Pauley's really nice – she's sweet. So when she asked me why I became a nuclear scientist, I said it was because I wasn't born crossed-eyed – thank God. I mean the real reason I became a nuclear scientist was because I didn't become a nurse.

Nancy:

That, of course, is not the truth. He became a nuclear scientist because he was a romantic. Back then, nuclear power contained the dreams of the future. The nuclear scientist was the new witch doctor. He felt his spirits could fly with the rockets into outer space. The unknown, the uncharted was his place. It was perfect for him – the galaxy stretched ever beyond our imaginations. We speak of the imponderable every day.

John:

"Those rings are giving us nightmares." I'm quoting Brad, our photo interpretation chief. He's referring to the rings of Saturn – with the mysterious spokes that form in some regions of the rings as material whirls out from the planet's shadow. The spokes survive for hours at a

1981, 14 minutes, colour; "The tape explores the personal lives of a nuclear scientist and his NASA director (a woman and also his lover). The space scientists have been invested with an aura of invulnerability and superhuman attributes. The tape breaks down these stereotypes by exposing these people as alarmingly manipulative and emotional" (Vtape). John: Colin Campbell; Nancy: Ann McFarland; The Plumber: Alex Wilson. This work originated as a longer, two-channel video commissioned by Tanya Mars and Rina Fraticelli for the performance *Picnic in the Drift*; only a single-channel version is currently available.

1 American television journalist (b. 1950).

time as if they were intentionally setting out to destroy scientific theories about the rings. Perhaps the Voyager 2 flyby in August will unravel a mystery. My dreams are full of volcanoes emitting ice, lakes of liquid nitrogen, fields of blue snow, the braided F-Ring of Saturn.

Nancy:

There are no bargains in space. It's money that explores space, not imagination; it's power that makes it happen, not sentiment. Look, I really like John – sometimes I really loved him. But keeping these guys on budget is a real pain in the ass. Hey, I never was an earth mother – give me a break – I'm not a space mother either.

John:

I think I fell in love with Nancy that day she came up to me and placed her hand on my chest and said –

Nancy:

I really love your ideas, but can we afford them?

John:

In case you missed me on the *Today Show*, I'm the one who invented the miniature power plant that converts the heat from the radioactive decay of plutonium directly into electricity, which in turn powers the *Voyager 1* and *2* spacecraft.

Nancy:

He denied that he was connected to the military; in fact he was a civilian piggy-backing on projects primarily funded for militaristic advantage. He also never believed that he lived dangerously. I told him I felt he took too many chances, that he was too outspoken, too public. I'm sure he was very surprised to find himself murdered.

The Plumber:

I became a plumber. I am Venetian. I know what that means to you: canals and Venetian blinds. You North Americans rule outer space, but I have lain beneath the sky that gave birth to your flight to oblivion. I have fair skin. I have fair hair. I am Venetian.

Nancy:

All I know is that I woke up very thirsty, that I had spilled the juice beside my bed. I don't remember spilling the juice but I remember that John had brought it in to me, and had said something about the

plumber coming to fix my taps. He said he had to leave early – I presumed he had gone back to the lab. It had amused me that John could build these nuclear power plants but not fix a leaky faucet. So I began to crawl on my hands and knees to the kitchen, down the hall from my bedroom. I kept having to stop and place my face against the cool floor tiles so I wouldn't faint. Everything was out of focus and I was experiencing double vision. I had just about reached the kitchen when I heard John call out in pain. As I entered the doorway I could see this large man had John pinned to the kitchen counter, his arms around John's waist and back, holding him from behind. They seemed to be struggling. I staggered to my feet – it was dark, the kitchen light was off. They were illuminated only by the light from the window. I saw this hammer on the floor ... but – I swung at the man attacking John. Just as I did so they both turned, startled by my presence, and the hammer struck John and shattered his temple. He must have died instantly. I don't remember anything else.

John:

And I was about to get up when he pulled out a package of cigarettes and he said, "Would you like a cigarette?" And I said, "No thanks, I'm trying to stop smoking." "Well, just one won't hurt you, why don't you just have one with me?" he said, and he started walking towards me with the cigarette package out. And I said, "No really, I really am trying to stop smoking and one will do it and I don't want one, thanks." And he came right up and stood beside me, and I remember being puzzled by what he was doing and maybe also a bit afraid of him. Because I remember looking up at him, sort of with my mouth open, when he said "But I really like you," and he leaned over and he put his arm around my shoulder sort of like comrades or something, and then he bent over and he kissed me, I mean really kissed me with his tongue in my mouth. And when he stopped that he stood up and said, "Let's go to bed right now. I want to fuck you." I said, "You're crazy, it's impossible and besides you've made a mistake." And he said, "Why?" I said, "Well for one thing, my girlfriend's just down that hallway, right behind that door, so you're crazy." By this time he was fondling my crotch. He said, "Well, we'll just go to the bathroom then, it won't take long 'cause I'm really hot." "You're crazy," I said. What Nancy described as a cry of pain from me was not entirely that. I'm sure she meant to kill us both.



Video stills from *Snip Snip*, 1981

SNIP SNIP

[...]

Jimby:¹

Isn't it amazing the way some artists just don't age?
I do love meeting artists.

Mary:

Jimby?

Jimby:

Yes, Mary?

Mary:

I feel that you've been somewhat ... critical of me in your writing.

Jimby:

Oh no, Mary, not me, oh but I – I have a job, Mary, you can't fault me for that! I'm a journalist, Mary. I work for a major Canadian newspaper, and we have a job to do. And we must weigh and balance the scales of justice. We must speak out for all the causes. And we must try to find the gold in the straw of life. Yes well the artists of today, you know, they take literally the kind of expression that was once called speaking in tongues, and they like to experience it fully. And that's why we have the great religious painting of today: burly splotches, large blobs, and swathes of emotional colour. And that's why artists of course are working in videotape and film because they feel closer to experience that way.

Mary:

Jimby, I had no idea it's that complicated.

Jimby:

Oh it is, it is. I wish you could go down to the AGO with me, and we could look through all of those great German Romanticists. See their

Excerpts; co-directed with Rodney Werden, 1981, 30 minutes, colour; "Mary Brown, the head of Ontario's Censor Board, spends an afternoon with the gals cut, cut, cutting" (Vtape). Mary: Colin Campbell; Jimby: Marien Lewis; Bernice: Berenicci; From the Anti-Foot Fetish League: Suzanne Gillies; From the Humane Society: Marsha Rovam; Gerry: Lisa Steele; Heidi: Rodney Werden.

Editor's note: The irony of presenting heavily edited excerpts of *Snip Snip* is not lost on me. Of all the scripts in this volume, this title includes the most dialogue where multiple people speak over one another. I encourage everyone to seek out and view this tape in its entirety via Vtape.

1 The character of Jimby was inspired by the Toronto art critic John Bentley Mays.

fear, their trembling, their agony, their angst, their revulsion with the human body.

Mary:

The AGO? I thought that was a supermarket!²

Jimby:

No, no, no, no they have a lot of carpet. But they do, they specialize in paintings, and sculpture sometimes. They show videotapes – and film!

Mary:

Film, you say?

Jimby:

Yes, but it's all historical material.

Mary:

But I'm sure we see it.

Jimby:

Yes, of course. You don't? Oh, I'm shocked. You've never seen any material from the AGO?

Mary:

Oh I'm sure we have.

Jimby:

What are they thinking of?! Poor Bill Withrow!³

Mary:

Are you telling me that they're screening without sending it to me first?

Jimby:

And they're screaming too!

² Actually, the Art Gallery of Ontario.

³ Director of the AGO from 1961 to 1991 (1926–2018).

Mary:

Oh, are you the girl from The Spout?⁴ Well just give these to me, dear. Thank you. Goodbye. Heidi, Heidi dear – will you set up the projection booth please?

Heidi:

Ja, Miss Mary.

Mary:

Here's the films.

Jimby:

More screenings?

Mary:

More screenings, and more cutting.

[...]

Jimby:

Mary! Mary! Are these the hands ... that cut?

Mary:

Yes they are, Jimby, the very same hands.

Jimby:

What strength, what bravery, what heroic deeds!

Mary:

It's my duty, Jimby.

Jimby:

Mary, you remind me of the Statue of Liberty.

Mary:

Well, Jimby, I appreciate the analogy.

4 "The Spout" is a reference to The Funnel, which operated in Toronto from 1977 to 1989. See John Porter, "The Funnel Experimental Film Theatre," <http://www.superSporter.ca/FunnelHistory.htm>.

Jimby:
That's a beautiful scarf.

Mary:
Why thank you. But Jimby, about your writing and about your articles about ... censorship.

Jimby:
[Gasps.]

Mary:
I feel you are too – shall we say? – liberal. After all, I'm concerned about the dignity of the artist. You understand?

Jimby:
The artist is very important.

Mary:
But I wish to reflect the dignity of the artist to the public. That's my mandate, my responsibility.

Jimby:
What a brave woman.

Mary:
You can help me.

Jimby:
[Gasps.] Mary!

Mary:
You can help me, Jimby.

Jimby:
Oh, I'd adore to help you.

Mary:
Well perhaps you could begin helping me by ... changing your tune, so to speak.

Jimby:
Yes. I could do that. I could write The Truth.

Mary:

The truth, Jimby, is all I'm concerned about.

Jimby:

What a woman. My, what a woman.

[...]

Suzanne:

I haven't met any of you before. My name is Suzanne, I'm with the Anti-Foot Fetish League ... yes, I know it's disgusting. I don't even want to talk about it, it's quite upsetting.

Marsha:

I'm Marsha. [...] Nice to meet you!

Gerry:

My name is Gerry [...] I have a practice here in town, at the Clarke Institute.⁵ [...] I do sex counselling, work with couples only.

Marsha:

Nobody I know has been recommended to you or anything, but I've just heard your name circled in certain circles.

Bernice:

Bernice. Right to Life.

[...]

Mary:

Well, I see all you girls are getting to know each other. So good to see you on such short notice. But this is important work. Why don't you have some mineral water [...] Suzanne, I'm sorry I caught you in the shower but these things are urgent – morality *knows no time*. [...] Bernice, my dear?

Bernice:

I'll just stick with my milk, thank you.

5 The Clarke Institute of Psychiatry was founded in Toronto in 1966.

Mary:

You've got your milk, ok. Heidi! Heidi! Perhaps we can have the popcorn? [...] Just be relaxed. [...] It's very simple. All you have to do is say: cut. Anything offends you, just say: cut! [...] Then we can talk about it, what is wrong, what is right, and just discuss it, it's very democratic. [...] Really it's what I feel, but I want your support, you understand. [...] By all means express yourselves, express yourselves, speak out, speak out, feel free to say what it is that you wish. [...] You're the community, the community standards. You do represent the community. Have some popcorn. I'll be right with you.

[...]

Mary:

Girls! [...] We're going to roll them now.

Gerry:

Do we have a title on this one, Mary?

Mary:

Yes, this is from Copenhagen. [...] Heidi's hometown, right Heidi? [...] This is called *Lesbian Picnic*.

Suzanne:

Is this necessary?

Bernice:

Oh, I don't like that word.

Mary:

It's been submitted to us.

Marsha:

Who would want to watch that?

Gerry:

I don't take lesbians into my practice ...

[...]

Bernice:

I think for the sake of my unborn child ... I would like to see it burned.

Mary:

Should we burn it?

Suzanne:

Or snip it to death!

Mary:

We'll snip it.

[...]

Mary:

Well, I seem to have cut a little bit of this out. I know –

Marsha:

Well if you cut too much it's no problem, it's when you cut too little that it's a problem.

Mary:

I'll staple it together.

Gerry:

Didn't we have a couple of stapled prints last time, Mary?

Mary:

They never notice.

[...]

Bernice:

I think that should be a cut.

Mary:

Alright, it's a cut.

Bernice:

She could have at least washed her hands.

Mary:
Was it at the point of two fingers in or three?

Suzanne:
I'll start with the two but if there's a disagreement I'm prepared to go for three.

Mary:
Suzanne for two?

Marsha:
Two, I'm with Suzanne.

Mary:
Marsha for two.

Bernice:
[...] Cut the whole thing, I think.

Gerry:
I'm going to abstain on this vote, I think there's a context for the self-pleasure.

Mary:
You think there's a context for three fingers or two?

[...]

Mary:
How do you feel being from the Humane Society about animals being in this kind of –

Marsha:
As I was explaining to the committee –

Gerry:
They're in an observational role.

Marsha:
But that's voyeuristic, isn't it?

Bernice:

I think it was running away, wasn't it?

Gerry:

Well that could be seen as being positive.

Suzanne:

Hopefully it was running away, hopefully it wasn't running closer.

[...]

Bernice:

I always feel so relieved when she cuts through the –

Gerry:

It's a very definite action. I think that's the part that does feel good.

Mary:

Well girls, we've done very well. We've reduced it to five minutes.

[...]

NOTES FOR AN ARTIST'S TALK

Unknown venue/event,
c. 1982–83. Unpublished.

I want to look at some aspects of the work I've done in the past, and try to relate the characters I developed to the social tolerance of the period. Note, I SAY TOLERANCE, not condition. I believe it is tolerance by authorities which allows certain ideas to be held by the artist, it is not a given, the condition of artistic expression or freedom. The characters I will be discussing tonight are all women, most of them played by myself. I am not going to do all the talking tonight ... some of the characters speak well enough by themselves.

Back in 1976, a woman from Malibu impressed herself upon my consciousness in Los Angeles. The series of six tapes were produced over a period of eight months, the original one being based on a newspaper account of just such a woman. The woman from Malibu loves detail. Her hair – excuse me, it's a wig – has seen the bottom of too many peroxide bottles, and her false eyelashes would qualify her as an impaired driver. And, she seems immediately familiar, as an inhabitant of the suburban living nightmare – be it California or Quebec.

Benign as she may appear, she at the same time has some quirks in her character. She is too obsessed with detail, for instance: she counts, memorizes, and recites the number of pieces of vegetables in her salad. She declares herself to be a victim of men: they make obscene phone calls to her, and follow her on the freeway. They attempt to murder her, by shooting her. They even fly space ships. They are all men. They are all anonymous. It seems men represent a source of fear and power over her. She could use a friend from the Women's Liberation Movement (as it was called at the time). Although she has not identified herself with that movement, she is extremely conscious of how she is being mistreated by her society, and by men, whether in fact or in her imagination. The fact that she is played by a man makes some people a little uncomfortable (perhaps in part because she won't be completely ridiculous). A man playing a woman seriously presents difficulties. However, she doesn't push beyond the barrier of social tolerance, although the tapes did press right up against the barrier at the time.

Robin, the Xerox-operator punkette a few years later in *Modern Love* doesn't have to state that she is modern – she assumes everyone knows it. Robin is aware that she must be modern to be acceptable. Although she isn't conscious of Feminism, by some process of osmosis, she is

struggling to free herself of the low esteem she knows the world holds of her. Embodied in Robin is the naïve, the hopeful, the even cherished view that by being good, and by being modern, she will succeed in love and life ... maybe even become involved in that rarefied lifestyle symbolized by Lamonte Del Monte: show business. She is a copy of media sensibility. All original ideas belong to someone else. Her responsibility is to copy.

We know she will never make it. Monte, her lover, drains her of her meagre resources, then discards her. She loses her apartment for love. She loses her job for love. She is not a practical woman living in a practical era. Robin's loss of innocence is predictable. We are left with the uneasy impression that she has not learned anything, except how to adapt. She could use some feminist friends. The appeal to the art community about Robin is that she finds the artistic/New Wave music community so appealing and challenging. We can gloat in smug Canadian superiority. The artists, the critics, the curators like Robin. Then Robin does something unexpected, perhaps unacceptable. She becomes a Bad Girl. The series is written, shot, edited, dubbed, and shown each week in segments at the Cabana Room, a New Wave bar. The Cabana Room is the collector lane of life that Robin mistakes for the fast lane.

She becomes an artist. All it takes is a ponytail, a flanger, a rhythm box, and a chilly blonde from Germany named Heidi. Robin and Heidi become successful artists by forming an electronic band that plays at the Cabana Room. They are overnight sensations. But finally Robin is the loser. It is not so much that success spoils Robin, but that Robin spoils success. She fails because she takes her role seriously. She takes the fun out of success. She doesn't lie. She appears on talk shows. She poses nude for a skin magazine, baring her body for art instead of for the camera. She falls in love with Ms. Susan, instead of falling in love with bisexuality. She must be banished, and her successor is Heidi, who has never adopted her new culture, but merely adapted to and used the culture.

Bad Girls receives an uneven reception. Robin is endearing as the vacuous, empty-headed Xerox operator who misunderstands something so basic as *The Twist*. But the more successfully she copies the New Wave art music scene, the more uncomfortable her audience becomes. How could Robin, being so vacuous, become a success at what was so trendy at the time? The difficulty with *Bad Girls* is that it criticizes. Although I don't classify *Bad Girls* as a highly political work, it did reveal the basically narrow band of tolerance the art community would endure. It

wasn't finally funny. Which brings us almost to the present. The tape I am showing tonight is called *Dangling by Their Mouths*, it was produced eighteen months ago. It is more recognizable as art than as politics. It is sympathetic to Feminism. It is not sympathetic to the white heterosexual male power base. I believe the tape reflects its time.

I would not make the same tape today. The present situation in the Ontario art community, and more specifically, the Toronto art community is paranoid, myopic, and repressive. Community is really a misnomer. The issue of censorship forever has dissolved that illusion of art community. There are those artists who will cooperate with the censor board, and there are those who will not. Unfortunately, more will cooperate with censorship than will not. The reasons video artists in Ontario have given for cooperating with the censor board were enough to curl my hair, or at least stand it on end. I consider it naïve of video artists to be unable or unwilling to relate the bath raids;¹ the harassment of gay and lesbian bars by police, the harassment of *The Body Politic*² by the attorney general, the existence of the censor board, the suspension of funds to art organizations by the city – all in recent months – these events are all about censorship and repression of the freedom of expression. So when it comes to producing work in an environment like Ontario, today, one either has to be very preoccupied with the censor board, in thought if not in action, or one has to ignore the censor board and all the officials, organizations, and individuals – including artists – who cooperate with or support censorship. Otherwise one risks the problem of self-censorship. The solution is to show work at illegal private screenings, and outside the province, and outside the country if necessary.

Dangling by Their Mouths CAN be shown in the province of Ontario – illegally, because I won't submit it to the censor board. But there is little reason to assume that work being produced today will be assured even that questionable viewing situation. So what I have tried to present – very briefly – is some kind of a connection between my work and the times it was produced in. I believe that the essentially pessimistic view of human nature presented in *Dangling by Their Mouths* (for there are no heroines or heroes in this work) is one that foreshadows present circumstances.

1 On February 5, 1981, Toronto police raided four gay bathhouses, arresting hundreds of men. A formidable political movement grew in response to "Operation Soap," making it a defining moment in LGBTQ liberation in Canada.

2 Influential Toronto-based gay liberation magazine (1971–87).

ENTER THE HERO

Enter the Hero

In my case it has generally been the Heroine.

My Heroines may not satisfy the dream-factory standards of theatre and film. *The Woman from Malibu* has obvious flaws.

Her love of detail approaches obsession.

Not only can she recall the details of a salad, she's counted every piece in the salad and committed THAT to memory.

Just in case.

Her hair (oh! ... it's a wig), has seen the bottom of too many peroxide bottles.

Her false eyelashes qualify her as an impaired driver.

She's been far too crafty at getting to all those Kresge makeup counter sales.

Still, she tries.

She has dreams.

She dreams of finding pony skeletons in the Mojave.

We last see her embarking on this search.

Without her water jug.

She's doomed.

She has nightmares.

She was picked up by a U.F.O. (Nightmare? Real?)

Her dreams give her headaches. It's a nightmare.

She tries to actualize her dreams, and she can't articulate her reality.

Wait a minute.

SHE?

The Woman from Malibu is obviously being played by a man.

Check out her MANnerisms.

Oh.

So are these dreams of women?

Men's dreams of women's dreams?

Men dreaming of being women dreaming dreams?

Adopting a persona breaks down order.

You can't be what you are not.

You can be what you are not.

You try to get away with it.

But you leave behind lots of clues.

Heroes. Heroines.

I just borrow them for a while.

Artist's statement
published in *MANNERSm:*
A Theory of Culture
(Vancouver: Vancouver Art
Gallery, 1982), 30.



Video stills from *White Money*, 1983

WHITE MONEY

Speaker 1:

You ever eat roadkill? Well if you're into it, I'll introduce you to a guy I know – Mike. I went camping with him in Florida. You know me, I go to Florida for the sun and, in case of rain, the manicures. Not the nature. Nature's out of control down there, and I think it's contagious, because Mike got it – went right out of control, and I think I had a touch of it myself just being with the guy. Camping – can you imagine? I mean give me Miami or give me death, or give me Arpège, but don't give me camping and Mike and roadkill dinners. See Mike made me dinner one night, and I'm not talking hot dogs. The guy cooked me an alligator. Roadkill. You know the look on a cat's face when it brings home a bird between its teeth. Well Mike had that look the night that he showed it to me. Said it was fresh – looked a little overripe to me. It was in this cooler, just floating around with some ice cubes like Gatorade, headless. It was a baby alligator and baby alligators are fat just like baby people are fat – only a lot greener. But don't ask me if they're cute, because this baby's face had been pancaked by an eighteen-wheeler and was gone, lost from its plump little body. Out on Interstate 207, just outside Tallahassee, where we were, or where I left Mike. But get this: dessert was on me. I put the pedal to the floor and left him a couple of snacks and one Hungry-Man dinner as I passed through Tomorrowland on my way to Miami. Mm – excuse me, do you have any HP Sauce for this? Thank you.

Speaker 2:

I'm going to find her. Was this my final fall from grace? The queasy feeling that rose from my broken arm seemed a parallel to the sick economy. The patient was terminal. The air smells like war. In the '70s, we got bad vibes. In the '80s, we get diseases – moral diseases like herpes and gay cancer. Sex kills. No kinky sex, my doctor warned me. Actually, I thought that was what we were having in my isolation ward. Kinky sex. No phone, no visitors. Everyone who came in wore a gown and a mask. Late at night, after my sleeping pill, the gown and the mask would come in and take off my IV, which I thought was pretty kinky. And then the mask and the gown would fuck me in the ass. I always figured it was the proctologist, so I knew that part was alright.

1983, 8 minutes, colour; "A series of short vignettes which take place against large painted backdrops. There are indications of lesbian S/M activity and explicit gay male sex. The tape includes three monologues, one travel story and a discussion of sexual diseases of the '80s as well as a heterosexual's definition of sexuality (in Spanish)" (Vtape). Speaker 1: Marsha Rován; Speaker 2: Leena Raudvee; Speaker 3: Thomas Reed.

Being fucked in the ass with your IV dripping the cortisone onto the floor ... So what was kinky to this doctor?

Speaker 3:

No hagamos confusiones, señor. No me atraen los hombres, especialmente los blancos. Los blancos, las blanquitas, creen que son tan apetecibles, tan monos. Muchachos blancos son remedos. No tienen mi sensualidad ni mi calor. Sí, supongamos que sí me atraen los hombres, los muchachos. No me atraerían los blancos. Nunca chingaré a un muchacho blanco. Nunca que haré a un muchacho blanco. Nunca que haré a un muchacho blanco que arrearle. Nunca podrán tomarme. Nunca me dará a un muchacho blanco. Ellos son como tumearo blanco, fácilmente gastados.¹

Speaker 2:

I was walking along Pacific Avenue, when this man stopped, and he turned to me, and he said, "It's a terrible tragedy when a dog has long hair."

1 Let's not get it confused, sir. I am not attracted to men, especially not white men. Whites, white boys, believe they are so appetizing, so cute. White guys are a sham. They don't have any of my sensuality or my hotness. Sure, let's say I were attracted to men, to guys. I wouldn't be attracted to white ones. I will never fuck a white guy. I will never do a white guy. I will never do a white guy just to have a crack at him. They will never get me. I will never give myself to a white guy. They are like white money, easily spent.



Video stills from *The Woman Who Went Too Far*, 1984

THE WOMAN WHO WENT TOO FAR

Excerpts; 1984, 10 minutes, colour; "This tape follows the final few months of a woman's life before she is murdered. A female television gossip columnist chronicles the murdered woman's last months and becomes increasingly obsessive as she abandons journalistic ethics in the pursuit of the story. The final scene, a car accident, serves as a metaphoric scenario for the gossip columnist's moral disintegration" (Vtape). V: Carmen Arndt; Marsha: Marsha Rovan; Men: Rodney Werden, George Hawken, John Greyson.

V (on TV):

Hi. C'mon, snuggle up to your TVs. That's better. I have got some news for you. We are in for a whiteout – we're in for it. This is going to be the big one. One winter shudder-land coming up. Nothing to see on the weather map, it's totally white. Just between you and me, I look better in black. So I asked the boys on the set: do it up in black for me. So anyway, tomorrow you can miss work, mess up your sheets, stop paying the bills, 'cause those meteorological boys are guessing at two feet of the stuff. Eh – what do they know? Don't measure it – ignore it, stay inside. Don't let your cat out unless you really hate it. Send your kids to school – they won't be back for days. Don't worry about me, I'm just going to snuggle up by my fire in my mink, read my Cartier catalogue. So 'til later this is V, your weather girl, whether or not, saying 'night.

Marsha (on TV):

More on that later. Ever wonder why that monster pepper grinder was nicknamed the Rubrioso? Well here's two clues. First: Rubrioso was Betty Hutton's fifth husband. And second: come on now, you don't really need the second one, do you? Oh and yes, you know that other station's weather girl? Well, whether or not, she has decided to "not." It seems there'll be no more whiteouts for V. From now on, from what I hear, it'll be carte blanche all over Manhattan. We'll miss you, but no doubt everyone is looking forward to future forecasts.

V (on phone):

Transgression. T. R. A. N. G. R. E. I said "transgression."

Mm-hm? Shit. Mm-hm? Mm-hm? Alright, I'll take that bastard to court.

Marsha (on TV):

...The word on that is "no comment." That ex-weather girl is in the news again. Seems she's in court suing Betsy B.'s hubby for all the warm winters she can get. They call it palimony; I call it risky business. Betsy B. meanwhile has beat it to the west coast to hang out with

her pal Nancy. This is rating a full ten on the social Richter scale. I'm issuing a weather watch on this one. On the fashion scene, meanwhile, it appears Lauren Hutton has thrown out her cap in favour of her natural gap, spawning a trend among models everywhere, cover-to-cover, blacking out the space between their front teeth [points her finger to her two front teeth] somewhat like this.

Man 1 (on phone):

Betsy is very upset, so is Nancy. Very upset.

Marsha (in TV rehearsal):

Bianca was quoted as saying: "Having his baby? Jerry, it's been done before." Listen, how's this sound? [Clears throat.] The baseball season opened early in LA this year, only someone got it all wrong. Instead of using a ball, someone used V's head to bat around. She's lying in the morgue unclaimed. She's the ex-weather girl who embarrassed Betsy B.'s hubby to death - literally - with her palimony suit. Now I wonder, who could be that mad at V?

V:

It was about, hmm, midnight when we finished the scotch. Betsy B. wasn't due until around 3 a.m. When she arrived from LA, I couldn't be there. I had to leave, he had to stay, she had to arrive. So we took downers. 'Bout an hour later, I'm goin' down slow. I leave. I walk. It's dangerous, but that isn't registering. People are asleep and their lights are off. Just like mine. Except for the light in my brain, y'know? Light is coming out of my eyes - like laser beams. Laser eyes. I'm by the water thinking, if she ever finds out about me, I'm dead.

Marsha (on TV):

... Seems everyone who's anyone will be there. Let's mark that event "be there or be square." This next item gets the bad timing award. Seems Betsy B. decided to rise above the sleaze of that stormy weather girl's death by throwing one smashing party. Trouble is, Betsy B. threw it on the exact day that would have been V's thirty-first birthday. Never rains but it pours. Maybe someone should send Besty B. a ticket to the Yankees' opener.

Man 2:

She went too far.

[...]

Marsha:

Wait a minute. Wasn't this the train to Verona? Every time she looked out the window of the train and focused the landscape stopped. But here the ground just keeps shifting beneath her feet. Stop the goddamn car!

Man 3:

He covered the right side of his face, his right eye. His left eye tracked the man's advance across the floor towards him. This is a mistake.

Marsha:

This is ridiculous. Just at the moment when she feels like she's going to fall under the wheels of the car and goddamn die, she remembers that photo of herself at Punta Ala, the one on the balcony with the TV antenna in the background coming out of the top of her head like a deely bopper. She also saw this moment just like that photo of herself at the Bridge of Sighs. All the details and shadows were eliminated by the flash. Erased. She herself had looked apprehensive.

V:

I turn over on my side. I'm in bed, having a nightmare. I turn onto my back, freeing my good ear from the pillow. I hear footsteps in my hallway. It's very dark in here. I think, they will want to kill me, but they'll never find me, 'cause they can't see me, 'cause my laser eyes are closed.

No Voice Over

Colin Campbell

Post-script to a letter written in 1982 to Miranda from Mocha,
New York, 1983

I'm rather embarrassed to say that I finally read the description on the back of that postcard I wrote you about (but just couldn't send), the one with the mummy on the front, remember? Well, it wasn't a mummified PERCIV but rather it was a mummified HAWK. Did you know that the Egyptians did things like that? Actually, I remember seeing a mummified cat in the Louvre last spring. Running out of room. Suffice to say that that whole year of guilt and sense of synchronicity it inspired in me was for naught. The fact I unwittingly bought a postcard with a mummy on it (an MOTHER'S CAFF for God's sake, had nothing to do with ANYTHING! Other than leading me to archeology. Note to think what Dix-Ten's analyst would do with this information. OUT OF ROOM. Still waits from file.

XXXXX Mocha

Los Angeles, 1982

Miranda,

Got the message from Mocha. Is she OK? Shocked to hear about her mother's death. Going to Morocco for the funeral must have been horrendous. Do they have any suspects? Can't believe Mocha is going to give us painting. For Archeology!!!



COLIN CAMPBELL

Published as Colin Campbell, "No Voice Over," in *Video by Artists 2*, ed. Elke Town (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1986), 131-38. Campbell adapted this printed artist project into his canonical video *No Voice Over*, 1986, 26 minutes, colour; "The tape focuses on the close bond between three women artists, and the correspondence that occurs between them via audiotape and videotape as they travel to Italy, Brazil, and Texas. All three have off-screen working relationships with a producer called Dix-Ten. The tape details a series of visions or second-sight experiences that one woman has about another. These events are disturbing and seem to contain some ominous portent, which remains unclear until the end of the tape, when it is revealed that the visions are in fact premonitions of the other woman's death" (Vtape). Miranda: Kerri Kwinter; Marcella: Johanna Householder; Mocha: Janice Williamson; Dix-Ten: Bruce W. Ferguson; Paul: Duncan Keir; Kelly: Leena Raudvee.

Does this mean the end of the journal you two have been editing, or will you keep writing? A long finger is reaching through my brain trying to activate the micro-chips that piece this fast-changing drama together. My program is obviously scrambled. Explain to me why Mocha is going to South America. She hates nature. Even dead nature. Can we stop her?

XOX Dix-Ten

Miranda was in San Gimignano, Italy, finishing a video script for Dix-Ten. Due to her initial surprise that the towers of San Gimignano created a miniature Manhattan skyline, she had decided to stay. San Gimignano only looked like Manhattan from across the valley. Up close, it looked like nothing she had ever seen. Most important, it wasn't New York. She had left New York for many depressing reasons, not the least of which was the third cancellation of the long scheduled screening of her new tape at the MoMA, *They Said It Couldn't Be Said: The Ruby Slippers* with Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz* glowed off the face of the postcard in Miranda's lap. It was from Marcella. It lay beside the one from Mocha.

Dallas, February, 1983

Dearest Miranda,

At Dallas airport. Off to Chicago to edit my new tape (the one I shot in Lubbock). The editing studio is on the North Side, so am a bit nervous. Am really freaked out about Mocha. She's disappeared? Kidnapped? Dropped-out-of-sight? In Santiago? She was supposed to be en route to Miami to be in the new tape Dix-Ten's shooting in L.A. The postcard I received was chewed by a shark along the way and delivered with the Post Office's apologies. What am I missing? Am I fabricating? Phone me at the studio. Forgot. You don't have a phone. Why don't you have a phone? See you in Rome for the premiere of the new tape. Write!

All my love,
Marcella

Rio de Janeiro, March, 1983

Miranda,

Am going a little crazy with the colour here. Glad I don't paint anymore. I don't mind being overwhelmed, but I don't like feeling crazy. I've noticed that archeologists tend to mate with other archeologists. And most female archeologists tend to have barn-door hips. I'm still alone, and I still have my boyish figure. Do you think I'm in the wrong field? (Please, no fun intended). By so tangibly touching the past, I feel I am reaching into myself in a way I could never do with my painting. I need money. I need to get out of here. Guardian Angel Dix-Ten has asked me to work in his new tape. I love working with him. This dig is exhausted. I'm exhausted. Does this mean I will see you? Are you working on the script? Do my cards arrive in the order I write them? Did you ever get my "pyramid dream" card?

Love,
Mocha

New York, 1982

Dusk revealed that a light remained on in the studio across the street. The telephone rang. Miranda picked it up. She noticed a man standing near the window in the studio. She answered absent-mindedly.

"Miranda. Know who this is?"

"No."

The man across the street turned into the light, now backlit.

"Well I know you do know who this is." The voice was high. The tone was



I'm
of the same hotel
Rimbaud shot Ver
(Or vice versa) th
I was when I was
two years ago.



MIRANDA
ALAZA ROMAN
SAN CERNIAMO
ITALY

PAR AVION
PERLUCHTBOU

ce, and thought of mocha in Rio. Ev
thing is deta vu and avent vu. Shower heads are low li
phones, and the towels are the size of facecloths.
the w... tape with the wrong sou



menacing.

"And I know you know all about witches," he snickered.

"What?"

"You know what I mean, Miranda. Black tights and witches."

She hung up.

The man in the studio turned and faced the window. Then he hung up the phone.

Miranda hadn't recognized the voice on the phone.

She lit a cigarette, then packed a bag, and left her apartment for five days.

Sitting in the back seat of the cab, she had this crazy memory of Paul saying to her that there were only five letters between F and L, F standing for Feminist, L standing for Lesbianism, and she was at about K in his estimation.

Lima, not Rio, February, 1983

Miranda.

Rained all day. There was a mist or dense fog so one could only see part way down the street. Very few people out. Some wearing ponchos cut out of lavender or lime-green plastic. Somewhat hallucinatory in appearance. Gazing in the direction of the mountains, I saw the string of pyramids, with majestic steps leading up to them across the plain. Everything is exceedingly green. Miraculously, I can see down into one of the pyramids. On the floor of a sealed room is a figure crouched on hands and knees, facing straight ahead. Somehow, I manage to turn the image around like a hologram until I can see the face. It's your face, Miranda. A strange feeling (premonition). We are still so connected. I'm not sure it was a dream it was in my room looking out the window. Write me. What're you working on? The pyramids on this card aren't the ones in my vision. Adios.

XXX Mocha

It was the combination of the phone call (she decided later that she couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman), Paul's comment (she had already been to "L," a few times), and the MoMA cancellation (MoMA had always seemed to have something to do with "Mom," but Miranda was never sure how she associated the two), that compelled her to leave N.Y.

Besides, there was the offer from Dix-Ten to write dialogue for the script of a new face he planned to shoot in Venice.

Los Angeles, February, 1983

Miranda.

"Tease For Two." Next time let's have more details, perhaps a shadow of the object of desire, an image of revealing detail. Do we know him or was his name just casually left out? Let the Fiat people see the script first. Will they want options on advertising? (Was he being sarcastic?) Let's run this up the solidarity pole and see who strikes. See you in Rome at Marcella's premiere.

XOX Dix-Ten

San Gimignano, March, 1983.

The big rubber house fly Paul had sent her with the note, "Swat whenever you think of me" stared at Miranda from the top of her typewriter.

So this is where night and day begin

He had opened his eyes to see the nighthawks, but they had disappeared. It wasn't a fiction, that division.

The difference between light and dark being too imperceptible a transition.

Where does day end and night begin?

With the nighthawks?

Our time has slipped away. We have slipped into the past.

But as long as you are alive and free, we will have a history.

COLIN CAMPBELL

Anything less and you are a memory.
So let's continue the history
Memory is finite.
History isn't.
"So don't join the African National Congress and get yourself killed."
Would anyone say a thing like that?
Besides, how did men embrace?
Miranda's eye strayed to Marcella's card.

Lubbock, Texas, Jan. 1983

This is really big-sky country. Like it is really hard to see the ground unless you are looking directly at your feet. Talked to a rancher today and all he wanted to tell me about was that he had just discovered that he has homosexual bulls in his herd "Just like those ones in Alberta." (!?) Which should have startled me, I guess, (if certainly had him).

XX M.

Did they think things like that?
Also, this wasn't dialogue. It was voice-over.
Did they go to bed then, or go their separate ways?
Write one-another once every ten years?
Letters weren't dialogue either.
More voice-over.
"More voice-over," Miranda's voice-over said.
"Christ," Miranda said aloud.
Maybe Dix-Ten would fire her.
Miranda stared down at the day's pile of postcards.
Marcella, Mocha, Dix-Ten, Paul.
Mocha a political prisoner? Unlikely.
What did archeology have to do with politics?
Besides, she said she was off to Rio.
But of course, the card was written weeks ago.

San Gimignano, March, 1983

Marcella.

Just called Dix-Ten in L.A. and he says he had postponed the shoot with Mocha in it because of the weather (something to do with El Nino). He said he 'wasn't aware' Mocha had been kidnapped, and if she had been, Mocha probably wasn't aware either. Sarcastic, but I think he was kidding. Thinks Mocha is in Rio. So do I. Where did you hear that rumor? Paul? Dix-Ten has promised to hurl me off the highest tower in San Gimignano if I don't have sixteen pages of tight dialogue ready for him in a week. So far, only have sixteen lines. I climb the tower every morning and look down to inspire myself. Can hardly wait for Rome.

Miranda

Dix-Ten's list of enemies was not as long as he imagined, but the degree of animosity directed at Dix-Ten more than made up for the short list. Miranda had never been able to dislike Dix-Ten, but understood how Dix-Ten could instill a feeling of ineptness in people who were in any way pretentious. Dix-Ten's knowledge of literature, philosophy and art was formidable. But he displaced the weight of that knowledge with an easy going charm that quite belied the intensity of his intellectual curiosity and skills. He had a sense of humour that Miranda often described as goofy, but which could be turned into a weapon of distilled sarcasm. Consequently, she re-read several times every note or letter from him, cringing at the approach of his wit, for fear she was the object of it.

"Oh for God's sake Miranda, don't be so paranoid," she told herself.
"More voice-over," she said aloud.

Los Angeles, April, 1983

Miranda,

I like the way you take a dangling participle, for example, and then exploit its full potency through the patient application of a sensitive adverb. Or, the way in which you cause a verb to achieve full ecstasy of expression by sidling it toward a terribly ing noun.

Dix-Ten

Rio, March, 1982

Miranda,

Remember that card I sent you from Lima (when I was supposed to be in Rio?) about that "vision" of you on your hands and knees in the pyramid? Well, it's a little bizarre, but I "saw" you again. More details, but no idea about what's going on. Saw you again crouched on your hands and knees, staring ahead, but the strange thing is that your eyes are bright red like jewels. And there is this light around your head like a halo. Miranda the Madonna? Odd. The thing is, I didn't dream these images. I saw them. Just out of the blue. No pyramid this time. Couldn't recognize the interior. Told Dix-Ten about it and he could barely conceal his glee at the fact I may prove his theory that archeology has driven me completely bonkers. Adore him. Hear he's sending you to Japan after Rome. He's given up smoking for hot tubs. Oh California! You know how he used to look anxious? Well now he looks wrinkled and anxious. He send a cryptic message to you: "don't ask Japanese men with no tongues for directions." Personally, I think he should go back to smoking. Or maybe into archeology. See you in Rome. Hear Paul's coming too.

XOX Mocha

New York, July, 1983

What a rendezvous in Roma!

Loved watching the Three M's fielding questions from the Italian Press Corps. Mocha, Marcella, Miranda. MMM! MMM! MMM! Truly delicious. Why do Italian men love North American feminists? Is it the challenge? The eyes? I hear even the Pope had a hard-on. Went to see Pina Gauche tonight. (OK so it's Bausch.) Had a heated discussion with a Canadian feminist (did you send her?) about whether it was PC (politically correct) to show so many men's bare bums in one show. Personally, I like men's bare bums, but suggested Pina shout MOW grass rather than PERFORM on it. Have fun in Japan with all the Geisha Girls. (Just kidding.) I bawled on my sushi. Well, on your sushi. I don't have one.

Paul

Brussels, August, 1983

Miranda,

I'm in the same room of the same hotel (where Rimbaud shot Verlaine or vice versa) that I was when I was here 2 years ago. I ate alone (nobody else in the restaurant) in a Spanish place and thought of Mocha in Rio. Everything is déjà vu and avant vu. Shower heads are low like microphones, and the towels are the size of face-cloths. Continue to see the world as a tape with the wrong sound track.

Dix-Ten

Dix-Ten must have been drunk or depressed when he wrote that to Miranda. It would be that when Dix-Ten visited Miranda he would at some point announce that he was going to "confess." The first time he stated this to Miranda, she had left.

COLIN CAMPBELL

momentarily apprehensive, even though he had said it laughingly. In fact, Dix-Ten's "confessions" were often a string of compliments followed by some revelation of human frailty of desire or ambition that only endeared Dix-Ten to her even more. Just at the point where she looked forward to the "confessions," he announced he no longer felt insecure enough to confess. That chapter of his life was closed.

Anchorage, Alaska, August 31, 1983

Miranda put the card in her bag. She already missed her cosy room in San Gimignano. Somehow she couldn't imagine a cosy room in Tokyo. She rang for a cab to the airport.

Miranda was re-reading the Rimbault card from Dix-Ten when the lights went out. Not just her reading light, but the entire 747 had gone dark. A second later, inexplicably, she found herself on her hands and knees in the aisle of the airplane.

As Miranda raised her head, her eyes reflected the red fireball from the second missile as it flashed toward her. Even before the flames reached her, her hair burst into a bright ring of fire round her head.

"Like a halo," said her voice-over.



B. MODE

The photo showed a face that was somehow familiar, but distorted. A woman. Mid-forties. Definitely not anorexic. Overweight. Was it the soggy ponytail? The pancake makeup? The runny mascara? No. It was the eyes. Rolled upwards. And the hands. The gesture. I re-read the headline:

Published in *Impulse* 12,
no. 3: *Cold City Fiction*
(1986), 116–19.

CUSO¹ WORKER CAPSIZES DUGOUT CANOE IN COSTA RICA.

Then I knew.

It was Robin.

She hadn't made a headline since her days at the Cabana Room. A few years back, Big Cheese promoter Ms. Susan booked in Robin and that German blonde, Heidi. Instant Bigtime. Instant Hanky-Panky.

"MS. SUSAN ATTEMPTS SUICIDE"

"ROBIN BARES BEAVER"

"TORRID LOVE-TRIANGLE AT CABANA ROOM"

"MS. SUSAN FIRES ROBIN"

"HEIDI'S WAR MEMORABILIA SEIZED BY CUSTOMS AGENTS"

The press had a field day.

I should introduce myself.

I'm kind of a ghoul, I guess you'd say.

I write a column for an "Art and Literary" magazine.

The column is sort of a "Whatever became of..." type of thing.

Mine's called "Dead Careers."

No shortage of material.

I mean, they're practically lining up at my door.

But you're OK, right?

You're riding high.

You got a few column inches last month, right?

You should see my file on you.

1 Canadian University Service Overseas, an international development organization founded in 1961.

I convince my editor to send me down to Costa Rica to interview this Robin type.

From the Cabana Room to CUSO is quite a comedown. Right? I find Robin on the beach.

Yeah, you guess it. In a cabana.

She'd been hittin' those Dufflet pastries pretty hard.²

I can imagine her in a launch, maybe, but a dugout canoe?

The kid's a real optimist.

I'm not keen about the interview format.

Sort of looks like a ping-pong match in print.

I'll just let Robin tell the story.

I may interject once in a while, but I really don't think you'll confuse the two of us.

It was kind of hard to keep this gal on track. I asked her where she trained for her job in CUSO.

She told me a story.

Kinda reminded me of Georges Bataille³ in one aspect.

Georges Bataille as Tammy Bakker.⁴

Robin was headin' south by Greyhound to check out an expensive clinic for Show Business types that are hooked on booze, drugs and fame. You've seen the interviews on the tube.

"Well it just never occurred to me that 20 downers combined with 3 quarts of scotch were making my mornings so fuzzy."

Sure, Babe.

This clinic is quite the scam. Like, how many people do you know who can triple their income by admitting on the *Tonight Show* that they can't remember the last five years? So anyways, seems like Robin had an "EBM" on the bus just outside Sacramento, California.

"EBM?"

Robin explains;

"Emergency Bowel Moment. I prefer to think of shitting as a 'Moment.'"

² A bakery on Toronto's Queen Street West.

³ French philosopher (1897-1962).

⁴ Tammy Faye Bakker (later Messner), American televangelist (1942-2007).

So Robin leaps off the bus and runs to the can.

Just makes it. “I thought, gee, I wonder if it was those tacos I ate at the Eugene, Oregon bus stop, or those Vitamin-C pills that cute boy sold me in the women’s washroom ... whatever he was doing there! But, that’s America, right?”

So Robin’s on the can, doing her business, and she flushes, but sits there, “Daydreaming of bidets in Paris, France, not Ontario,” enjoying the cool spray of air on her bottom, when the spray suddenly turns wet and she realizes the toilet is overflowing.

As she jumps up, one of her contact lenses pops out.

She races it to the floor.

It was in the midst of her own shit, piss and wads of toilet paper that she saw it.

Scrawled in felt-tip marker on the tiles near the floor was a message: “Rock Hudson Takes It Up The Ass.”⁵

*

So Robin finally makes it to the clinic. And she’s talkin’ to the Head Nurse, who, it turns out, is quite the head herself:

“Well, I guess I was at the right place at the right time.

I mean, the chance to come to this famous clinic as an observer for CUSO just seemed like a dream come true!

Of course, my experiences in Show Business really helped my application. I understand the pressures of being a star ... the ups ... the downs ... the men ... the bisexuality ... *the drugs*... it’s all just really hard. And the Press! The things they say! They’ll say anything! Poor Ms. Susan ... Ms. Susan was hard on me, but the press was much harder on her.

I mean, I phoned up Ms. Susan long-distance in New York to see if she would give me a reference for CUSO, and she said she would be delighted to send me to Africa. Isn’t that sweet? Of course, I told her it was Costa Rica, not Africa, and she said she’d love to send me there too! ‘Anywhere off the continent.’

Those were her very words. So I asked Ms. Susan if she was still in the music business ... she’s the one who made the Cabana Room famous ... like I thought she might be booking acts for Studio 54 or something ...

5 Hudson (1925–1985) was one of the first American celebrities to die of an AIDS-related illness.

but she said she was into making films now. She's so multi-talented. And very avant-garde. She said the films she's shooting now are very minimalistic. Like, the actors don't wear any clothes, and they have hardly any lines. Very arty stuff. She said they were too avant-garde to be shown in Toronto, but maybe I could catch one in Buffalo some weekend.

'But enough about me. What did you say your name was?'

'Nurse.'

'Nurse? Nurse what?'

'Nurse. Goody Nurse. Nurse Goody Nurse.'

'Oh, what a lovely name for a nurse.'"

Seems this Head Honcho, Nurse Goody Nurse was a direct descendant of Rebecca "Goody" Nurse, hanged for witchcraft in Salem in the 1600s. Goody Nurse then clues Robin in:

"Robin, honey, this clinic is a refuge, a haven from the New Salem that is the United States. I'm here to help my sisters. To protect them from the witch hunters, especially from the One-In-Red, who lives in a big white house on the East Coast."

"You mean Nanc⁶...!"

"Hush your mouth, Robin, honey. We don't speak her name here. Yes, the very same.

Never trust a woman who wears that much red.

A woman who wears red occasionally may be out for a bit of fun. But a woman who wears red constantly, well, she's out to punish the woman in red. Know what I mean? She's trying to ruin the FUN of red.

She's diabolical. Red hat, red coat, red dresses ...

Which of course is why paisley has made such a comeback.

Not because anyone likes it.

It's because everyone knows she's too SHORT to wear paisley. You look done in, honey. I'll show you to your room. Besides, I've got to get Liza's room ready for her again."

"Liza M... !!!!"

6 A reference to the then-American first lady, 1980-88, Nancy Reagan (1921-2016).

“I’ll show you to your room. Here’s tomorrow’s schedule. It’s a heavy one.”

THURSDAY AT THE CLINIC:

9:00 A.M. Our Founders Aerobics Class:

Instructor: Our Founder.*

9:05 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.: Teach Elizabeth how to make own bed.

2:00 P.M. – 6:00 P.M.: Teach Mary how to say “SHIT.”

*Wear your paisley bodysuits, girls!

So Robin has a pretty wild night. She can’t figure out whether she’s dreaming, or if her mind is just runnin’ amok. Personally, I think it had something to do with the downers Nurse Goody gave her.

“Ten downers, Nurse Goody Nurse?”

“That’s the prescription. Five for Americans. Ten for Canadians. Don’t worry honey, I’ll have a couple of whiz-bangs to snap you out of it in the morning. Have a good one, honey.”

“Oh, thank you Nurse Goody Nurse.”

Maybe it was the scotch chaser Nursey Nursey gave to wash them down with. It’s a good bet, ’cause in no time, this Robin is really flying. She claims she found herself in the hall looking through the window of this room where there was a hell of a ruckus goin’ on.

“Oh, my God! I think it’s Elizabeth!”

This woman is bawlin’ her eyes out, new Twisted Sister hairdo and all.

“I... I just c-c-c-can’t d-d-do it, Nurse Goo-Goo!”

“Course you can, honey. When we can bounce a Quaalude on that sheet ... it’s all yours. C’mon sugar. Remember, the sheets go on first.”

“Se-Se-Sebastian! Se-Sebastian!”⁷

Next thing Robin knows, she’s back in her bed. And there’s this message in huge letters scrawled in red on her ceiling:

7 A reference to Elizabeth Taylor’s performance as Catherine in the Joseph L. Mankiewicz camp film adaptation of Tennessee Williams’s *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959).

ROCK HUDSON TAKES IT UP THE ASS

Robin ponders the possibilities.

“Well, I guess it could be an enema ... but I mean, everyone takes an enema that way ... oh my God ... to even be thinking about Rock Hudson’s ass ... I’ve just never thought about Rock Hudson’s ass ... well, not in THAT way ... not putting something UP it ... I mean, what do people put up there anyways? I always thought it was ‘one-way traffic.’”

But then this very repressed memory starts to push its way into Robin’s brain, which is rapidly approaching meltdown. Something the German once told her. Heidi.

“... unless ... oh, it can’t be ... I mean I didn’t believe Heidi when she told me those things about how, well ... how she could only have sex if she had an artichoke up her bottom ...”

“No matter how beeg da schlong, vy steel need da arteechoke.”

Her very words.

Rock Hudson puts artichokes up his ass?

But how would the person who wrote that on the washroom wall know that?

Then this really amazing thought hits Robin.

“Did Heidi know Rock Hudson?”

Hey. I’m out of space for this month.

And remember.

Don’t count your pulse.

Count your reviews.

BOTH

Claude Jutra has disappeared.¹

Think of Jutra.

Can you conjure up his face?

Images from his films?

One can find photographs of Jutra.

One can screen his films

But you can't speak with him.

You can't see him.

He has vanished.

Without cash, without credit cards. Without identification.

Foul play? Loss of memory? Willful escape to anonymity?

A mystery.

The artist has disappeared.

Today, when I read the paper, I saw a photograph of a man holding the barrel of a gun in his mouth. His right hand holds the handle, index finger on the trigger. His left hand holds the barrel. His eyes are shifted slightly to the right, avoiding the camera.

His eyebrows are raised.

He said, "It's too late for me."

The caption over the photo of the man is: "US official shoots self." On the column to the left is a story on George Shultz.²

The man in the photo looks like George Shultz.

I think George Shultz has shot himself.

I read the story.

It isn't George Shultz.

It is Pennsylvania Treasurer R. Bud Dwyer.

Facing fifty-five years in prison for accepting a bribe.

He proclaims his innocence, then shoots his brain away.

Instant memory loss.

I'm disappointed it isn't George Shultz.

Published in *Toronto: A Play of History (Jeu d'histoire)* (Toronto: The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, 1987), 58–62.

1 Québécois film director (1930–1986). Diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in the early 1980s, he was reported missing in November 1986. His body was found in the St. Lawrence River in April 1987.

2 George Schultz (1920–2021) was United States Secretary of State, 1982–89.

Looking at the photograph, I realize that there are other photographs that are missing. The ones that show the destruction of the bullet as it impacts through Dwyer's skull.

These photographs exist. They were printed by newspapers in the United States.

Some television stations replayed the event on the news.

When it came to the moment the trigger was pulled, the image was edited off the screen, but the soundtrack continues.

You heard the gun go off. You heard the people gasp and scream.

You imagined the worst.

When the screen goes blank, I imagine George Shultz's skull exploding. Messy, but it doesn't make me feel bad. I have to confess the fact that it is really Dwyer doesn't make me feel bad either.

It leaves a longing in me. The soundtrack is compelling. But I remain unsatisfied.

I long for the narrative to complete itself. I want the images linked to the soundtrack.

The Narrative Completes Itself:

Fade up from black.

We see a group of people some standing, some sitting. Some hold microphones.

Some hold pads and pencils.

There is a television camera. There are photographers.

A man enters. He's very nervous. He gives a rambling speech.

People look skeptical. Cameras click.

The cameras keep clicking. It begins to form a rhythm. The man begins to tap his heels to the rhythm.

A wild flamenco dance begins.

The Media Flamenco Dance Number.

Very sweaty.

Very hot.

Suddenly, the dance stops. The man has pulled out a gun.

"It's too late for me," he cries.

"It's never too late," a woman whispers. This is picked up by several people, until it becomes a joyous chant.

"It's never too late! It's never too late!" A frenzied *Oklahoma!*-style barn dance begins, with everyone doing lots of splits, and women reporters being tossed up in the air by men reporters.

A bass baritone rings out: "Better late than never." The dancers freeze. The lights fade down. A single spot comes up over the man with the gun. The dancers pull out their pads and pencils. The television camera begins to roll. The cameras are poised. The man slowly puts the barrel of the gun into his mouth. Another spot fades up. It reveals a woman in a plastic jumpsuit. She holds a bottle of Windex. She begins to sing. "You made me love you. I didn't want to do it. No I didn't want to do it." The man pulls the trigger of the gun. The back of his head flies apart. Blood, gristle and bone coat the camera lenses. The woman, in a beautiful contralto voice continues to sing "You made me love you," as she sprays the lenses with Windex, then licks them clean with her tongue.

Fade to Black:

I said I was unsatisfied. I am also puzzled. How did I recognize George Shultz's name, and the resemblance of Shultz to Dwyer? When I got up this morning, I went into the bathroom and looked into the mirror. Once again, I couldn't recognize the face. I couldn't put a name to it. I have forgotten who I am. I'm not sure how long this has been going on. I've forgotten that as well. I read in the newspaper three days ago that the police had not been able to turn up any trace of Quebec filmmaker Claude Jutra. I am not Claude Jutra. There was no photograph, so I couldn't compare my face to his, but I have never made a film, nor do I live in Montreal. At least I don't remember ever doing these things. Besides I am a woman. Perhaps a lesbian. I find women incredibly attractive. I have concluded from this that I am a lesbian. I don't know how old I am, of course, but I would estimate early forties on good days. Among my possessions, if indeed they are my possessions ... well, they are here with me, so they are mine for now, are some video tapes. They confuse me. At times there are images of myself as a woman, but I seem to be many different women. Then there are other images of me (I'm certain it's me) where I appear to be a man. I've watched

these tapes many times now, and I am still no closer to understanding who I am.

I have said that I am a woman.

I'm not sure.

My first memory in this new existence of my not being able to remember is of these tapes playing on my television. I woke up watching images of what turned out to be me as a man, and as a woman. I have never heard the soundtracks, so I don't know what I'm saying in these tapes. I don't know how to connect the sound.

I dress and undress in the dark.

I must piss and shit, but I can never remember the experience. It is impossible for me to look at my genitals. I may be afraid to find out that I'm a man. I think that is what I'm afraid of. If I'm really a woman, then that somehow doesn't seem so nerve-wracking. So bad. And if I am a woman, then I want to be a lesbian. Better to stick to women all round I think.

I know it seems that I'm making things difficult for myself. Why not just pull down my underwear and have a look?

But if you were in my situation, would you really want to find out?

At this point I have the choice to live my life as a woman, or a man.

Suppose I decide what I really want to be is a man, then pull down my underwear and find a vagina? Can you imagine the trauma?

Immediate pay cut for one thing.

Imagine it the other way.

I have decided that I am a woman, then pull down my underwear and discover this apparatus that looks like a gun.

Just like George Shultz. Or R. Budd Dwyer.

Could I deal with such a revelation?

I prefer not to find out.

I have said that I think I may be a lesbian.

I'm not sure.

I am attracted to women, and if I am a woman, it may mean I'm a lesbian.

I am also attracted to men. I think this is more than just keeping my options open. That would make me a bisexual lesbian. On the other hand, if I really am a man, it would make me a bisexual gay. One way or another, it would make me the target of affirmative action programs. Do I want this? Does anyone want to be a statistic in a cause?

The obvious thing to do is to go to the police. They might be able to tell me who I am.

I have decided not to do this.

Aside from the fear that I may be on some wanted list for jaywalking in Toronto, I'm really afraid they may tell me that I'm an artist.
 An even darker fear exists. They may tell me I'm a video artist.
 I say this because of the video tapes in my possession.
 I may have made them.
 They may be mine in every sense.
 Which is another reason for not going to the police.
 The police may play the tapes.

The Set: A police station. Lights come up:

A large number of policewomen and policemen are standing around acting like a bunch of goofy guys. They are all wearing aviator glasses with red frames. All their uniforms are too tight. All their pants are too short. The policewomen and policemen are making obscene gestures with their billy clubs, licking them and pretending to stick them up each other's asses. There are lots of shrieks of laughter from the policemen, and guffaws from the policewomen.

The door opens.

A man and a woman walk in. They are wearing sunglasses and corduroy bell bottoms. The man, inordinately big, has on a white polyester shirt with huge collars, open at the neck to reveal a gold chain with symbols of the zodiac hanging from it. The woman, braless, is wearing a pink macramé tank top and pearl earrings.

"Hey, creeps ... out," orders one of the policewomen.

"Uh ... hey babe ... we'z just ..." says the man.

"Youse just what, faggot creep artist?" interrupts the policewoman.

The man and woman burst out laughing as they remove their sunglasses.

All jaws in the room drop simultaneously.

"Sheeeeit."

"It's Vince and Vinnie!"

"Son-of-a-bitch. Youse guys sure did fool us!"

"We'z were sure youse was faggot-dyke-artists."

"Vince and Vinnie? The Resistance fighters!"

"The Six Days of Resistance Fighters ya mean, dick-head,"³ corrects Vinnie.

3 Six Days of Resistance was a series of screenings in protest of the Ontario Censor Board, April 21-27, 1985.

A disco version of “Some Heads Are Gonna Roll” fades in. All the policewomen and policemen start breakdancing. Others do the splits, while policewomen throw policemen up into the air, very à la *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*.

The door opens.

The dancers freeze, some in mid-air.

A video artist walks in.

Fade to Black:

I decided I had to have a name. Two came to mind. “Thing” and “Pinkey.” I decided on “Both.”

Both dreamt that night.

Both had opened a bar.

It was an “arty” bar.

The bar was called “Pinkey-Thing.”

It was very small, and therefore became very exclusive.

The “Pinkey-Thing” held only eight people.

This allowed Pinkey and Thing to run it all by themselves.

It was a bar of illusion.

Once inside, people weren’t sure how big or small it was.

Some claimed it held hundreds; some claimed a mere seventy-five.

This illusion was achieved by a complex system of mirrors, holograms, lasers, slide and video projections, and photo-realistic paintings and sculptures depicting scenes from video tapes.

If a patron mistook illusion for reality, they were politely asked to leave by Pinkey, and Thing would collect the \$100 exit charge.

It was very lucrative.

A director of the National Gallery broke all her fingernails trying to turn off a painting of John Greyson’s *Moscow Does Not Believe in Queers*⁴ depicting the male–male anal intercourse sequence.

Pinkey asked her to leave after the first attempt.

She was fined an extra \$200 for trying again.

A freelance curator was asked to leave after attempting to go down on a plaster sculpture of Robin disrobing for her nude photo session in *Bad Girls* and was fined an extra \$1000 for attempting to force a hologram

4 A 1986 videotape about Greyson’s experience “representing a gay organization at the Moscow Youth Festival in August 1985, while addressing the problems of linking sexual politics to a critique of Soviet socialism” (Vtape).

of Heidi (Rodney Werden) to give him head, from the tape of the same name.

He landed on the street screaming, “Frigid bitches.”

A representative from the Ontario Film and Video Review Board was evicted for putting censor bars over the genitals of a drawing of Vera Frenkel’s copulating fleas,⁵ along with a pair of uptown collectors who attempted a four-way with a slide of Kim Tomczak and Lisa Steele’s *In the Dark*.⁶

Pinkey and Thing had gambled that the patrons’ ignorance of video images would make them a mint.

They were right.

Three months later they closed “Pinkey-Thing,” and bought a condo at Harbourfront.

They opened a video gallery, expecting boffo business.

Both woke up.

The television was on.

Both lit a cigarette and looked at the screen.

Both was on the screen looking back at Both.

Waiting.

Both said, “So create your own fiction. You can be anything you want.”

Both answered. “There is no fiction.”

Both reached for the knob on the television set and depressed it.

Both disappeared.

5 This refers to Frenkel’s *The Business of Frightened Desires; Or the Making of a Pornographer* (1987): “This videotape traces the collusive relation between government censorship, pornography and tourism, and the devices by which the contemporary world teaches people how to comply with its requirements” (Vtape).

6 *In the Dark* (1983) is a video performance combining a screening of footage of Steele and Tomczak making love with their live presence in the auditorium in order to discuss questions of sexual representation with the audience.



Video still from *Black and Light*, 1987

BLACK AND LIGHT

Stan:

It was my birthday. I was forty. I called Moira from Rio. I told her I had twenty-four rolls of film, a sunburn, and Samba fever. She said I sounded tense. Which made me tense. I said I wasn't. She said she wasn't either. I didn't believe her. She didn't believe me. I said I would see her in a week. She said she could hardly wait. Me too, I said. Turns out, I could have.

[...]

Stan:

No, no. My primary relationship right now is with my camera.

Roberta:

Which is another thing, Stan, that I've been meaning to talk to you about – I'll have to save it for another time. I mean, spending your life looking at the world with one eye closed frame by frame has got to cause severe personality distortion! Stan, I can't imagine you out there in the wilderness by yourself listening to the loons at night with your camera as consolation.

Stan:

Well, I'm not going to be listening to the loons, I'm going to be listening to the Talking Heads. And I'm not going to be alone – Timothy's coming.

Roberta:

[Snorts.] What's he going to be doing in the woods?

[...]

Timothy:

That series of photos you shot in South America, can you replace them with anything?

Stan:

Well, it wasn't a theme show as such, I mean all my photos are all linked regardless of location. It's just that I wanted a lot more new

Excerpts; 1987, 53 minutes, colour; "The two central characters are breaking up. Moira flees to Paris; Stan up north with gay writer friend, Timothy. Moira returns and joins Stan and Timothy up north to sort things out. Roberta, Stan's old friend, also arrives. The next twenty-four hours reveal the assortment of tensions, expectations, humour, and discontents of four people experiencing the difficult transition to middle age. The four characters return to Toronto to resume their separate lives" (Vtape). Moira: Johanna Householder; Stan: George Hawken; Roberta: Tanya Mars; Timothy: John Greyson; Barry: Barry Nichols; Heterosexual woman: Rhonda Abrams.

work. I've never shown in Paris, so it'll all be new to them, I guess. It's just a drag that I lost the ones from the Baño Delicioso in Santiago, and the ones of the guys in the transvestite quarter in Rio. There's just no substitutes for those.

Timothy:

Yeah, well, I don't think you're going to find many drag queens or leather boys up here. I just hope you don't think it was a waste of time your coming up here. I just thought you needed a change of scene, some company, nature and all that. Besides, my motives weren't entirely altruistic, I knew I'd have a captive audience to read my new drafts to.

Stan:

Well, I'm a sucker for captivity, you know that. How many chapters are you aiming for today?

Timothy:

Well, I've just reached the tricky part. Drishna, the seventy-year-old Lefty-slash-masseuse-slash-vegetarian –

Stan:

Any relative of Tisha, the seventy-year-old Lefty-slash-masseuse-slash-vegetarian from our lodge?

Timothy:

You're a real Miss Marple, aren't you? Anyway, Drishna has just found out that Ontario Hydro¹ is using Agent Orange to defoliate the brush around their towers, so she's stayed up all night making this vegetarian bomb – no plastic explosives for Drishna – she's arrived at her first target when, to her dismay, she discovers this woman sunbathing nude at the base of the tower. All the leaves are dead, it's perfect.

Stan:

Good thinking.

Timothy:

Exactly. So Drishna crawls forward on her stomach to get a better look at the woman –

1 The former government-owned provincial electricity utility.

Stan:

Well that's a little hard on a seventy-year-old tummy, isn't it?

Timothy:

Drish is in full combat uniform – camouflage, boots, the whole bit. So when she gets close enough to see the woman's face, that's when she gets her second shock.

Stan:

A neighbour?

Timothy:

No, it's Mila Mulroney!²

Stan:

I'm shocked. Does Mila shave her crotch?

Timothy:

Drish doesn't notice. Her dilemma is: does she blow up the tower and Mila – two birds with one stone sort of thing – does she move onto another site leaving the Agent Orange to defoliate Mila's crotch, or does she snap a few pictures for *Vegetarian Vigilantes*, the publication she and her boyfriend publish on the secret press behind the false wall in the vitamin pantry ... the possibilities are endless!

[...]

Barry:

You're Stan, right? I'm Barry.

Stan:

Yeah, I know, we've never been introduced before.

Barry:

Great pants – New York, right?

Stan:

Uh, no, Rio, actually.

2 Born 1953, wife of Brian Mulroney (b. 1939), prime minister of Canada 1984–93.

Barry:

Rio? Wow! How was it?

Heterosexual woman:

Excuse me. Well, you're both gay, aren't you? It's just that, I saw you both, and well, you're both so good-looking and well-dressed, it's like, and then I saw you see each other, and it's like you have some kind of antenna or something, you know? Like, gay men just know, know what I mean? Like it's just so easy for gay people because they just know, and they can talk so easily. I mean don't get me wrong, my brother's gay, and I still love him, it's just that we heterosexuals have such a hard time. I mean, like we are really repressed. I can't tell you how hard it is to start a conversation with another heterosexual, I mean, like it's heterosexuals that are oppressed. It's just so unfair, like you guys are all organized: gay pride, gay rights, parades, softball teams, forums, gay studies, I mean, what about hetero pride or hetero studies? I mean, I can't talk to anyone, if I talk to a guy he thinks I'm a tramp, if I talk to a woman she thinks I'm a dyke. Do you know what I mean?

IT'S A LONG TIME TO HOLD YOUR BREATH

“Artist-Run Television” or Low Power Equals No Power

Published in *Fuse* 10, no. 4
(1986–87), 31.

Somehow, we all knew it would come to this. Start your *own* television station. It's fun. It's subversive. Not to mention it will cost you all your time, your income and your art to make it happen. Mostly, it's boring. But, it's a “window,” one of the charming buzzwords used by The Boy from Telefilm.¹ Personally, I prefer to walk through doors. What were all the panels about? Money. The video artists were anxious to find out how they could get some money. The people on the panels who had the money were really anxious to keep it. Oh, you might get some of it if you played by all their improbable rules (like climbing through windows). But mostly, it's the old game. We have it. You try to figure out how to get it.

Broadcast television is hardly the only game in town. Sure, there's lots of money there. And money is bought and sold. Just like art. For television and video art to mesh, there's got to be a lot of compromise on both the artist's and broadcast television's positions. It's a buyer's market right now. TV has the money, and artists have the art. On the evening of the second panel, someone from CBC² interviewed me on the topic of “is television stifling video art production?” Well, hardly. I mean, before they can stifle us, they have to be aware we exist. Once they are aware we exist, they have to be concerned. Once they are concerned, they have to get motivated. It's a long time to hold your breath.

I promised the editors of *Fuse* some fashion notes in this article. The audience reaction to the first two panels focused on the hair. A great deal of hair was seen standing on end. Hair loss was common. People pulled their hair out. Some wanted to pull other people's hair out.

1 A federally owned corporation created in 1967 that finances and promotes Canadian films.

2 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, national public radio/TV broadcaster founded in 1936.

There were several documented cases of people's hair simply falling out (mine included).

The Artists and Television Symposium panels concluded on a decidedly inconclusive note. The order of the panels in retrospect, seems to have been rather prophetic.

“Broadcast Programming” or Don't Hold Your Breath

Everyone did hold their breath, but the arrogance displayed by the CBC front men resulted in a verbal battle that left everyone, well, breathless. Part of the problem appeared to be that the CBC didn't know who they were talking to, therefore didn't know who to send. This implies of course that there is someone at the CBC who could talk on the subject. An overly optimistic notion. They haven't even thought of it.

Part of the outrage expressed by the art audience was no doubt fostered by the history of cutbacks by the Conservative government. The cutbacks imposed upon the arts community and the CBC occurred simultaneously; therefore they seemed linked.³ Artists protested against the cutbacks to the CBC at the same time as they reacted against the cutbacks to art funding agencies. The arts community was puzzled by the absence of the CBC at the myriad of protests organized across the country. Obviously, the link between the CBC and arts community cutbacks was a mirage. Video artists and the CBC are about as closely related as thistles and Venus flytraps. This was dramatically demonstrated during the night of the first panel. Everyone went home with their dismembered expectations, consoled only by the faint glimmer of hope offered by the second panel.

³ A reference to budget cuts imposed by Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government on the CBC and the Canada Council for the Arts.

**“Funding Perspectives”
or
No News Is Bad News**

It took a remarkably long time to discover that there are, in fact, no funding perspectives by Telefilm and the OFDC.⁴ We already knew about the funding perspectives of the Ontario Arts Council. Who said no news is good news? The boys from the OFDC and Telefilm kept their chill. Secure in their knowledge that their positions (and funding) were unassailable, they alternated back and forth between undisguised glee: “Yes, I’m a bureaucrat,” and mock concern, “Oh *do* keep hammering away at us, we may eventually notice you.” A sterling example of white male privilege. Well, what next? You got it.

4 Ontario Film Development Corporation, established by the provincial government in 1986.

ART SPEAKS IN THE '80S

Published in
Parallelogramme 14, no. 1
(1988), 14–17.

Scenario #1

Establishing Shot:

ANNPAC Headquarters, the Penthouse Suite, the SkyDome Stadium, Toronto.¹

56,000 fans in the stadium below are cheering the premiere of an artist's videotape on the giant video scoreboard. Venus Fly Trap has just completed a performance piece where the retractable dome, swathed in pink latex, has closed like a giant vulva, chopping off the head of The Free Trade Blimp in the shape of a penis trying to insert itself into the dome.

The Editorial Board of *Parallelogramme* is locked in a debate over the cover story of the next issue. Will it be: 1) The purchase of the National Gallery by SAW² or 2) Should *Parallelogramme* bail out McLean Hunter³ yet again?

Scenario #2

Ten years of Bill C-54 has landed most artists in the cooler, resulting in a dearth of material for exhibition.⁴ The new National Galley is now an orchid greenhouse, while the Vancouver Art Gallery thrives as a late-nite fried tofu joint.

The bunker headquarters of ANNPAC, location undisclosed, is the last office in Canada where smoking is permitted. The chain of “art speak”

1 Association of National Non-Profit Artists Centres. The SkyDome, now the Rogers Centre, is a stadium in downtown Toronto that opened in 1989.

2 An artist-run centre established in Ottawa in 1973.

3 Canadian publishing and communications company founded in 1887 and acquired by a competitor in 1994.

4 Introduced in the House of Commons in May 1987, Bill C-54 would have amended the Criminal Code to include legal definitions of pornography and erotica.

(underground, uncensored art spaces) is feeling the heat from the combined efforts of the Smoke and Art Vice Squads. Will the last bastion of freedom of artistic expression fall to the lowly smoke detector?

*

The artist-run movement's history of assuming the burden of what the commercial and public galleries never risk – providing a forum for new artists – has proven to be a great asset. In their formative years, artist-run centres (ARCs) were viewed by some as artist holding tanks for the commercial art market. Once artists had “proven” themselves in the ARCs, some were siphoned off by commercial galleries (usually the new ones trying to establish themselves), and eventually their work might end up in a retrospective at the Glenbow,⁵ the National Gallery or the like, across the country.

In the '80s however, ARCs have consolidated as a force to be reckoned with. Many artists, not just emerging ones, choose to remain within the artist-run system for various, frequently political, reasons. Personally, I have chosen to remain in the artist-run system because I believe it is the MAIN art venue in Canada, and that commercial galleries and public institutions are on the periphery of any art movement. It is within ARCs that all the major shifts in art discourse have first been given recognition, through both exhibitions and lecture series. Since their inception, ARCs have provided the only continuous venue for time-based artists and have had a tradition of opening up new ways of exhibiting new forms of art. It's no wonder that established artists choose to remain in the artist-run system that both nurtured their early work, and accommodates shifts in later material, without fear of loss of artistic identity; for example, the painter who decides to do a performance, and the photographer who decides to do an installation.

Shedding the Farm Team Image

As major league players, the aims and objectives of ARCs are many and varied. However, for simplicity's sake, I have separated them into two distinct groups: There are SPARCs (Speakeasy Artist-Run Centres) and the NARCs (Neutral Artist-Run Centres).

5 An art and history museum in Calgary.

The NARCs tend to show tidy art exhibitions, sometimes with catalogue, hopefully with a review in the newspaper, all geared to further the cultural life of its community. Nothing wrong with this, just nothing very provocative. Although they may appear neutral, they're not entirely neutered.

The SPARCs, on the other hand, are very politicized. They show lots of time-based arts (film, video, performance, poetry, theatre, music), frequently with the painting exhibitions providing the backdrop to solo evening events. SPARCs provide the venue for work by artists involved in social activism, be it labour, feminism, civil rights, or sexual difference. Thus, "Black History Month" becomes the focus of all activities at SPARCs, while NARCs, public and commercial galleries continue on with the tried and true WASP art market strategies.

The SPARC's frequently untidy exhibition agenda, the multiplicity of its programming and diversity of audience, guarantee a healthy response to any kind of crisis. An organization with many vested interests by very diverse groups can't be neutralized by any one faction. The other factions simply won't stand for it, especially if the SPARC provides the only outlet for their particular area of concern.

Despite the diversity of mandates, solidarity does exist among ARCs, as revealed in the coalition on censorship, the Six Days of Resistance⁶ which took place in Ontario. SPARCs and NARCs united to form a province-wide network of censor-free screenings of film and video. As a result, the major institutions and arts organizations have all taken a public anti-censorship position. Should Bill C-54 pass, I am certain we will see a similar form of nationwide resistance.

The Next Big Ten

The past decade and a half has revealed a shifting of identity within the artist-run movement. From the more radical to the vaguely conservative, ARCs are now assertive and confident of their position in the Canadian art landscape. Ironically, a public institution recently tried to do a show about ARCs (*From Sea to Shining Sea* at The Power Plant,

⁶ Six Days of Resistance is a still-active coalition of artists, artist-run centres and art organizations formed to combat the Ontario Film and Video Review Board [note from original version].

Toronto).⁷ If anything, what the show pointed out was how impossible it is to contain or classify the most vital component of the Canadian art scene. How are ARCs going to maintain and expand upon this vitality? First of all, they must continue to attract young artists.

Accessibility

My first exhibition of video in Toronto was at A Space⁸ in the early '70s. I remember how nervous I was when I approached the A Space staff about having a show. Even though I knew the people who were running it, I still suffered from major heart palpitations.

Artists want to feel that ARCs are accessible. However, there is a perception by some younger artists that they are merely another “in-group” established to thwart the outsider’s budding career. ARCs must remain aware of how formidable it is for someone to approach them the first time with their work. Younger artists may be naïve, or have unrealistic expectations of how an ARC functions. Being judged as inadequate by one’s peers can be more devastating than being judged by someone outside one’s milieu. In response to feedback about the access of ARCs, Mercer Union⁹ developed an excellent programme a couple of years back, where they invited college and university art departments to bring their classes down for an orientation on ARCs. Mercer Union staff would explain how ARCs were run, who worked in them, their membership system, how one applied for a show, and the criteria that determined exhibition programming. The programme helped to demystify ARCs for the students, while building a potential pool of young artists to feed into the system, as exhibitors and members.

I conducted an informal and highly unscientific survey with my classes at the University of Toronto and the Ontario College of Art. 95% were aware of ARCs and 73% of the (painting) students said they would approach an ARC, before a commercial gallery, for their first exhibition.

7 Curated by AA Bronson of General Idea and Art Metropole, this landmark exhibition ran from June 16 to August 19, 1987 at The Power Plant, which had opened that May on Toronto’s harbourfront.

8 An artist-run centre established in Toronto in 1971.

9 An artist-run centre established in Toronto in 1979.

If these young artists approach ARCs for shows, and the ARCs respond, it would seem that ARCs are going to be forced to continue to fulfill their early mandate of showing younger artists' work, as well as showing older artists who will continue to access these spaces.

Guerilla Tactics

Personally, I would like ARCs to keep their "Art Speak" image honed. They should maintain a somewhat irascible face to the public eye. The unexpected and the unpolished should be able to occur in these venues. Fringe sensibilities, divergent politics and radical aesthetics should continue to be the cornerstone of ARCs. The establishment press will, at times, be exasperated by the diversity of material presented and viewers may at times be overwhelmed by the number of events and exhibitions afforded them, but the artist-run movement's resistance to being pigeon-holed is a measure of its success.

Now if this were a just and honourable world, the first scenario I described at the beginning of this article would come into being. Sad to say, Scenario #2 seems more likely. As freedom of expression is seriously threatened across Canada through the introduction of censor boards and the horrific implications of Bill C-54, the ARCs (in British Columbia and Ontario), already in open defiance of the law in terms of film and video screenings, could seem destined for "art speakeasy" status.

ARCs must maintain their ability to respond quickly to the needs of the community, be it a crisis or a celebration. Bill 7, protecting gays and lesbians against discrimination in the workplace, was passed during the week of a long-scheduled video presentation at A Space on the history of the lesbian and gay movement.¹⁰ Consequently, the exhibition and lecture took on an admirably celebratory timeliness. One of the expectations of the membership of an ARC is that it provide a forum and a space where ideas and concerns can be expressed. Due to the number and frequency of events staged in these spaces, they provide a social-cultural network that helps to keep various communities in touch with one another in a very tangible way.

10 1986 legislation that extended the protection of the Ontario Human Rights Code to gays and lesbians.

The Comfort Factor

The Art Gallery of Ontario really isn't a place where I want to hang out. I usually take my classes there, but I seldom go alone or with a friend. The AGO feels more like a museum than a gallery and provides no possibility for socializing. You feel like a moving target as you traverse the vast carpeted spaces trying to avoid the ire of the security guards. Similarly, the commercial galleries with their polished hardwood or concrete floors offer no chairs or couches to encourage lounging by the foot-weary. Give me the beat-up couch by the bulletin board at A Space any day.

The Controversy Factor

Public and commercial galleries have notoriously bad reputations as sources of gossip or scandal. In other words, they generate practically none. Almost totally worthless! ARCs, on the other hand, are hotbeds of speculative social philandering. Whereas commercial galleries consider a social-sexual-psychodrama a liability (there are those sales to consider), such things at ARCs are considered an asset. Tongues wag. Fingers wag. Camps are demarcated. Burn out, melt down, flared tempers, dampened spirits ... these are the active ingredients of artist-run society. No one's reputation can ever be ruined ... we all think we know each other too well. There are no fortunes to be lost, no patrons to shock or offend.

The Prognosis

All culture is in a state of siege due to cutbacks, freezes and free trade sellouts. The future looks perilous. The '80s have proven to be relentless in their conservatism and ARCs have responded to this with exhibitions and forums such as *Visual Evidence* in BC,¹¹ and *Issues of Censorship* circulated by A Space in Ontario.¹² At the same time, some ARCs are in danger of parroting commercial and public institutions as the pressure to meet funding criteria creates a bureaucratic structure

11 Curated by Sara Diamond and Karen Knights at Video Inn; Pitt International Galleries; Women in Focus; Heritage Hall; and Western Front in Vancouver in 1987.

12 See the catalogue *Issues of Censorship*, eds. Jude Johnston and Joyce Mason (Toronto: A Space, 1985).

that smothers the free-wheeling nature that has been the stamp of success for so many. Certainly, fewer artist-run centres have artists running them ... There is no question that ARCs have a future, but it is unbelievable that they – the major art structure in Canada – are so seriously underfunded, underpublicized and unsung!

ARCs depend a great deal on the volunteer labour and brain power of artists. Let's hope that in the economic pressure cooker that makes it so difficult for individual artists to survive, and thus donate time, we will continue to find the energy and the means to shape that future.



Video still from *Fiddle Faddle*, 1988

FIDDLE FADDLE

Excerpts; 1988, 27 minutes, colour; "A cash-strapped woman video artist is commissioned to write a review of a colloquium on sex and semiotics for a 'serious' art magazine [*Provoke: A Canadian Literary Journal of Social and Political Postmodern Theory*]. Laugh along as this learned gathering and its cultural critique take a tumble" (Vtape). Rosa Cosa: Janice Hladki; Inez Pincer-Hooper: Johanna Householder; Theorist: Colin Campbell; Pointsetta (cat's voice): Marg Moores; Potty: b.h. Yael.

Pointsetta:

My name is Pointsetta, I'm a theorist. So's my roommate, Rosa Cosa. Boy theory's been going on for five thousand years. Girl theory? Hmm, about twenty. Cat theory? No one can count that high. Remember the saying, "It's raining cats and dogs?" Uh-uh, it's reigning men.

Rosa Cosa:

Oh, fiddle faddle. *Recodings*?¹ I thought it said "Recordings." I'll never find the soundtrack for my tape at this rate. [Singing] I'm going to take those yams and shove them up my granny's ass.² Now who wrote that anyways, Pointsetta?

Pointsetta:

Patti Smith? Patti Labelle? Patti Califia?³ It's beyond me. [Cough.] I feel a hairball coming on.

[...]

Inez Pincer-Hooper (voiceover):

Rosa darling: We can't possibly print those production stills from your new tape *Object Love*. Dear, they're simply too explicit. Putting spike heels on the feet of your pink couch and tying it up like that is just all a big no-no these days, dear. Treating objects like women and all that. Besides, your couch doesn't look a day over ten years old, which probably qualifies it as a kiddie-couch or something. Could we crop them just a bit? Have you got anything tamer? Back to the darkroom, old thing. Oh, I've enclosed a pass to the Semiotics of Erotics colloquium this weekend. Could you cover it for us? A little article on eroticism sounds perfect for you.

1 Key 1985 text of postmodern theory by American art historian Hal Foster.

2 Refers to American artist Karen Finley's 1986 performance *Yams Up My Grannie's Ass*.

3 Pat (now Patrick) Califia (b. 1954), American writer about queer sexuality, whose debut was *Sapphistry: The Book of Lesbian Sexuality* (1980).

Rosa Cosa:

Semiotics of Erotics? Well at least the title rhymes, which is the only connection I can make at this point. Oh poop-de-doop. I'll do it – I need the money.

[Title: DAY ONE, Semiotics of Eroticism, Emmanuel Hall, University of Toronto]

Theorist:

Of course, one thing about the sexual organs is that they smell, so we feel disgust, but to feel pleasure in the midst of this disgust is a transgression. This makes sex seem dangerous, and the pleasure all the more transgressive. Now why, I'd like to ask this question, could the sexual organs not have been positioned somewhere nice?

Pointsetta (voiceover):

Like in Tahiti?

Rosa Cosa:

Somewhere nice? Like penises on elbows?

Potty:

Or vagina ears?

Rosa Cosa:

Ha, I've had enough – let me know where the mispositioned anus should be. Bye, everyone!

[...]

[Title: Six Months Later]

Rosa Cosa:

Ok Pointsetta, let's get on with this article. "Semi-antics: The Case History of the Dry and the Limp." The bride looked beautiful but bewildered. One of the few interventions – fuck-ups – that occurred during the three-day gag – oops – gabfest was when a wedding party mistook Emmanuel Hall, site of the colloquium on the semiotics of erotics, for the wedding chapel. It's unclear what led the wedding party down this particular garden path, but it is speculated that the honorary president of the colloquium was responsible. Apparently he mistook the bride, dressed in a daring off-the-shoulder white taffeta full-length

gown with black crepe bows, for a groupie of the present speaker Kaja Silverman.⁴ Of course this disrupted Kaja's talk on male masochism and subjectivity, but no matter, because it gave the audience time to speculate on Kaja's striking taffeta gown with a very taut and naughty is-it-flesh-or-is-it-net-or-is-it-masochism bodice.

[Scrolling text:

Felix Guattari, "Spiked hair, spiked heels & spiked drinks – points of plurality"

Jean Baudrillard, "Similac and the simulacrum: The infant choice"

Michel Foucault, "Brown-outs and the [loss] of power"

Gilles Deleuze, "The Veiled Gaze: Beekeepers' hats: The intersection of bees and sexism"

Guy Hocquenghem, "Stuffing envelopes: Mail-art and male parts"

Jean-François Lyotard, "French malaise and mayonnaise: Morning aggression"

Sylvère Lotringer, "Darkness and the loss of self"

Felix Guattari, "The absence of absence before 1902"

Jean Baudrillard, "Infant Defecation: The Avocado Conundrum"

Gilles Deleuze, "Boy-Tech: Angst, Longing and Hysteria"

Jacques Lacan, "T-shirts: Signs, signals and sigh[s]"

Georges Bataille, "Cuisine and cruising: The scrambled ego"

Guy Hocquenghem, "Pleasure and plungers: The 'tuffy toilet' syndrome"]⁵

[...]

Inez:

Rosa, darling, you look fabulous. I love your miniskirt. You're so fun.

Rosa Cosa:

Well, girls just want to have fun.

Inez:

I read that somewhere – some article or something. Oh, never mind.

What are we having [to drink]?

4 Celebrated American art historian and critical theorist (b. 1947).

5 All canonical figures in so-called "French theory" and its popularization in North America. In case it is unclear, the article titles are fictional.

Rosa Cosa:
The Freeze Frames are fun.

Inez:
Super. A Freeze Frame, dear. Now, let's see the article ... "Semi-antics"?
Are you quite sure?

Rosa Cosa:
Couldn't be more.

Inez:
Rosa, you can't say those things.

Rosa Cosa:
Cosa. Rosa Cosa. Can't say what things?

Inez:
Becosa - *because*. The bride's gown, Kaja Silverman's gown. My journal does not publish fashion columns and I find your attitude entirely irreverent.

Rosa Cosa:
Thank you, you got my point.

Inez:
The point, Cosa, is that you are being a very bad girl. We cannot consider this for publication.

[...]



Film stills from *Skin*, 1990

SKIN

Ann:

The skin is an organ. It sheathes that treacherous entity called “the body.” The cunning, the subversion of the body is relentless. The body’s voracious appetite for sustenance reveals it as the bully, the brute, the biological Nazi.

Brenda:

I live in rural Kentucky. And when I was giving birth to my third child, I had a cardiac arrest, I had a stroke, I went blind for a while, and I had to have massive blood transfusions, which is how I contracted AIDS.

Ann:

Skin is the map of the body’s psyche, its strengths and weaknesses. Skin is the alarm system, the cop, the betrayer of the body, the betraying bully.

Hedde:

My boyfriend had tested positive to HIV antibodies several months ago. He didn’t tell me. We decided to have a child. I miscarried. I didn’t recover the way I should have. I had been reading about AIDS. My symptoms were the same.

Ann:

Sex is 90% in the mind and takes place on 100% of the body. Skin is the mirror. You look pale, you’re flushed, you’re blushing, you’re feverish, you look tired, you’re sweating, you’re cold.

Hedde:

I was diagnosed as having AIDS.

Lucille:

You know the trick about travelling for shopping: you put these two small bags inside this one big suitcase, and then you have three bags for carrying home your loot.

1990, 15 minutes, colour, 16mm film (distributed on video); “*Skin* is not a documentary, but an evocative and moving dramatization of women coming to terms with the pandemic that is AIDS. The metaphoric voice of the skin provides a counterpoint as four women talk about how AIDS has disrupted their lives. Brenda and Hedde courageously address the isolation and stigma of their personal lives when they go public as People Living with AIDS (PLWAs). Ann and Lucille confront (through each other), the complex social, cultural, and medical agendas surrounding women and AIDS. In *Skin*, women speak powerfully and urgently of their experience with AIDS, their voices breaking through the silence of neglect created by the media” (Vtape). Ann, *Skin*: Alison Sealy-Smith; Brenda: Johanna Householder; Hedde: Kim Renders; Lucille: Clare Coulter; with Lorraine Segato.

Ann:

Addict to pleasure, from the ecstasy of self-flagellation to the joy of masturbation, the skin hoards pleasure to the point of self-destruction.

Lucille:

We'd spent all our money a day early, and we were at the airport lined up waiting to check in. Every time we moved forward, this frail, old Mexican nun helped us move our bags. We just couldn't stop her. I was so moved by her humility. Why, just one of those diamond rings sparkling on my sister's fingers would have set that nun up for life. "Why," I asked myself, "was she doing this?"

Ann:

Skin is the territory upon which the pleasure of one's sexuality is enacted. Skin is the informer, the loud-mouth gossip. Skin is the signifier of health, the surface of beauty and desire.

Lorraine Segato:

[Singing] You must remember this, a kiss is just a kiss, a sigh is just a sigh ...
I don't know. How about: *You must remember this, a kiss was just a kiss, a sigh was just a sigh ...*

Ann:

Careful now. A treacherous allegiance has been formed. The body and the skin are conspiring in silence.

Brenda:

It has been my observation that women are on the bottom rung of some ladder. When I told people I had AIDS, I realized: I'd just been demoted. My doctor wouldn't treat me. My dentist wouldn't treat me. I was asked to take my children out of school even though they don't have AIDS. And me and my family were asked not to attend church. Medicine, science, education, and apparently even God, didn't want to have anything to do with me. Before I got AIDS, I worked in the women's movement for the Equal Rights Amendment. Now I work with women living with AIDS. But none of my friends from the women's movement came forward to help me when I went public with the fact that I had AIDS. The first help and support I got were from gay men. Well it was hard being in a group of PWAs trying to talk about my vaginal infections when half of the group had never seen a vagina, and the other half were thinking, "yuck!"

Lorraine Segato:

[Singing] Two, three, four. Boys' club. Women are not welcome to the boys' club. Boys' club. No matter how you cut it, it's a boys' club.

Ann:

I'm Black, I'm feminist, and I'm a lesbian. It's the lesbian part that's giving me the most trouble with the AIDS epidemic. My gay brothers have included me in the fight, and I've been fighting for a decade. But I am uncomfortable with the blurring of agendas.

Lucille:

Actually, I'd been saving my money for a facelift. I thought, "Could my facelift money be better spent?" I adopted these three Black children with AIDS who had been abandoned by their mothers at birth. So I took Jamie to the Stockholm AIDS conference instead – ain't he a hunk? Jamie is only six months old and he probably won't see his first birthday. If he dies, he will do so surrounded by love. I'm trying to speak to you for those children whose voices can't be heard.

Ann:

You left something out.

Lucille:

I beg your pardon?

Ann:

We both know the media loves you and your cause, Lucille.

Lucille:

Yes.

Ann:

We also know the media loves sensation and promotes hysteria. I wouldn't say that all Black women are perfect mums. I'd say we're average mums.

Lucille:

Yes, I would agree with that.

Ann:

Of course it's hard to be an average mum if your husband is an IV drug user, or swings both ways, or is too macho to wear a condom. AIDS is

the biggest killer of urban, poor women between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-five, most of them Black or Hispanic. By the time those women find someone to look after their kids, scrape together the cab fare to the hospital and fill out all the forms, they are already half-dead! You didn't say that.

Lucille:

I'm only allotted so much time to speak, I can't say everything.

Ann:

Those women are running out of time. We have all the time in the world, Lucille, to say whatever we want.

Ann as TV Host:

Welcome to *The Face of AIDS: Television's Response*. Our objective is entertainment. Our critics say we're sensationalist; we say we're simply sensational. Our program tonight takes the form of a game show. It's called "Name That Disease." Two of our panelists are dying from –

Brenda:

Living with.

Ann as TV Host:

I stand corrected, Brenda. *Living with AIDS*. We'll have a quiz at the end to see if you can guess who they are. Ready panelists? Symptoms: fatigue, weakness, weight loss, low-grade fever, night sweats. Disease?

Lucille:

AIDS.

Ann as TV Host:

Tuberculosis. Symptoms: depression, sleep disturbances, fatigue, headaches, sweating, and large lymph nodes. Disease?

Brenda:

AIDS.

Ann as TV Host:

Chronic Bang's disease. Could have fooled me! Symptoms: lymph nodes are affected one to ten years after infection; lesions on the skin are solitary, asymmetric, painless, and indurated. Disease?

Hedde:

I'm going to say AIDS, and you're going to say –

Ann as TV Host:

Wrong! Tertiary syphilis.

Skin:

Every moon is atrocious and every sun is bitter. Rimbaud said that. It describes my circumstance. My healthy glow is a source of surprise, not pleasure. Devious subterfuge, dubious signals, treacherous desire. I am the ultimate ambush, the new Siren of the twentieth century. Now genderless and every gender at the same time. I am the bait, the hook, the candy-coated elixir to eternity. I am waiting ... for you to let down your guard, your bad judgement. To forget the rules, to ignore the rules, to not know the rules. For a coupling of vanity. A lie. An intense seduction. A depressed fuck. Blind lust. Blind faith. Blind love.

Brenda:

As national president of the Coalition of People with AIDS, I know that to some I'm a heroine. Well, I'm not the one I would have chosen. Truthfully, it's an effort to speak to you because physically I'm real tired. I have to preserve my strength for these speaking engagements. And frankly I'd rather be at home with my husband and my kids, 'cause we don't know how much time we have left. So why am I talking to you? Well, to put it simply: there are a lot of other women who are tireder than me. That's it, really. They're just tireder than me.

Hedde:

The seed left in me has spawned an unexpected life. I spoke my name and I spoke my disease, and the touch of passion deserted me. I hold back both my past and my future. Each autumn advances with the chill of finality. Now I experience only the technician's distant touch on my skin. My skin has a memory. My skin stored what I once took for granted. My skin remembers the brush of lips, the tenderness of an embrace, the heat of desire. My pain is the pain of my skin's memory.

NOISE

Published in *Colin Campbell: Media Works 1972-1990*, ed. Bruce W. Ferguson (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1991), 4-7.

I came home and found an anonymous invitation on my message machine.

It said:

“The Treachery of Gender. A lecture. You’ll be sorry if you miss it.”

The date and time (next evening), the location (within walking distance), were given. I didn’t recognize the voice, not even, I’ll confess, the gender.

I called Lori. “Too reductive a title, I’d skip it. Have you taken out insurance on your flight to Winnipeg?”

I called Glenn. “Totally seductive. I’d come with you, but I’m in the middle of a score, and I can’t find the paprika.”

“Paprika?”

“I’m cooking and composing. Say ‘hi’ to my mom if you see her at your opening in Winnipeg.”

I live alone, don’t have pets, and I don’t talk to my plants. I have internal dialogues. None of these have been recorded.

This summer I painted my living room red, my office green, I laid AstroTurf (which I sometimes vacuum) on my balcony, and I watched my scarlet runners succumb to aphids around mid-June. I successfully didn’t try to stop smoking. It had been such a low-key summer in Toronto, that a lecture escalated to event proportions. I decided to attend. About twenty of us had reached the same conclusion. We didn’t recognize each other. The plush upholstered seats reclined. We sat spaced apart. The lights dimmed. A figure approached the lectern on the large stage. Appropriately, I concluded, s/he was androgynous.

THE PERSON said:

“I have never discovered a dead body. Not a dead woman. Not a dead man.”

I recalled that when I was about twelve I had this recurring nightmare that I had killed and buried a schoolmate in the ash pile behind the public school I attended in small-town Manitoba. I experienced profound anxiety that I would be apprehended. Days went by. No body was found.

A 100 foot by 80 foot film projection appeared on the screen in front of the stage, nearly obliterating the speaker. The image was the face of a young man. A tear welled up, and began to roll down his cheek from his left eye. Music, Mahler, I guessed, filled the theatre.

THE PERSON

“I’ve never been certain which would be the more traumatic. The discovery of a woman, or the discovery of man.”

The tear on the man’s cheek reached the edge of his jaw, and fell. The music faded as the spent tear plummeted through space, then landed on a smooth surface. The sound was at first muted, then became a loud splashing noise as tear after tear fell. They turned into glistening sprays, then silent concentric circles.

THE PERSON

“If the body was a woman, I would hope she wasn’t a feminist. If the body was a man, I would hope he wasn’t a person of colour. If the body was a man of colour, I would hope he died of natural causes. If the body was a woman, I would hope she wasn’t a friend. If the body was a man, I would hope he wasn’t my lover. If the body was a man, I would hope he wasn’t my son.”

Such things do happen, I thought. In the aftermath of the Montreal massacre of fourteen young women, a policeman, responding to the disaster, discovered the body of his own daughter. I’ve never discovered a dead person either, I thought. But recently, I’ve watched a few people die. Not only on TV, or the movies or on the stage. They died in the hospital, where you’re supposed to. My father was in his eighties, but had no intention of keeping his appointment with death. He was stubborn. He struggled. Eventually he lost. So did Ross. He was in his twenties, and a student of music. He died of AIDS. Both my father and Ross fought death with tremendous dignity but finally, death wreaks a sordid mayhem on the body and the spirit. It’s pretty hard to aestheticize.

An image of a wooden match being struck filled the screen. It was lowered to the pool of tears, which ignited, filling the entire screen in strange blue flames.

Sitting with Ross, watching him hallucinate on morphine the final days and hours, I found myself thinking of my parents. I remembered them trying to articulate their almost wordless dismay at having lost so many young friends in World War II. I grew up worried about being young and shot in a war. I've reached middle age to watch my friends die in a different war – AIDS.

As they die, I lose our stories, our remembrances and our history.

THE PERSON

“At different times I have idealized each gender, only to be betrayed by both. I elevated one form of sexual preference, only to be seduced by all. I don't play favourites anymore. I battle normalcy. I'm no longer trapped by gender in my mind. I view myself as equal. The treachery of gender is in the eye of the beholder.”

The music and the film faded, and the lights came up. End of lecture.

The air was cold as I stepped into the street. I found myself selfishly longing for the greenhouse effect to descend on downtown Toronto. Preferably right over my apartment. No such luck.

When a survey of your work occurs, you are forced to cast back in time. It is not at all like looking through a diary. Rather, it's like discovering messages to yourself. Some of the messages seem urgent. Some are funny. Some are indecipherable. Others are curiously incomplete. The intervals between my completed works grow longer, in part because of the increasingly complex technology, and the growing costs of production. This does not, however, entirely explain the silences between the outbursts of a tape or film. At this period of my life, I measure time with an increasing gravity. I'm old enough to ponder with a kind of awe, people who are much older than I, those who are productive, optimistic, the breakers of silence. Witnessing death makes us silent. Some of the characters in my tapes have met death through disease, violence, accidents, or a lack of will to live.

Death is no longer merely a fictional device for me. Death is gathering around me like a cloak that is increasingly difficult to shake off. I

question my right to speak in the voice of others. I want my voice to be equal, not “other,” to be part of a community, not of the individual. It’s taking me more time to achieve this. The urgency is offset by the need to hit the mark.

We are rarely given the chance to speak. At best, we can only try not allowing silence to fall around what matters. By breaking the silence around issues of gender, sexuality, prejudice, love, and politics, you enter the noisy discourse of life. You risk being drowned out. Hopefully, someone is listening.

I came home and stared at the half-completed script on my computer. The screen stared balefully back. My message light was flashing. I listened to the sole message. It was from the same person who had invited me to the lecture:

“Death makes us silent, and SILENCE EQUALS DEATH. Time to make some noise, Colin.”

ARTIST TALK AT THE POWER PLANT

The Power Plant
Contemporary Art Gallery,
Toronto, December 10, 1991,
in conjunction with the
exhibition *Colin Campbell:
Media Works 1972-1990*.
Unpublished.

I think I'd better be straightforward with you, uh, right off the top. And, uh, tell you that the talk that I wrote for this afternoon a few weeks ago had disappeared when I went to look for it at nine o'clock this morning. As some of you will know, my pal for life Lynne Fernie¹ and I have moved into our old new house two weeks ago. Forty-eight hours later we gave up our rights as free citizens of this country, and allowed the renovators to come in and start tearing down the walls. People assure us that things are going well and all we can assure ourselves is that things are still going on. Among other things, the recession has produced creative options for employment. Our house, for instance, is being renovated by two airline pilots. It's true. We're not sure when they're done whether one will walk in or have to prepare for a landing. In any case I tried to keep my talk visible on paper as I was packing my belongings into box after mislabelled box. I could only conclude the talk is buried in some box under plastic with about two inches of one-hundred-year-old plaster dust. The huge box labelled "*Batman*," for instance, contained among other things the video version of the movie Glenn Schellenberg, who is the composer for much of my work, had given me last Christmas. It didn't contain the talk. Nor was it in the box vaguely labelled "correspondence," which contained the postcard from a friend who had asked me if I was ever going to return to heterosexual themes professionally and heterosexual practices personally. To which I'd replied: I like to keep my options open. And had already passed through my "bi now, gay later" phase. To which she replied on the aforementioned postcard, that if I was planning on being a born-again heterosexual – which I'm not – that I'd better stop hanging out with all those lesbians. Lynne Fernie made me a honorary lesbian some years ago, and it's an honour I accepted with appropriate gravity and would be very loath to relinquish. Besides, I'm not really a lesbian trapped in the body of an ex-heterosexual, ex-bisexual gay-man-who-performs-as-heterosexual-women-in-some-tapes. I can't hold that concept in my

¹ Lynne Fernie (b. 1946) is a Canadian filmmaker and Campbell's roommate at the time. The many friends whom Campbell invokes here are primarily fellow Toronto artists, some of whom collaborated with him; many names will be familiar as cast and crew in Campbell's tapes.

brain. Also missing was the audiotape of “I Cover the Waterfront” that I’d planned to play as intro mood music to this talk, which wasn’t in the box labelled “audiotapes.” I found the jacket but inside it was the Laurie Anderson tape I’d been listening to when I, uh, burst into tears after coming back from visiting Ross Fletcher, who was a student of mine who was dying of AIDS last year. I’d already unpacked my favourite drawing, one of a multitude of elegant images that represent love, sex, grief, and loss that we’re all experiencing in the war with AIDS, by Stephen Andrews. So I knew it wasn’t there. I thought, perhaps, I’d packed it under the suede pot holder Johanna Householder had given me last Christmas, which is still in mint condition because I’m afraid to use it. Or perhaps it was in the volumes of handwritten pages describing beavers building dams and birds feeding at feeders sent to me by Tanya Mars from Shelburne, Nova Scotia. No such luck. I phoned Marg and Almerinda to see if they’d found it in the Murphy bed I sold Marg when I left Beaver Hall. But they were too busy to talk because Almerinda was setting a world record for assembling a Murphy bed without diagrams or any Allen wrenches. I was getting desperate, and about to phone John Greyson in Tokyo, to see if he had accidentally picked it up as he was rushing out the door, along with my Bic lighter, which he snitched. When the telephone rang ...

Robin was on the other end of the line. I’d lost touch with Robin, and Robin – who is rarely in touch with herself – had lost touch with me. Robin is suing me. She’s also suing Allan MacKay, Rick Rhodes, and The Power Plant.² She was very cheerful and optimistic, and felt it would be a great way to renew acquaintances – in court. Robin is suing all of us for breach of copyright, for using her image as the signature photograph for my retrospective. After she finished her apprenticeship at the Betty Ford Clinic, she decided to stay in the United States as an illegal alien. She headed for Buffalo and is doing very well as a supplier for a cigarette smuggling ring, doing boffo business to Canadians. She’s also working part-time for the US Immigration Service, tracing illegal aliens. Rather than turn them in – and they’re mostly Canadians – she links them up with Ms. Susan, who is running the Mojave Desert by Night bus tours. They tour the desert by night in a black bus on side roads camping at oases when they can find one. The big appeal of this, of course, is that everyone can spend a week without thinking about Brian Mulroney. Robin’s also

2 MacKay and Rhodes were director and curator, respectively, at The Power Plant at the time.

going to night school, which brings us to the lawsuit. Robin's studying law at night school. She said that since she was breaking so many laws herself, she thought it best to clue herself in should she ever need the help. She likes to keep up on the arts and was stunned to see herself in a recent issue of *C Magazine* captioned, "Robin makes it to the National Gallery." She claims she's never been there. She decided to make her lawsuit the class project for the term, and she hopes that everyone will cooperate since she needs an A and has to have it all wrapped up by early December, in time for grades. Robin says that if this suit is successful, she's going to go on and sue the Toronto-Dominion Bank for refusing her a \$300 loan to buy a rowboat for quick trips across Lake Ontario from Buffalo. I cautioned her about taking on such a powerful conservative institution, but she maintains they're all creeps, and any self-respecting artist should take all their money out, and if possible try to instigate a run on the TD Bank. Robin said if she wins her \$12 million lawsuit against the TD Bank, she's going to give most of it to AIDS causes. But save some and take out a few full-page ads in newspapers telling the straight media to stop turning down the volume every time the topic of AIDS comes up, except in the case of Magic Johnson, where every sports writer in the country seemed to discover HIV for the first time in their lives and got real concerned, at least for a Black basketball star. She's also saving a few bucks to send June Rowlands³ to a race relations course, but she couldn't find her address because apparently she doesn't even live in Toronto. I told Robin I thought all her ideas were great, except for the one about suing me, and could she possibly reconsider. She was very sympathetic but she said it was too late in the term to change her topic, and if she won, then I could sell my house and that she'd ship me up a few cartons of contraband cigarettes. She said it was her moral duty as a feminist performance artist and showbiz gal to only sue men, and regretted my luck of the draw at being male – but the patriarchy has to fall. She said justice is blind, except when you're a woman or not white, and to talk to her lawyer. Then she hung up. That was half an hour ago. I looked at my watch and I realized it was time to call a cab and get down to The Power Plant – so here I am.

3 Rowlands (1924–2017) was mayor of Toronto from 1991 to 1994.

MARSDEN AND ALTY

HARTLEY

I was fifty-eight. He was thirty-one.
World-weary, in retreat from the
decadence of Berlin, I came to Blue
Rocks, Nova Scotia. Alty met me. I
was to stay with his family.

ALTY

I speak from the dead. This exultant
man kindled my heart, though the
fishes have long since nibbled it away.
I put a flower in my hair and went
to meet his bus.

HARTLEY

With extreme gentleness, this two-
hundred-and-ten-pound man relieves
me of my luggage, and with a graceful
solemnity, embraces me.

ALTY

I embrace a blur of sighs.

HARTLEY

The flower in his hair blurs, then
comes into focus as he steps back.

ALTY

You're a painter, I hear. I'm a fisherman.
I can't swim. Better to sink quickly beneath
the waves. With no shore in sight, why
extend the terror of death? Could you
paint that terror?

HARTLEY

I hope I never have to. Tell me, why
is this place called Blue Rocks?

ALTY

At twilight, as now, the rocks

1991; published in
Homogenius 2, (Toronto:
Homogenius Collective,
1992), unpaginated. The
scenario is based upon
documents from the period
of time the American
artist Marsden Hartley
(1877–1943) spent at Blue
Rocks, Nova Scotia, with the
Mason family. Marsden fell
in love with their son, Alty.

appear blue. Would you like to see them?

HARTLEY:

Alty takes me to the harbour.
But they aren't blue, I protest.

ALTY

They're a modest blue. This isn't Berlin.

HARTLEY

Alty stood there, hands clasped, staring at the rocks, the sea, and the sky beyond. Something fell from me as I watched him. I felt a need to discard, to shed, to rest. Alty turned to me, his expression grave.

ALTY

I cupped Hartley's face in my hands. Gently, for his weathered face was fragile, and I wondered if our lives would be long enough to say what we had to say to one another.

HARTLEY

We became lovers. His family, with whom we lived, accepted this improbable perfection. As you know, I painted the last supper. My last supper with Alty. Alty is seated at the table with stars painted above his head. I painted the flower in his hair. Alty has been dead for two years. His boat sank in a storm. He drowned. The storm thundered ashore, and I raced to the harbour, and paced the blue rocks all night, my eyes never off the sea. But Alty never swam to shore. Four months later, I left Blue Rocks forever.

ALTY

I had my first swimming lesson that night. I figured you'd be waiting, Hartley. The boat went down, and I watched my brother sink

beneath the waves without a struggle. You
smart bastard, I thought, seared by his descent
to his icy grave. Which way is the goddamned
shore? These waves must be forty footers!
Left arm right arm left arm right arm.
Christ I'm cold. Hartley! I'm so tired!
Wait for me. Hartley! Jesus, here comes
a big one!

Marsden Hartley died in New York City in 1943.

IN MEMORY OF STUART MARSHALL

Unpublished. Campbell
refers to Lisa Steele, Kim
Tomczak, and John Greyson.

Toronto, June 20, 1993

Last night the four of us, Lisa, Kim, John, and myself, opened a file on my computer called Stuart Marshall.

And into this file we poured four hearts beating in unison.

A kind of medical wonder.

The doctor was skeptical. When he lowered the stethoscope he remarked,

“I’ve never heard such a strong syncopated beat.”

“But it’s really very faint,” we replied, “Because one of us is missing.”

Save.

We watched the screen as our words dropped onto the page gradually staining it to all four edges. Wondrous words. All of them were Stuart’s words. His very own because he was unique.

Save.

We ran out of time. We couldn’t believe it. There was no more time and we wanted so much more.

Save.

We wanted to save Stuart collectively and individually. Save him and store him up. We’ll keep this file open.

Save.

CARAVAGGIO DIARY

I feel Bacchus's gaze. Impatient for my attention. His beauty for hire.

c. 1993–94. Unpublished
excerpt.



I contemplate desire.

I contemplate lunch.

I contemplate the brevity of any moment.

I discovered the most exquisite light reflected off
the oiled buttock of an eighteen-year-old go-go boy.
I crave that light.
I'm here to dance, not talk.
Talking comes after knowing.
And knowing comes after dancing.
I look at the floor
when I dance.
I never look at you.

I visited you in your garden.
It was sunny.
The gate was blocked by a wall of water
from the sprinkler.
I stood on one side, you on the other.
We couldn't see one another.
We conversed.
You were dying.
The water separated us like a confessional,
though we had nothing to confess.
Anger and frustration had long since been eroded to a
silent reluctance about your impending death.
You stepped back and took my picture.
This is the only photograph in existence of me in sunlight.
I'm on the other side of the wall of water.
This is how you saw me.
You're on the other side now.

THE LIZARD'S BITE

One

Excerpts; 1994. Unpublished novel. Dedication: for Stuart Marshall and Alex Wilson.

By mid-afternoon the sun gave up its attempt at penetrating the gloom in the old quarters of Genoa. The ancient tenements sucked out what little light there was from the polluted air darkening streets and turning alleys into threatening tunnels, the ceilings of which were concave with clotheslines' soggy weight. Ramos grew bored listening to his father and grandfather's discussion about their failing second-hand bookstore and wandered the worn carpets of the oppressive room to the foyer.

"Ramos?" called his father.

"Yes, father?" Ramos remained standing at the door, the pale blue eyes studying his father set in a symmetrical face framed by golden curls. At twelve he was nonchalantly aware of his flagrant beauty.

"Don't wander off, your grandfather and I will be done soon."

Ramos's father's heart ached at the sight of his son. Ramos at five had learned to read, but displayed no interest in the physical beauty of the books he voraciously consumed. Texts were sources of information to Ramos, nothing else. He wanted to be an actor not a bookseller.

"I thought I'd go up to the attic and look through some of those old boxes for a while," said Ramos, knowing his father would never give up on the dream of his son taking over the family business.

His father's face softened with hope.

"Ah yes, well look out for rats now!"

"There's no rats there!"

"How would you know? You haven't been up there for years. We really should take an inventory ..."

Ramos closed the door on their conversation and climbed the three narrow flights of stone stairs to the attic. He pushed the creaking door open and surveyed the gloomy room with its bare plaster walls bracing shelves of boxed books piled up to the low ceiling. Ramos picked his way across the floor around additional mounds of loose books and dusty crates piled high with more books until he reached the shuttered casement windows. He pulled the shutters open, waved away the dust then pulled up a bolt releasing one side of the window and swung it open to the street. The light from the street barely probed the dark room. Ramos sat on the ledge and looked back down to the garbage mashed into the stone streets, the odour of decay thickly pungent in the air. He didn't feel like reading. He wanted silence, solitude. He preferred his own company.

At first the sound was almost imperceptible. He strained his ears, the hair on the back of his neck slowly rising at a slithering sound on the boxes to his left. Expecting a rat, Ramos cautiously turned, squinting into the dark maw of the attic. His heart quickened as the sound intensified. He soundlessly slipped off the ledge and began to move silently toward the door, aware that whatever creature was making the noise stood between he and his escape. He paused and picked up a heavy volume from the top of a crate. Holding the weapon above his head he crept silently toward the now constant scraping and clawing sounds. The passage between the crates of books barely allowed the width of his spare frame. The source of the noise was now very close. Ramos crouched at the corner of an immense pile of books. Slowly his eyes adjusted to the light. He saw the animal. Not a rat. A lizard. It was clawing at a small leather-bound book that looked rather like a diary, obviously very old, worn, almost falling apart. The leather cover was pulled back. The lizard would flick a page with a claw then crawl onto the page as if examining it. Did lizards eat glue? wondered Ramos. Relieved it wasn't a rat, Ramos watched the lizard, totally intrigued. It leapt lightly off the page this time facing Ramos. As it inserted its claw between the pages it caught sight of Ramos's rapt gaze. It froze. They stared at one another for a moment, then the lizard scrambled up the pile of books beside it and disappeared over the top. Fascinated, Ramos walked over and retrieved the book. Too dark to read. He hesitated then picked his way back to the window, opening the book as he reached the fading light. He carefully opened the cover to the front page. It was indeed a diary. Bold yet childish handwriting announced itself:

“This diary is the property of Michelangelo Merisi from Caravaggio.

The year of 1594.
My beginning.”

Ramos carefully turned the page to the first entry.

“Milan
6 April 1584

I have just been apprenticed to the painter Simone Peterzano. Tomorrow I start with my first lesson: the grinding of colours. Peterzano’s paintings seem as dour to me as the man himself. Still, it’s my chance to learn the fundamentals. Peterzano has already mentioned frescoes. I loathe frescoes. I shall do my best to avoid the task. He thinks a boy of twelve is a blank canvas with no form, content or ideas. I’ll show him!”

“Ramos! We’re leaving. Ramos?”

“Yes father, I’ll be right there!” Ramos stared at the diary. His curiosity was piqued, not only by the fact that the diary was written by someone his own age from the sixteenth century but also by the precocious attitude of the young writer. The name meant nothing to him. He flipped through the diary quickly, occasionally pausing to look at a drawing or sketch of figures, mostly nudes. He noted the last entry was made in July of 1610. He hurriedly scanned the final entry which suggested a frail hand had pushed the pen across the yellowed pages. The text spoke of sickness and languished unsigned. An idea began to stir in his mind, but he dreaded his father’s curiosity. He sighed and concealed the diary under some books in a crate near the window. He would find some excuse to visit his grandfather and retrieve the diary at that point.

“Ramos!”

“Coming father!”

He closed the window and shutters and rushed to the door. The lizard, unseen, watched Ramos disappear as he closed the door behind him.

Ida Brady felt a chill of anxiety when her son Billy didn’t turn up for lunch. She didn’t want to over-react. Not like a year ago when Billy

hadn't returned from school during a snowstorm. She'd called the RCMP, who'd organized a search party from town. Three hours later they'd found Billy asleep in his room. She hadn't thought to look there.

"Only eleven years old. Not the kid's fault," had been the consensus.

It was her fault was what they meant.

"Hysterical easterner," they said behind her back. They could never have understood her fear of the vast prairie sky which year by year weighted her spirit. She pushed open the screened back porch door. The hot dry wind hit her face. She looked up at the cloudless sky white with heat. She stepped out onto the steps and jumped when the wind violently slammed the door behind her.

"Billy?"

She squinted into the sun toward the barn. She bit her lip, and began to walk toward the gaping black hole of the open barn door. When she reached it she hesitated, then stepped into the gloom. She stood for a moment, her eyes slowly adjusting to the darkness.

"Billy?"

Her voice was swallowed by the silence. The wind whined outside the barn. She let out a small cry and instinctively ducked when she noticed the dark object circle above her head. But it just stayed there, slowly turning. Ida couldn't understand what her Sunday dress was doing hanging there. It slowly revolved until she recognized the form in the dress as her son, his lifeless eyes sweeping blindly across her face as the rope around his neck began the next revolution.

"Billy!"

Thunderheads bunched like vultures on the horizon.

Alex was at Bill's.

Alex had accepted his grandmother's rule to never call her "grandma."

"Just call me Bill."

"That's a boy's name." He knew a boy his own age named Billy.

"I've always been called Bill."

"How come?"

"Because I was such a tomboy when I was young."

"What's a tomboy?"

"A girl who's as good as boys at doing what boys are supposed to do best."

"Like baseball and football?"

"Tennis and golf in my time. But that's the idea."

He regarded his grandmother as he swung on the hammock in the veranda that encircled three-quarters of the house. It was screened to keep bugs out and colourful striped canvas curtains suspended on rods and hoops could be drawn to block the curious gaze of passersby. Alex had done just that, relishing the false interior dusk. The hammock was suspended by two chains from the ceiling, which supported the padded solid sides hinged to a spring mattress which could swing in any direction. It was covered in pastel floral material in turn topped by numerous cushions and a quilt. The hinged sides creaked contentedly as Alex's right foot dangled to the floor controlling direction and momentum.

His grandmother was decidedly feminine for a tomboy. Tall, slender and stylishly dressed, her hair pulled back in a French roll, she was the elegant doctor's wife, perfectly groomed always calm. Alex held her in awe. He suspected his grandmother enjoyed the incongruity of her nickname and her appearance. He also intuited that vanity was at the bottom of her desire to not be addressed as "Grandma," that she didn't like being a grandmother and Alex wondered if she even liked him.

"Aren't you supposed to be trying out for the baseball team today?"

"I skipped it. Too hot. I'm drawing."

"You'll ruin your eyes in this light," said Bill, rattling back one of the curtains.

“That’s enough.”

She turned and disappeared into the house.

A black and white reproduction of Caravaggio’s *Lute Player* gazed up at Alex from the page causing a chill to creep up Alex’s spine in spite of the muggy afternoon heat. He intently examined the painting. The flowers on the left side of the painting were exquisitely rendered, as were the fruit, the violin and sheet music spread on a table in front of the musician. Elongated delicate fingers brushed the strings of the lute as the player looked across the centuries, sensuous lips parted perhaps to speak or sing. The lutist’s richly dark curls were held by a transparent scarf knotted through, the end falling down to touch the transcendent shoulder. A voluminous blouse closed beneath the breasts, which were modestly covered by a delicate camisole. Alex couldn’t determine the gender of the lute player. He examined the breasts more intently but they remained androgynous.

Could any boy be this beautiful wondered Alex?

He began to painstakingly copy the painting. Two hours later he pinned his copy to the veranda wall and lay back on the hammock to admire the results. The drawing was several times larger than the magazine page. Alex was pleased. It was the most accomplished drawing he had ever done.

Caravaggio. Caravaggio. The name caressed Alex to sleep.

Alex bolted upright at the thunderclap, disoriented in the darkness. *The Lute Player* smiled at him from the wall, then his lips began moving in a song with the thunderous flashes of the storm.

“You will know me, hear my song...
Hear my sorrow, know me long...
Come to me, hold me, sing my song...
Come play to me, but not too long.”

Alex sat spellbound staring at the singing lute player. The song stopped and a soft laughter filled the veranda coming from all directions. Alex closed his eyes to concentrate on the sound.

It was the laughter of a boy.

The phone woke Alex's grandmother. Immediately alert, she rose from the couch and walked quickly to pick up the receiver as lightning strobed the room.

"Dr. Burning's."

She listened a moment.

"You're sure? I see. I'll try to locate the doctor and have him come out as soon as possible."

Replacing the receiver she went out onto the veranda. The empty hammock drifted slowly back and forth in the windy half-light.

"Alex?"

She went to the hammock, picked up the magazine then pulled back the curtains to prevent the rain from soaking them. She looked at her peonies in the garden below, heavy pink heads bowed to the weight of the rain then the drawing fluttering on the wall caught her attention. She examined it up close.

"What do you think?"

She turned to find Alex standing in the doorway.

"Impressive," Bill said looking at the drawing again. "You had better go home now that the rain's letting up."

"Is that a boy or a girl do you think?"

"Hard to say. Look, Alex..., " she hesitated.

"Yes?"

"There's been some trouble. I've got to find your grandfather."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Billy Brady. He's dead. Hung himself. Accident most likely."

She slowly walked to the door. She glanced back once again to the hammock swinging eerily in the dark and at Alex mutely rolling up

his drawing, his hands shaking. She knew she should say something, or hold him but she couldn't. She didn't like children and she didn't particularly like Alex.

That boy's a dreamer, she thought. Even when he's awake.

Four years later Alex escorted Lorna to the Saturday dance in the basement of the Memorial Theatre. It was the first time either had been on a date. A single line of hard-back wooden chairs rigidly lined the two long walls of the dance hall, the cloakroom and ticket office at the front, the stage at the other end bearing last New Year's Eve decorations. It was July. Alex was a good dancer and had recently expanded his repertoire by acquiring pamphlets which contained tiny diagrams of footprints and arrows that promised to turn him into a cha-cha and mambo king. No one wanted to mambo, just jive, but the bands mostly played country and western.

Lorna was brainy and wore a bra, while the "looser" girls dressed for the summer heat in light tops with nothing underneath. They endured two hours of dancing with Alex deftly avoiding body contact, finally buying Cokes from Helen Trail's Snack Shop en route to Lorna's farm.

"Goodnight," said Alex as the car rolled to a halt on the dirt driveway, lights on, motor humming.

Lorna grabbed him and hungrily kissed him.

I've never kissed anyone, thought Alex. I've never wanted to be kissed. This feels so rough.

I want someone to hold me.

That's all.

Two

"Ladies and ... er ... Gentlemen! and Gentlemen!"

There was a giggle in the darkened room.

"Tonight! Further revelations from the mysterious and troubled Michelangelo Merisi." Flickering candles created a grotesque shadow

of the announcer cast against the sheet strung across the end of the room as a hand reached up and released one side of the improvised curtain. It fell, revealing Ramos in a white satin shirt open to the navel then tucked into the narrow waist of white tights, which revealed his lithe muscular lower body leaving little to the imagination. A wolf whistle came from the audience of six young men. Ramos, eyes shaded and lined in black, acknowledged the compliment with the faintest suggestion of a smile at the corner of his wide full lips. He began to speak in a compelling confiding voice that soon mesmerized his tiny audience.

“Milan
September 1589

My dearest Caterina,

I will have left for Venice by the time you read this. Please explain to our dear brother Giovan that I will not accompany him to Rome, but will join him later. I long for the mysterious nights of Venice and can wait no longer. I am done with the odious Peterzano. Four years of hard work and little inspiration. I celebrated by burning all my drawings, saving Peterzano's favourites for the last.

I head off with a clean slate.

And the inheritance! I lied about my age. I couldn't wait two more years. Our poor mother would understand. She was always so patient with my impatience.

Imperial pounds! It will support me for years. I bought a shirt today made of the finest silk. I look quite dashing.

And a sword. They say at night the canals of Venice are dark and dangerous. Fairly crawling with rats and human vermin.

Do not fear for my safety. Fear for theirs!

Tonight Pietro and I celebrate. We are going to a very fine party at the Marchese's palace. Perhaps I shall meet a mysterious Venetian! I shall wear my new silk shirt and sword. I bought a shirt for Pietro as well. My parting gift. I shall miss him as I shall miss you.

I will write.

I will conquer Venice.

Be prepared to hear of the famous artist Michelangelo Merisi from Caravaggio!

Your loving brother,
Michelangelo”

There was a moment of silence when Ramos stopped, then the boys recovered themselves and applauded as Ramos did exaggerated bows.

“Bravo Ramos, excuse me. Bravo Michelangelo!” called a dark curly-haired boy.

“Hey Ramos! I thought diaries are supposed to have dirty parts! This seems pretty tame!” called another.

“Don’t be so impatient,” smiled Ramos. “There’s much to come.” He blew out the candles.

Alex took a deep breath and pushed his way into the crowd congregated at the bar. He checked his watch. A good ten minutes before Justine’s performance began. Fog had nearly cancelled his flight to Toronto. Justine would have been understanding but unforgiving. His shoulder bag swung across his back, menacing plastic glasses of cheap French wine held aloft by people fighting their way from the bar.

A harried bartender frowned at him.

“White wine, please.”

The bartender briskly filled a glass, pushing it toward Alex.

“Thanks. How much?” asked Alex trying to maneuver his hand to his back pocket against the press of people.

“You need a ticket,” said the bartender coldly, whipping the glass from Alex’s hand and giving it to the woman next to him.

“Christ.”

He turned to push his way through the mob scanning the crowded foyer for the person selling tickets. Several people were in line ahead of him. Alex checked his watch again.

Five minutes. Four.

“Yes?”

“Two wine, please.”

Tickets in hand he turned and found himself face to face with a woman. About to excuse his way around her she smiled at him.

“You’re taking Sean to Spain.”

It wasn’t a question. He looked more closely at her.

“Yes.” Alex wanted to be polite but he also wanted a drink. How the hell did this woman know he was taking Sean to Spain? She read the confusion on his face.

“I’m Molly.”

Alex’s mind remained blank.

“Sean’s mother,” she added helpfully.

“Molly?” Alex concentrated on her face.

“Your ex-wife.”

Shocked embarrassment coloured Alex’s face.

“Oh my God! Molly.”

“I’ve read things like this happen. Exes not recognizing one another.”

“It’s been years ... I just wasn’t expecting ...”

They looked at one another uneasily. Molly was heavier, her hair was shorter and greyer, but she looked essentially the same.

The lights dimmed, signalling the performance was beginning.

“Well, have a great time and take good care of our son,” smiled Molly, turning back into the crowd. Alex stared after her mortified.

[...]

“Tennis anyone?”

A single spot revealed Justine in a late sixteenth-century costume, sword hanging from her waist. Lights flooded a net stretched perpendicularly to the stage with two men in costumes similar to Justine’s engaged in a strenuous tennis match gradually shedding their clothes as Justine shouted scores.

“Love-fifteen.”

“Love-thirty.”

“Deuce!”

“Bello! Bellissimo!”

The muscular men were by now sweatily reduced to G-strings.

“Match!”

They stopped, looking at Justine.

“Caravaggio’s my name and tennis is my game.”

Justine strolled onto the tennis court sizing up the players. She stopped in front of the perspiring blond and extracted two coins from a pouch strapped to her hip, waving them before the man’s face.

“You’ve lost me a small fortune today.”

The man shrugged.

“You have any other talents?” she asked as she pulled the front of the man’s G-string toward her, dropping the coins into the pouch. He winced as the G-string snapped back and the stage darkened to

the rumble of thunder. Then lights came up revealing Caravaggio with sword drawn standing over a bloodied man lying face down on the stage.

“He’s dead.”

And Derek Jarman died today, thought Alex. Jarman had made a film about Caravaggio, an audacious, passionate work that left Alex gasping with outrage and pleasure. This evening of Jarman’s death another Caravaggio sprang to life like a fleeting echo of Jarman’s spirit in transit. Alex struggled to concentrate.

A gigantic slide of Caravaggio’s *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* depicting a sensuous, androgynous boy, lips parted in surprise and pain, filled the back wall of the stage. From one of his outstretched fingers a lizard dangled by its mouth. The boy’s startled gaze was not at the lizard biting him but at the audience.

“I’m about to start my religious art phase,” announced Caravaggio. “The Passion of Saint Matthew in a Jock Strap. The Conversion of Saint Paul to Queer Nation. Paintings to die for.”

Alex had watched Derek Jarman raise the cup of coffee to his lips in the dark-panelled dining room. By coincidence they had been staying at the same pension in Berlin years ago, sitting opposite one another one morning at breakfast. Jarman had met Alex’s curious gaze across the long dark mahogany table with an unassuming friendliness. Alex never spoke to Jarman. He never said, “I liked your film” or, “Your film was audacious.” Alex had read Jarman was ill with AIDS. He felt certain fate would never place him in proximity with Jarman again but still he failed to speak, to signal his admiration, their mutuality. He managed a “Good morning” then retreated to an almost British reserve. Jarman smiled back a greeting amused by Alex’s shyness but didn’t attempt further conversation.

Alex smiled back.

“I’ll miss you when you die. We all will.” Alex hadn’t said it.

“I hear you panting,” said Caravaggio, “but I’ve got to do a painting.”

The house lights came up.

[...]

“What did you think?” he asked.

Allison looked at him frowning.

“I hated it.”

“You mean you didn’t understand it.”

“No, I mean I hated it.”

“Let’s get a drink.”

Allison followed Alex up the aisle to the lobby. This wasn’t theatre she reminded herself. This was performance art, which looked and sounded like theatre but broke every theatrical device known to Allison, leaving her disoriented. They reached the lobby.

“Alex!”

A young blond man waved at him over the heads of the crowd pushing his way to Alex and Allison.

“Hide your hate,” he said to Allison.

“William, how are you?” smiled Alex as he received William’s kisses on each cheek.

William’s lips always lingered a little too long to properly be described as pecks.

“Fabulous. That’s the only word. Fabulous,” he said, eyeing Allison curiously, then to Alex, “How did you like the show?”

“We love it. Allison. William. William did the costumes.”

“Hi,” said Allison drily. Then added, “The G-strings were inspired.”

“Amazing what a little gold paint can do for a dust mask isn’t it? We had to do SO many fittings. It was sheer TORTURE!” laughed William. “That Tolly! I just had no idea what SIZE to make it. Monday morning it was

too small. Monday afternoon it was too big. Stretch Lycra and saltpeter. The only solution.”

William’s higher than a kite, thought Alex.

“We’re going to try and grab a drink,” said Alex, touching Allison’s elbow. “Great to see you.”

“My pleasure in ALL ways, Alex. Coming to the party after?”

“Wouldn’t miss it,” said Alex, receiving two more kisses from William.

“You coming, Alice?”

“Allison.”

“AL-ison. See you there!”

William spun around and headed off without waiting for Allison’s response.

“A fan.”

“Fan of the world. Really talented. Really sweet. Just does too much nose candy. Wait here, I’ll get those drinks.”

[...]

He turned and walked right into Justine’s arms.

“Alex!” She hugged him.

“Justine!” Alex kissed her.

She had changed into a black jumpsuit but still had on her stage makeup. Her blonde hair was matted and sweaty from the performance.

“Well did you like it?” she asked anxiously.

“Yes. A lot. Congratulations.”

“Congratulations to US you mean!” exclaimed Justine, “I can hardly wait until we work on acts two and three. Maybe tour Europe. Then I want to do a book. That’s where you’ll be especially helpful.”

“Wait a minute. This is starting to sound like a five-year project.”

“It’d be great if we could get the Winter Garden for the show once it’s all together,” said Justine, referring to the refurbished vaudeville theatre on Yonge Street. “You happy the way the costumes looked? William was so nervous.”

“Stace’s lighting did wonders – really added texture and weight.”

“Choreography? We may have overdone the tennis ball theme.”

Lost in contemplation of Jarman’s death, Alex hadn’t paid much attention.

“Odette’s at her peak.”

“Yeah ... I think it’s coming along. I just hope people remember that it’s a work-in-progress.”

“With a series called ‘Works in Progress’ you’d have to be dumb to forget.”

“You staying for Jane and Andy’s piece? Who’s the other drink for?”

“Allison.”

Justine gave a disgusted look.

“She’s a bit dumb on performance art. You bringing HER to the party?”

Alex was never quite sure when Justine was acting.

“You’re a little hard on her.”

“She’s the only food critic I know of who hates performance art. I mean I love food. So why can’t she lighten up about what I do?”

“Why don’t you ask her? Here she comes.”

Alex nodded to Allison, who was grinning her way to him and pointing at Charmaine stomping out the main entrance with a group of people all shorter than her.

“Nahh. I’ll see you at the party. I want to say hi to George.”

Justine waved nonchalantly at the approaching Allison and pushed into the crowd.

“Justine looked really eager to see me,” smiled Allison, accepting the glass of wine from Alex.

“My friends don’t like my friends. It’s a specialty of mine.”

[...]

Justine wanted some new skin against hers tonight. Roaming the lobby accepting congratulations, she kept her eyes open for a new face. She spotted Ben leaving the bar.

Now he’s cute, she thought. She watched him drift to the edge of the crowd and sip his wine, obviously alone. She made a beeline for him.

“New in town or just new to performance art?”

“Both actually.” He raised his eyebrows but his face remained blank.

“Thought so. You look a bit lost.”

“Not at all. This is The Power Plant and you’re Justine alias Caravaggio, or is it the other way around?”

“And you’re ...”

“Ben. Ben Fisk.”

“Know anyone here?”

“I do now.”

“There’s a party after. Why don’t you come? I could introduce you to a few people.”

“Sure. Thanks. Where?”

“Look for me in the lobby afterwards. I’ll drive you there.”

“Ok.” Ben’s face revealed nothing.

“Gotta get back to my fans. See you later.”

Ben toasted his glass in her direction.

Alex suddenly felt dejected and tired. He saw a few familiar faces but didn’t have the energy to engage in a conversation. He wandered to the window overlooking the waterfront and stared out at the dark lake. The five-day Critical Writing jury for the Canada Council in Ottawa had been exhausting and in many ways disappointing. At forty-nine Alex felt he was turning into a cranky old art historian. He had no patience for projects where the content was buried beneath layers of glitzy terminology. His own writing was direct. Detractors described it as “Low-PoMo.” Such criticism left Alex unruffled. He was thick-skinned. He viewed criticism as an equal to praise. Critical salvos lobbed in his direction were always more revelatory than praise. The critical leaps of faith in his work were more the result of impatience with conventional structure than creative inventiveness. He had always anticipated the noted failures that were sprinkled throughout his career. The source of his successes on the other hand were impossible to predict.

When he was younger he’d been haunted by the fear of “drying up,” but no longer.

Caravaggio was inexhaustible as a subject. The exhibition of Caravaggio he’d curated at the National Gallery had triggered a somewhat queasy response in him. He loathed being introduced as “the” authority and its implication of some plateau (the final plateau?) being achieved as an art historian. His frustration with achieving goals (the exhibition had virtually fallen into his lap) highlighted the number of projects left undone. He announced to a surprised opening audience he was completely rethinking his writing on Caravaggio. He didn’t know what it meant. All he knew was that he was tired of being the documenter of creativity. He wanted to create himself. He didn’t know what. No one had asked.

The shift began when he started as consultant with Justine and William on the costumes, sets and interpretation of Caravaggio’s life

and work. He'd met a whole range of new people. Actors, dancers, artists. The fact remained that his area of expertise was fairly arcane. How many people would mount projects on Caravaggio? Justine's plans would keep him busy and underpaid if she raised the money. It was a big "if."

"A penny for your thoughts."

Alex turned to face the unfamiliar voice.

"That's about what they're worth."

A man in his early thirties was smiling back at him. He was dressed in a black turtleneck and dark trousers. Both expensive.

"I admire your work," said the man, brushing back blond hair from his face, revealing regular features that looked like they'd been put together by a committee. He was wearing dark-framed glasses.

"Thank you. Have we met?"

"Ben. Ben Fisk. We've been in the same room before but we didn't actually meet."

"Now what kind of room might that have been?"

"I was at your lecture at the National Gallery."

"And you were sitting in the front row. I recognize you now."

"Great talk."

"You got all the jokes. So did your friend."

"Holly. We were at loose ends, saw the announcement about your opening, so decided to check it out. Glad we did."

"So you and Holly live in Ottawa?"

"Toronto." Ben nodded his head in the direction of the lake. "Gorgeous night. Feel like a stroll by the water?"

"What about Holly?"

“She’s back in Ottawa at the film archive ’til Tuesday.”

“Actually, I was going to see the next piece on the programme. You’re not interested?”

“Not really. I’ve had enough.”

“You didn’t like Justine’s piece?”

“I thought the chorus boys looked very environmentally friendly. Yeah it was fun ... but?” Ben arched his left eyebrow inquisitively, indicating the lake again.

Alex hesitated. He wasn’t sure what was on Ben’s mind. Was he just being friendly or was he also being a little flirtatious? Suffering from pre-trip jitters he didn’t trust his own judgement. He hated travelling. Essentially domestic, he felt rattled at pulling himself away from his familiar surroundings and plunging into the world of air terminals and jets which he regarded as instruments of torture. He loathed travelling by himself, which he felt he had neatly solved by asking Sean to join him. Still, he felt anxious.

He looked at Ben, who wasn’t as bland as Alex’s first impression. He was at least ten years younger than Alex and seemed self-assured and bright. He was attractive. Attached. Straight.

“I’m running out of pennies,” said Ben in mock concern.

[...]

Six

[...]

Alex noticed another letter. He picked it up checking the postmark. Reston. He tore open the envelope.

Dear Alex,

It is over thirty years since I have seen you.

Thirty-two to be exact.

The last time was a dusty late-August afternoon on Main Street.

You were leaving to attend medical school in Winnipeg. I just happened to be sitting in the window booth of The Modern Cafe watching you board the bus. I broke down and cried. You hadn't even bothered to phone to say goodbye. I thought that we were special to each other then.

You were always like that. Real friendly but always bored with the present and impatient for the future. I felt you were marking time when we were around each other.

So you never became a doctor. Neither did I. I became an actress. Not as noble a profession.

I've read about you being a successful art historian. Little tidbits in the newspapers. I doubt that you've read about me. Not that many column inches were devoted to my career. And that was a while ago. One might say a lifetime ago.

I should explain why I'm writing after all this time.

I'm dying.

All of a sudden this seems mad. Why should I tell you?
Why should you care?

I have to think about this.

Maybe I won't send this. Oh shit!

Lorna

Inez made me send this.

The letter jolted Alex. He reread it before setting it down. He supposed he had to respond. But how?

[...]

Lorna's letter came back to him. He hadn't thought of her in decades but her re-emergence spiked guilt in him. His first date was repeated continuously with him forever fending off her physical advances. Why had he done that? Partly because one HAD to date. Partly because they viewed Reston as a trap they had to escape and because they both wanted to become doctors. He could even admit to loving Lorna. He just couldn't desire her. He thought of his own plans. Muddy as they seemed.

When I grow up.

Absurd. But the phrase still entered Alex's mind.

You are grown up, Alex. You're almost fifty.

Did everyone feel that way?

Alex had bought the line that by twenty-one you were to be on track. His failure at pre-med had badly shaken him. Age nineteen and he had already run off the rails. What to do about his life? In desperation he filled out a "What Should You Do with Your Life?" questionnaire.

Ken Watson ran the company that guaranteed fulfillment. He was an ex-Brier¹ curling champion much admired by Alex's father and most of Manitoba. Alex figured these were impeccable credentials. One had to go to Winnipeg for the results.

Mr. Watson ushered Alex into his austere office. The walls were decorated with photographs of Mr. Watson in various curling poses. The delivery of the curling rock. The sweeping of the curling rock. The trophies. Great ugly silver urns covered with tiny plaques commemorating various champions. It made Alex remember what a lousy curler he'd been in high school.

"As I stated in our letter to you," Mr. Watson said, interrupting Alex's train of thought, "your results are now complete and have been analyzed."

All of a sudden Alex became tense. Mr. Watson was about to reveal what lay ahead as Alex's life's work. His heart began to pound.

1 The annual Canadian men's curling championship.

"The results were somewhat inconclusive."

Alex's heart skipped a beat. Inconclusive! Mr. Watson, he of the steady hand that guided all those curling rocks to Brier victories, didn't know what Alex was supposed to do with his life! Then who would?

"Inconclusive?" Alex managed to say.

"We have concluded that you should pursue a career in ..."

Mr. Watson stopped to check his notes.

"Medicine."

Alex's heart plummeted.

"I see."

He didn't see at all. He felt gripped by a sudden and profound depression.

Mr. Watson watched Alex attentively.

"Have you given any thought to such a career, Alex?"

"Well, yes I have. In fact, I did. I mean, I can't. I'm just not cut out for it."

"What do you mean?"

"I spent one year in pre-med. It didn't work out."

"Flunked out, did we?"

Mr. Watson obviously didn't mince words. Alex blushed.

"More like fainted-out, sir."

"I see."

He obviously didn't. Alex couldn't imagine Mr. Watson fainting. Mr. Watson continued to study his notes. His brow knitted in what looked like consternation. He returned his gaze to Alex, his face now very grave.

“Well, I did say the results were somewhat inconclusive. Another career DID suggest itself.”

Curling. The thought impaled itself into Alex’s heart. Mr. Watson wanted him to win Briers. Alex sat mutely awaiting his life sentence.

“Artist.” Mr. Watson said the word with evident distaste.

“I beg your pardon?” Alex couldn’t believe his ears.

“You could become an artist. Have you ever thought of that?”

“No.”

“Well, you should think about it.”

“I don’t know how one becomes an artist, sir.”

“You go to art school.”

“Art school? Where is there an art school?”

Rome? Paris? It was hopeless. He couldn’t speak Italian or French.

“Right here in Winnipeg. Why don’t you go and speak with them?”

The director of the art school looked thoughtfully at Alex’s tiny pile of copies of Caravaggio’s paintings.

“So you like Caravaggio.”

The director made it a statement rather than a question.

“Yes, sir. I mean I imagine there must be other artists, but I like Caravaggio, yes.”

“They’re quite nice copies.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Alex gratefully.

“Not terribly creative but pleasant.”

"I know. I mean I guess you're right."

Alex had spent hours on the drawings. He felt crushed.

"You might consider art history. You know, studying the works of various artists. I think you might rather enjoy that, don't you?"

"Well, I've never thought of it, but yes, I think I would."

"I'm going to direct you to the head of our art history programme. Talk to them. That may be where you should focus your attention."

"Thank you, sir."

Alex felt tremendous relief. He loved the idea. Studying the HISTORY of art. He wouldn't have to know how to draw.

"Talk to Miss Trentini. She's on the next floor. Room 206."

Alex stood up and collected his drawings. He thanked the director and was about to leave when the director asked the question.

"We're always interested to know why students want to be in our department. Why did you decide on art?"

Alex flushed.

"Mr. Watson, Mr. Ken Watson suggested it, sir."

The director raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"Mr. Watson?"

"The curler, sir. He won the Brier?" Alex added helpfully.

Seven

[...]

Alex,

Gosh sorry to leave you hanging like that, just saying I'm dying and then signing off. The morphine scrambles my mind sometimes.

It's breast cancer, at least that's the way it started. After they hacked off both my breasts the cancer just moseyed along to a different part of my body. It's been a long fight that I'm real unhappy about losing. Hard to believe but I've accepted the fact. Gone through all the stages just like the textbook states.

Age fifty, same as you, and no chance to make any more plans.

That's the shock really.

You just can't make any more plans. It made me think of you. And me. And all the plans we made when we were young. We really did believe we could do anything and that there was lots of time.

I guess you knew I loved you. I could never tell you that back then. For a long time I thought there was something wrong with me. I mean sexually or something. Like you would feel my breasts, and kiss me, but never showed the least bit of interest in my cunt.

So I figured it was me. I'd look in the mirror and try to imagine what was wrong with my body, but never could. I looked perfectly alright to me.

I decided to stop wearing a bra. Well, no need to now.

Remember that?

You were real shocked. Downright prudish. It just never occurred to me that you were afraid of sex. Back then I never knew boys could be afraid of sex. But then it could never occur to me that there were boys who didn't even WANT sex. Not with women at least.

I'm feeling light-headed so I'm going to quit for now. Please write. I'd really appreciate it if you could find the time.

Lorna

[...]

Eight

[...]

Alex,

I've just assumed all these years that you're queer, something everyone around here is too polite to say. It's not like they would hate you. They'd just feel real sad for you. Sort of like you had died.

Lorna

[...]

Nine

[...]

Alex,

My mother and I are engaged in a bizarre farce. She's dying of cancer in the ward next to me. They asked if I would like to share wards but that was too gothic even for me. I came back to care for her years ago and now that she no longer needs me, she's taking me with her. I know that's not true, just feels that way. I couldn't bear to have her watch me die. Her death I can witness. I'd prefer to sink alone if need be.

Lorna

[...]

Ten

[...]

Alex,

I didn't become famous. I may have set a record for the number of tables I wiped in Los Angeles though. "I serve Caesars in Hollywood." I even served myself up a few times, got a couple of parts, ended up on

the cutting room floor. I stayed far too long in the dream town. It was a good dream but hardly original. What pisses me off is now there's no point in dreams. For me. What about you Alex? Do you have dreams?

Lorna

[...]

Eleven

[...]

Alex,

Looked through our yearbook and found this small photo of you. It's totally unremarkable but for two things. You so obviously *posed* for the photographer like it was for the cover of *Photoplay* or something. And under "GOALS" you state, "To become famous and to help humanity." In that order. If you've achieved the first goal then how about the second one? Send me a new photo (if the eyeliner shows up all the better), and tell me your plans.

[Lorna]

[...]

Twelve

[...]

Alex,

It is almost impossible to write. My mind rages against my body. I'm afraid of when my anger runs out. Will I recognize that moment or merely slip into a morphine induced senility? Happily demented, my only tasks to hallucinate and babble.

L.

[...]

Thirteen

[...]

Dear Alex,

Lorna asked me to copy down her thoughts and send them to you, since she can't focus her eyes or manage to hold a pen. You may not remember me. I was a couple of grades behind you. You knew my brother who committed suicide when he was twelve. Lorna said his death had a big impact on you. It did on us all, of course.

I became friends with Lorna when she returned from California. She's had a hard time of it the past few years. I'm sure you know your letter has been real important to her. She was very concerned that you continue to hear from her while it's still possible so I tape recorded her, transcribed it, cleaning up a bit when she rambled. I could send you the tape if you want, but she seemed to feel letters were the proper way to convey her thoughts to you.

Here is her letter to you.

"Dear Alex,

What is it that one fears so much about death? If it's sudden there's no time to feel fear. If the process is prolonged and painful like mine, one welcomes the promised release. There's a moment when one becomes too intimate with one's body, overly familiar with every cell. That point has been reached. Passed. Every minute is like every other, waiting for each to end. I know I told you I intended to kill myself but I didn't succeed. I couldn't. Why? I had to hang on, bear witness to my mother's death. She's now dead. Who will witness mine? Would you do me the honour, Alex? I feel so alone. I know one has to die alone, but to die unseen feels so unbearable..."

At this point Lorna became paranoid and went into fantasies that have no bearing on reality. She seemed in a great deal of pain so I asked the nurse if she could have extra morphine. I left this letter for a couple of days on the chance Lorna would be able to dictate some more, but so far she has been lucid for only very brief periods. I'll send you more if she manages to dictate any other thoughts to you. Of course I shall let you know if anything happens.

Sincerely,

Inez Brady

[...]

“Inez!”

Inez jumped at Lorna’s faint voice. She turned to see Lorna stirring faintly in her bed.

“Inez.”

Her eyes were closed.

“I’m right here, Lorna. Right here.”

Inez lightly stroked Lorna’s head which was covered by a bandana to hide the chemo-induced baldness.

“Did he come?”

“Who?”

“Alex.”

Inez hesitated.

“Not yet. Any day probably.”

What harm was there in lying? It made no difference at this point, she reasoned.

“Read me his letter,” whispered Lorna.

Inez sighed and opened the drawer of the stand beside the hospital bed. She pulled out a grey business-size envelope. She checked the postmark. Toronto. Not that she needed to. She knew it couldn’t be any other letter. No one had written Lorna in months. Except Alex. She turned the envelope over in the dim light and pulled the letter out. She found it strange she’d become the medium through which Alex

and Lorna revived their intense friendship, to be severed again with absolute finality.

She unfolded the letter and began to read.

“Dear Lorna,

I was very saddened to hear about your illness and of your mother’s.

You must be devastated.

Although I was surprised (and yes pleased) to hear from you, I had some prior knowledge of your condition thanks to my sister. Although it crossed my mind that I might write you I hesitated, uncertain whether a note from me would be welcome or even relevant. The arrival of your poignant and frank letter this week resolved the situation for me. I’m replying, uncertain what my role is or what I may say. Indeed doubting whether I have much to offer and at the same time wanting very much to fulfill your request of me.

You asked me about my plans, since as you put it so bluntly, you can make none while I can make any I desire. Real or imaginary.

Perhaps I should first describe this day, and the room I am sitting in, for the plans I will make today (with you) will surely be shaped by my frame of mind, the state of the weather, the comfort of this room. I’m in the second-floor study. It is sparsely furnished with black bookcases, a black desk, chair and lamp, a black rug, with walls painted a deep mud. My computer is a standard industrial white, though I lusted after a black one I saw in Tokyo once. I’m wearing black jeans over brown Italian boots that make Doc Martens look truly proletarian, topped off by a black silk sweater. Today my hair looks especially grey and I look especially fifty.

The day is sunny with a stiff breeze from the east insinuating rain. A gust has just slammed my casement window shut. It’s warm, the garden wantonly at odds with itself, sprouting late summer blooms and already ripening seed pods. Strange how the joy of spring planting and fussing about, hands perpetually stuck in oozing soil, shifts to this melancholy as late summer spreads overblown, heedless of borders. I feel as if I’ve somehow erred on the side of vulgar abandon

while my neighbours in turn tend discreet patterns of brick with smart regiments of petunias, geraniums and alyssum marching about their borders. My front lawn is too small to mow so I use clippers that a friend lent me that are really just oversized scissors. I try to do this unobtrusively early Sunday mornings but am often caught by two elderly sisters on their way to church who smile approvingly at my undignified posture, my Sisyphean task. It looks like an act of penance.

For me it is mindless, one could even say gratifying. It keeps me occupied and prevents me from making plans. You're frustrated that you can't, I'm frustrated that I must. I invent strategies for planning.

I make plans I know will never work thus forcing me to make contingency plans.

Contingency plans are my core plans. Plans are what one desires. Contingency plans one settles for.

And what of failed plans?

You have somehow failed to kill yourself. How does one reconcile such a drastic oversight? I have no desire to experience your anguish but your failure has created this very space that we now occupy. This letter may arrive too late. You may be dead. I know that is blunt but that is what we are talking about. I take my cue from you. Re-establishing communication at this point has an urgency that is both morbid and heartening. Morbid because at some point only silence can return. Heartening because when you die you'll live in my memory, which in a way foils your death. Small comfort for you perhaps.

I'm not sure what you want.

I remember our dates and my anxiety because I wanted to kiss boys not girls. Even then I wanted to be with men but there was no vocabulary, no knowledge, no examples. Well, there was one example. The Brady boy who wore his mother's dress to die. That seemed like a warning to me. It affected me profoundly. You're right too in identifying me as a coward when I left town 'like frost burned off by the sun.' Unable to face you. Unable to tell you my personal fears and desires. Emotionally disabled, I melted away. Would it have made a difference to either one of us? Perhaps. We may have remained friends and shared our

(separate) happiness. We experienced discomfort then and now sorrow. Not much of a history is it?

Your life sounds intelligent and full but you imply regret and frustration. Our past brutally weights our present without apology or compensation. Who doesn't flinch in the face of unrelenting, unchangeable histories? We live untidy lives. We can't undo our pasts, only hope to understand them. Our cruelties to one another will forever wound, scar and fester.

What do I want?

To be the best at what I do, but I'd settle for mere admiration, a modicum of recognition. I want to change. I can't bear the familiarity of my routines, dreams, and disappointments. I regret the future which shrinks my ability to change.

'Give me the chance,' I can almost hear you say. 'Trade places with me then.'

I wouldn't if I could for we cling to what we have. You have jolted me and scared me.

I've sensed my mortality for many years but when someone as intelligent, as capable as you is being cut down too soon I feel anger. If I were you I would know precisely what I would do, given the chance. My self-doubt is an unspeakable luxury.

The air is sweet with scents from childhood. I wish I could visit you. Perhaps.

I hope this isn't goodbye.

If it is, know I'll remember you and that your courage has been a lesson to me.

Love,

Alex."

[...]

Fifteen

Genoa.

July 15, 1995

Dear Professor Burning,

I have just finished your second book on Caravaggio. My compliments on your fine scholarship, your remarkably creative intuition of the artist's turbulent imagination. We share a similar passion. You have spent your life writing about Caravaggio while I've spent my life *being* Caravaggio. I could help you delve very deeply into Caravaggio's mind. I know this may sound presumptuous, but you would do well to accept this advice: Come visit me soon. I notice we are the same age. This may not continue for long.

Ramos

[...]

"You've only been dead a few hours but you're Caravaggio's lover from centuries ago? I don't understand."

"Linear thinking doesn't work here."

She sounded a little bored with his slowness.

"Simultaneous points of time are the norm, transitions, glimpses of parallel realities, warps. Good to see you though, whatever it is. Sorry you didn't make it to my death bed. I wanted to say goodbye to as much of the past as I could and you were as far back as I could reach. Does that seem odd to you?"

"It saddens me."

"Why? Death and all that I suppose."

"I don't know. Death reveals such a volume of loss. You lose everything you ever were and you stop being everything everyone ever imagined about you. You let go of the present, your entire past, everyone's memory of you begins to disintegrate, be at odds with itself." Alex felt guilty. Lorna had been eclipsed from his mind years ago. If she hadn't written

him, she would have forever occupied a cold silent space in his mind that never stirred.

"I was going to try and make it out to see you, but I got sick."

"Just as well perhaps. I was pretty messed up on morphine by the end. I wanted my death shared by someone who matters to the world so that maybe I would matter a bit too. I missed out, messed up, Alex. Maybe it was my fault. I started to think about you, even bought some books on Caravaggio once I caught up on your life. I guessed you might be remote, unreachable, but that didn't stop me from reclaiming our long-interrupted friendship. I imagined what your favourite paintings were."

[...]

Sixteen

[...]

Dusk hurried across the prairie in a rush to end the day. Fence posts lost their edges, blurring into the fallow soil as scrubby trees bunched into unfriendly huddles against the chill. The landscape divided in two, the vast fading sky above, the sombre blacks, blues and purples of the battered earth below.

RESTON

5 km

The sign was a black rectangle punched into the red sky, the phosphorescence awaiting his headlights. It flashed. He eased off the accelerator, noting the lights along the western horizon. He turned the radio off. The car coasted onto the shoulder, scrunching the gravel as it came to rest. Silence. He whirred the driver's window open. The air held the sharp, acrid smell of recent field burns mixed with the bite of frost. No insect sounds. The cold nights had dispatched them.

He wished he weren't alone.

Maybe he should have brought Sean.

Ben invaded his mind, prying open sorrow and anger. Ben who had held Alex in the hospital professing love, Ben who said he'd go to California to settle things with Holly and return. Ben who burst into tears saying his love for Alex frightened him.

Alex had lain in the hospital bed silently watching him too exhausted to speak, to console, to persuade to help. Ben never came back. Never phoned. Never wrote. He had kissed Alex goodbye and left. All Alex had managed was a flutter of fingers.

The light faded quickly now that the sun had disappeared behind a black lace screen of denuded Manitoba maples. Alex, chin cupped in his hand resting on the window frame gazed toward the horizon, which rose like an ink blot darkening the sky, the division marked only by a frail line of twinkling lights. A jumble of childhood memories flooded his mind. Not narratives but fragmented images of people from his past, some frozen in time, others animated or gesturing in reaction to a long-lost moment. An image of his mother as a smiling glamorous young woman before he was born followed by the last time he'd seen her, pale, tired, standing anxiously beside him at the side of the highway waiting to flag down his bus. He had given her money to cover the cost of a set of dentures, her once beautiful smile now compressed to hide damaged teeth.

"Well if I don't make it through the surgery, you can have the teeth when I'm gone since they're really yours," she'd joked, trying to hide her fear.

"Sure, Mom."

He'd smiled, hugged her and got on the bus. She died of a stroke three weeks later. Ten days after her death a small parcel arrived in the mail, his name written across the front in his mother's hand. Alex had sat for a long time holding it wondering if his mother had managed a bizarre joke from the grave by sending him the dentures. He'd finally opened the package to find a pair of Dior socks with a card chatting about beating the Christmas rush.

"Sorry it's such a small present. XXX. Mom."

He felt he would never wear the socks, but he did. He wore them out and finally threw them away.

[...]

They drove in silence a few minutes.

“Did Billy leave a note or anything to indicate why he hung himself?”

Alex stared at the houses passing by without really seeing them. Inez didn't respond. Alex turned to look at her and immediately regretted the question, realizing it had presumed a kind of intimacy between them that didn't exist. Their connection through Lorna was tenuous at best. She gave him a sidelong glance, cautious, eyes darkened. She turned her attention back to the road shaking her head in a slow “no.” She pursed her lips as though she were about to say something, thought better of it and remained silent. They had passed the edge of town and were proceeding down a gravel road into the subdued countryside turned prematurely dark by heavy clouds. They drove the next few miles in silence. Inez slowed the car and eased onto a muddy dirt road.

“Almost there.”

Alex felt tense. The task ahead seemed hollow and meaningless. Lorna was no more than dust, ashes and bits of bone in an absurdly pretentious urn perched on the dashboard. She had no presence, memory, feelings to be betrayed.

[...]

DISAPPEARANCE

Excerpts; 1998. Unpublished novel; also known as *Deadly Destiny*.

One

Fate-monstrous
and empty,
you whirling wheel,
you are malevolent,
well-being is vain
and always fades to nothing,
shadowed
and veiled
you plague me too;
now through the game
I bring my bare back
to your villainy.

Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi
(*Fortune, Empress of the World*)
Carmina Burana.

“I’m losing my ambition.”

My waking thought today.

I sighed, eyes slitted against early morning light. Wantonly ajar, the bedroom door revealed a faded blue sky, the colour drained by the previous night’s downpour. The pale ochre stucco wall of the patio (one of twenty tones of brown sanctioned by the Santa Fe City Council), was already bone dry. Two small lizards sunned themselves on the flagstone patio near five large ceramic pots that contained my woeful attempt at an herb garden.

My eyes roamed the walls of the bedroom. Two months had not been enough time to dull the disquiet I felt waking up in a room with no corners. The adobe style walls were a seamless white that flowed in curves from room to room, the eye never finding a point to hover upon, bump into or rest against. The headboard of the double bed was

made of rough-hewn wood, stained black, aggressively penetrating the serene white expanse of the bedroom. I have no art on my walls, no photographs, so the only interruption to the flow of white is the arched hallway that leads from the bedroom to the living room, with a stand-up kitchen on the left and an equally tiny bathroom on the right acting in tandem like a too-tight cinch belt dividing the large airy rooms. My bare feet padded softly on the packed mud and straw floor as I headed for the espresso machine I had lugged with me from New York. My Alita and I are in the midst of a long, intense relationship. Both being angular with no curves, we seek solace in one another each morning, fortifying ourselves against the wiles of devious architecture. The Alita was the first item packed in my banged up '93 Toyota for a six-month sojourn in the Southwest. A box of highlighted, dog-eared books for research, three pairs of denim jeans, Italian cowboy boots (having no idea if they'd pass muster in Santa Fe), a huge pile of white t-shirts, complimented with sweaters for the chilly New Mexico evenings rounded out my wardrobe.

It would have been more efficient to fly to New Mexico. The need to accumulate time and distance between my life as a professor of medieval studies in New York, and what I anticipated as a rudimentary existence on unpaid leave in Santa Fe had compelled me to drive instead. My destination produced barely concealed gasps of shock amongst my colleagues. I couldn't take credit for such an audacious decision. Andrea had coaxed me into the idea. My friendship with Andrea, spanning twenty years, had dwindled to ever-fewer visits to New York by Andrea (I vowed to but never did visit her in Albuquerque), more infrequent phone calls, the culprit being a combination of busy schedules and aging bodies that couldn't out-wait time zones for a conversation.

I eased into jeans, tucked in a t-shirt, and draping a sweater around my shoulders, gingerly approached my desk. On it, in a pewter frame is a photograph of a woman. The photograph is black and white, one-and-a-half by two inches. It's an old photograph, possibly from the 1920s or even earlier. The woman has her back to the camera. She's at the lower right of the frame. All one can see of her is the back of her left shoulder, the upturned collar of her inexpensive fur coat, her ear, a bit of her neck, and dark coiffed hair tucked under a matching fur-trimmed hat that may have sequins on the top. A wire mesh fence makes a sharp diagonal in front of her, heading to the right of the frame until her body interrupts its progress. She's at a racetrack. Muddy pockmarks left

by horses echo the diagonal of the fence. Two tiny figures on horseback are receding to the left side of the frame. A fence behind them continues the diagonal to the horizon. The horizon of the photograph is slightly more than halfway down the picture frame, parallel to the bottom of the photograph, exaggerating the dramatic angle of the composition. The sky is dull, white, empty.

The woman is young. Perhaps thirty. I don't know who she is. I found the photograph amongst a vast pile of albums, manila envelopes crammed with yet more photographs, most unidentified, while cleaning out my mother's house after her death. Mute testimony to a forgotten past, they had reached the stage where they no longer belonged to anyone. I incinerated them, watching strangers' faces bubble, blacken, disappear. No doubt my own horde of photos will meet the same fate, including the mysterious woman on my desk. I believe that if I could turn this woman around, exposing her face, I might identify her. There's something in the tilt of her head, the tension in her neck that feels familiar. She's alone, yet she had a companion. Someone took her picture. Still, the bleak solitude of the landscape prevails, amplifying her isolation. There's another thing. Somehow, I know she's dead.

I'll describe myself. I'm fifty-one. I'm over six feet tall. Six foot two, to be inexact, since I'm shrinking with age. I still tower over most men. I look fit, as if I jog, but I don't. I'm slim, small-breasted, with an angular frame. I look like I have lots of sharp edges. My hair is turning grey with irritating speed. So fast in fact, that I missed the chance to camouflage the process. I have delicate bones in my face and hands. If I were a man I would be called handsome. I have hazel eyes that slant in an Asian fashion. I have good skin, good colour and lips that border on full. Good lips. My features are asymmetrical, splashed all over the place. I look like ten people. I resemble no one. People occasionally call me "Sir." I don't mind. It can provide unexpected opportunities. I never correct the false impression. Their mistake quickly becomes my deceit.

I walked out to the patio with my coffee. The flagstones warmed the soles of my feet as I sipped the espresso, watching white clouds building over the Sangre de Cristo mountain range to the east, a portent of this afternoon's rain. The morning sun would dry out the city as it hunkered down in twenty official colors of brown vainly attempting to imitate the landscape until around five, storm clouds would rush down the mountain slopes unleashing great volumes of water that filled arroyos with terrifying speed.

The culture mavens of Santa Fe, the “second homer” refugees from the summer heat of New York, Los Angeles, and Texas, kept a steady eye on the mascara they applied during these thunderous cloudbursts, knowing it would all be over by nine. It had to be. The opera starts at nine sharp under the open skies of the amphitheater north of Santa Fe. A rain delay made for a late evening. Yawning through an aria, even in a Dior, was unforgivable.

I have yet to be mistaken for one of Santa Fe’s social elite. Santa Fe has long been a dumping ground for the fringe of the rich. So-called Remittance Men, the handsome but decidedly useless, often embarrassing, sometimes shady drones of capitalism, have been shipped by wealthy families to Santa Fe for generations. They forged a new existence in the embrace of recently divorced or, even better, newly widowed matrons, as charming decorations whose only ambition was to stay rich, finding safe harbour with women who appreciated the mutual lies that made their unions possible, never passionate.

“Cappuccino and *New York Times*. \$7.55, sir.”

The young woman behind the counter of the Downtown Subscription News gave me a warm smile. I knew she hadn’t mistaken me for a Remittance Man. She was probably hitting her mid-thirties, her spiked hair streaked with grey. She looked too thin, too Northern European to be local. Her confusion about my gender could be attributed to my sweater obliterating my modest chest. That was this morning’s theory. The locals who got my gender right probably consigned me to that other bit of flotsam that washed up against the fake adobes of Santa Fe, the rich lesbian academic the family couldn’t quite explain, who couldn’t quite get a teaching appointment down east, who was still working on her dissertation ten years after the expiry date. In the ’30s, a dyke down east was referred to as a “Santa Fe-an.”

I smiled back at the woman, then wandered out to the large seating area that extended itself around two sides of the building. Downtown Subscription News was not downtown. It was halfway downtown, or halfway to the suburbs, depending on which direction you travelled. That, I imagine, is what made it so desirable to its clientele. The name kept the tourists looking for it downtown, forever eluding them. This guaranteed the hip and the rich would never have to rub shoulders with a sweaty backpacker as they stood in line to get their croissants and upscale lattes. No one walked or jogged to the Downtown Subscription

News. They drove, emerging from their cars in what I took to be aerobic outfits. You needed air conditioning to stay in condition here.

Saturdays and Sundays the place was jammed, but being early Monday morning, I had my choice of sun or shade. I did a quick surveillance of the other habitués, choosing a table near the front of the Downtown where I could watch the pedestrian traffic in and out of the adjoining bookstore and its sister, the Photo Book Shop. It was the closest thing to rush-hour traffic Santa Fe could muster. No one looked like they wrote books in this critical mass of literacy. Including me.

I was procrastinating. It occurred to me that losing my ambition was a physical condition, not mental laziness. At age fifty, the huge effort it took to hoist oneself from bed took on an uncanny resemblance to the effort it took to roust oneself into a challenging mental state. I lingered over my espresso until it was stone cold, then reluctantly drove home.

I keep a chair by the wall of my patio. Like most properties, mine has walls around the yard and patio that are too tall to see over. All you can make out from ground level are your neighbour's rooftops, or the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo and Jemez mountains. Plus a lot of sky. It has become my habit to make an espresso, go out to the patio and stand on the chair looking over my wall at all the other people's walls. Never once have I seen someone else staring over their wall at me. No one ever walks by my place, they only drive, so although I must have looked totally insane (or very tall), my small perversion has escaped notice. Shifting gears give plenty of warning a car is approaching, allowing me to step guiltily off my chair in order to avoid detection. I have a fantasy that one morning I'll look over my wall and find hundreds of other people's heads looking at each other over their walls. All totally astonished. Like a colony of prairie dogs. My bogus adobe was a sublet from a friend-of-a-friend who had been transferred unexpectedly to Europe, hence my upscale location. The rule seemed to be the more exclusive the neighbourhood, the worse the condition of the pot-holed dirt road masquerading as a street. I stepped down from the chair.

The procrastination around my work had multiple sources. I had to go to France to complete the research for the main character of my book. I had painstakingly excavated a mental image of this man from the thirteenth century from countless texts, manuscripts, poems, and obscure references. Clear to me in so many aspects, he remained elusive, full of contradictions. He was an individual before individuality

was even a concept. That probably made him a danger to others as well as to himself. He was possessed of a possibly fatal intelligence. I was in Santa Fe, worried I would go to France only to have him slip through my fingers, bemused and scornful at my attempt to grasp him, hold him, explain him after six centuries, a frail construction that would disintegrate like mist.

There were other reasons.

Andrea was in Albuquerque. I wanted to be in her vicinity, away from the claustrophobia of New York. Albuquerque is only sixty minutes from Santa Fe, all downhill. I had rationalized my need for a sparse landscape, one unknown to me, where I could better imagine what lay in Rainald's mind as he woke to a morning in the 1200s. I wanted to wrench open my mind to his by immersing myself in nature, certain that Rainald had loved his landscape. Forever awkward in any natural setting, I gained comfort from the nearness of Andrea, for I can never walk through a landscape without feeling stalked. Not by animals, or by men. It's something more ephemeral, possibly worse.

Rainald. I'd only recently figured out that was his name. His writing was what first caught my eye. Passionate, visceral, words that spoke more of the body than the spirit. My portrait of him had been etched slowly from anonymous fragments of writing at first, to ripened sequences, linked by a discernable style, but never a name. My sources were as disparate as the words that bound the work to the man. I was slowly piecing together his life when he seemed to disappear. At least his distinctive voice did. Somewhere in the 1320s, though the writing continues, the voice is so altered it's like he'd become inhabited by someone else. I was in here determined to sift through every word, every scrap of paper I had on Rainald before I dared go to the last resource: the actual ground he had walked on, slept on, and, finally, died upon.

Two

Would you look at the sky during the day to see if the moon was full?
And do you blush with every wave of the Red Sea?

Ganymede and Hebe, twelfth or thirteenth century.

The strings of lights hung from the twenty-foot-high ceiling in what seemed an almost random placement. Strangely reminiscent of male genitalia, they also resembled marquee bulbs of theatres on 42nd Street in New York. Familiar, but alienated, displaced and bereft here in Santa Fe, they approximated a *memory* of those lights, of the entertainment and escapism one associates with the stage. They spoke of loss and sadness. Gradually betrayed by time, they would all burn out.

I shuddered involuntarily.

Andrea noticed.

“Félix González-Torres,” she said, then added, “He’s dead now too.”

I stared at the sculpture of lights. A bulb near the top flickered, dimmed, went dark.

“Do you suppose they replace them?” I wondered aloud.

“They must,” Andrea answered.

I needed to be in the sunlight.

“You alright?” asked Andrea, touching my shoulder as we left.

“I’m fine.”

I wasn’t sure I was fine at all. I felt annoyed with Andrea. Memories of James had flooded back with her comment the artist was “dead too.” She had meant dead like James, my ex, who had died of AIDS four years ago. I remember James in terms of three momentous pronouncements he made to me.

“Mallory, I love you. Mallory, I think, no, I *know* I’m gay. Mallory, I’m HIV-positive, and I’ll most likely die.”

We fell in love, we married, we spent six years of graduate school in Boston, then the first two years of my first teaching appointment in New York. As an artist, he was ecstatic to be working and living in New York. That was the neat, easy part. The rest was untidy, uncontrollable. Unlike some, I didn’t blame myself for triggering James’s

gayness. I could hardly blame James. I didn't express anger, I'm not sure I even felt anger when he told me. I've always walked away from the fury of lover's quarrels, the fights. Things are said you don't mean, can never take back, forever regret. I remember feeling shock that I hadn't suspected, followed immediately by the fear of being alone. We both cried a lot but that changed nothing. We parted regretfully, painfully, each trying to make sense of the sudden emptiness we did a free fall through. It seemed impossible to reconcile the rupture that had occurred in our lives, but one day we managed. Our friendship resumed.

When James told me the results of his HIV test, we had been living apart for a year. James didn't know how long he had been infected. That meant I had to get tested. I hadn't contracted the virus. Our destinies appeared to diverge even further. The mixture of relief for me and grief for James cemented our bond, even as he began to physically fade away. One benign sunny day in spring, with songbirds in full mating cry, James slipped into oblivion. Quietly, undramatically, like one of González-Torres's light bulbs, his life extinguished itself with barely a flicker.

I shrugged off the memories. I realized Andrea was anxiously watching my face as I stood motionless in the parking lot, staring out into the landscape, deep in my thoughts. I smiled at her reassuringly.

"It's a great show," I nodded back to the building.

The exhibition, *SITE Santa Fe*, was located in the cavernous space of what had long ago been a brewery. The old suds factory had been reconfigured into an elegant, dramatic gallery space. The show was audacious and compelling, leaving me with a buzz not unlike spending the afternoon in SoHo. I felt gratified and homesick at the same time.

"Santa Fe will never recover," said Andrea as we slipped into the car.

I was beginning to understand what she meant. With a population of only 70,000, Santa Fe had more commercial art galleries than anywhere else in the US other than New York City. The majority of the galleries contained anything from a life-sized cast bronze male hunk, bare-chested in pajama bottoms, priced at \$40,000, to a six-foot eagle landing in a tree. Unconcerned by the conventions of bad taste, the

work was sentimental and blatantly materialistic. People actually bought a lot of this stuff.

The *SITE Santa Fe* exhibition felt like a physical assault in comparison, a dangerous presence hovering on the Paseo De Peralta that ringed the perimeter of the inner city. We headed for the centre of old Santa Fe, called the Plaza. It's a tree-filled square containing lawns that are geometrically criss-crossed with grey brick walkways. An obelisk holds the centre of the park with numerous freshly painted white wrought iron benches offering shady stations for reading or people-watching. Founded in 1610, a dusty outpost of the Spanish empire, Santa Fe remains the oldest capital city in America, retaining the claim of being the first European community founded west of the Mississippi. On one side of the Plaza is the unimposing façade of the Palace of the Governors. Construction on it began the year Galileo discovered the satellites of Jupiter. Although architectural codes are strictly enforced to maintain the historical integrity of the city, it hasn't prevented a two-storey Woolworths housed in neo-adobe from invading the opposite side of the Plaza, its red plastic sign glowering with tacky malevolence at the Palace of the Governors across the lawns.

Andrea and I sat on one of the benches doing battle with juicy beef fajitas, interspersed with swigs of fresh lemonade. There weren't that many people lounging in the square, the heavy tourist season being a month away. Santa Fe's summer population mushrooms with tourists, clogging the streets with everything from mountain bikes to BMWs, the Plaza being everyone's primary destination.

I glanced at my companion.

Andrea was edging elegantly toward her fifties. Fine-boned and tall, her blonde hair parted on the side in a fashionable cut, she seemed barely changed in the past twenty years. Whispery lines at the corners of her eyes and mouth were all that belied her youthful appearance. I noted that Andrea hadn't succumbed to wearing the excessive amounts of Hopi, Navajo or Zuni jewellery most outsiders found irresistible. Her neck, fingers, and wrists were completely unadorned as she perched on the edge of the bench, deftly avoiding the juices that dripped from the fajita. Her white cotton sweater and beige slacks remained unsullied as I dabbed ineffectually with a soggy napkin at my white T.

Her pale blue eyes crinkled in amusement at my futile efforts.

“That’s a lovely ring. Hopi?”

The tourist in me exposed, I felt an embarrassed blush rise up my cheeks.

“Thank you. I bought it in the arcade,” I said, indicating with a nod the front of the Governor’s Palace where Indians sell jewellery. The ring was subtle matte silver with another piece of silver inlaid to form a water pattern. The soldering was completely invisible. It had set me back a few hundred dollars and suddenly seemed incongruous with my blue jeans, sneakers, and spattered t-shirt.

“I prefer Hopi myself,” she assured me.

I stood up to dump my garbage in the bin a few steps away, holding out my hand to receive Andrea’s.

“I’m going to Paris the end of this month,” said Andrea as I returned to sit beside her. She pulled out a pack of Marlboros, offering me one. I shook my head in refusal watching her light up, wondering if I’d ever jettison the desire to feel smoke from that first drag hit my lungs. She exhaled slowly.

“A conference?” I guessed.

“Yes, there’s a whole section on my area.”

“You presenting a paper?”

“Yes, remember my teaching assistant, Stu...?” she paused.

Stu had accompanied Andrea to a conference in New York, where they were both giving papers a couple of years back. It would be hard to forget Stu. Over six feet, full of Kansas drawl and charm, he was Calvin Klein ad material from tip to toe. Smart as a whip, he and Andrea had hit it off extremely well once she agreed to supervise his dissertation for his PhD in psychology.

“Face of an angel, body of the devil,” I smiled.

“The same. Well, we’ve been working on this long piece together, uh, he’s second author, and I’ll be trotting it out at the conference.”

“Is he tagging along?”

“No. He’s bogged down writing his dissertation. He really can’t afford the time.” Andrea raced on. “It’s called ‘Living with the Dead.’ I’m pretty proud of it. We both are,” she corrected herself.

“You still sleeping with him?”

Andrea hesitated, drew on her cigarette, and shook her head.

“No, I ended it a few months back.”

“Did he agree with that?”

“He didn’t have much choice, did he? I’m his supervisor, I call the shots.”

“Even in bed?”

“Even there,” she smiled. “Truthfully, it’s been pretty tense working on this article with him since then.”

“What happened?”

“Between the two of us?” she asked needlessly, hesitating, carefully considering her response. She crushed her cigarette in a clay drainage pot on the patio table. I could see the tension in her hands as she clasped them together, elbows resting on her knees. She stared intently at the makeshift ashtray.

“It was the combination of grievances I’m sure trip up all mentor/student love relationships. As the older woman, and in a way, his boss, I could only be his teacher in the classroom, as well as socially, sexually. It wasn’t his fault. I could just never go to him for advice and at the same time felt I could never say ‘I don’t know’ when he needed me to help him overcome some problem. I frequently felt like saying ‘I don’t care. I’m beyond that.’”

She paused to light another cigarette. I said nothing when she glanced up at me. She continued.

“What worried me most about ending the relationship was the fact we were nine-tenths of the way through this paper I’m presenting in

Paris. I knew it was my best work in years, that there was no possibility of leaving it incomplete, or simply turning it over to Stu to polish. We had to finish the work together. He became emotionally needy. He demanded more credit for the authorship of the paper. I felt professionally compromised.”

“I can understand that. Was he seeing someone else?”

“I never kidded myself that I was the answer to all his sexual needs,” she said drily.

“But you don’t know?” I prodded.

“It was never discussed. No. I don’t think I wanted to know. Not at the outset, at least. Later, it became a way for me to rationalize my way out of the situation. For the first time in years I’d broken through with what I knew was exciting research. Suddenly, that’s all that mattered. It took over my life, leaving very little for Stu. I could see we were at a dead end.”

“How did he react?”

“He was tremendously angry. I’d never seen that side of him before. Oh, he could make snide remarks about someone’s thesis, or have a bit of a temper tantrum about a grade he perceived as being unfair, but this was something else. I was a bit afraid.”

“Of what? Physical violence?”

I found this hard to imagine about Stu, but a guy didn’t have to look like a thug to behave like one.

“I hate conflict. To me, shouting feels like body blows. I’ve never been able to fight, you know that. Any attempts to get to the source of his anger, he resisted. I know I held a lot of power over him emotionally and professionally. I think the combination of losing his influence over me in both domains, simultaneously, was very hard for him to reconcile. He accused me of using him sexually, emotionally, and intellectually. We stopped seeing one another, only communicating by email when necessary. He then began demanding equal authorship on the paper we’d worked on. The final absurdity was when he demanded to be first author and go to Paris to present the work himself. I cut him

loose at that point. Told him to get another supervisor for his dissertation, and to not contact me again.”

There was an air of finality to her tone that suggested I should pry no further.

I risked another question.

“Has Stu challenged you on your decision?”

“He can’t,” she said flatly. She looked up into the sky as if wanting to distance herself from her revelations.

“You involved with anyone?” she asked after a beat.

End of discussion, I concluded.

“No. Only with Rainald. He’s beyond causing me certain kinds of trouble.”

“How’s the writing coming along?”

“Painful. Ask the girl behind the counter at Downtown Subscription News. I’m moping around there at least twice a day. She thinks I’m a guy, by the way.”

She smiled.

“I never said New Mexico was perfect.”

We lapsed into silence. I could tell she was nervous about probing further, but she forged on with the dreaded question.

“You blocked or what?”

“Not entirely, I just feel I’m missing the point about him in some way.”

“What do you mean?” asked Andrea, giving me her full attention.

“It’s just that I’ve done this brilliant job, if I do say so myself, of piecing together the work of a pretty amazing young man. But I keep hitting a wall.”

“Like what?”

“His poetry, for instance. It’s romantic, seductive, witty, sometimes achingly sad.”

“It sounds wonderful.”

“It is,” I agreed. “But when you write poetry...”

“Which I never do,” reminded Andrea.

“But suppose you did. Imagine yourself at dusk, late summer, on your patio, candle flickering in the breeze, pen poised over paper.”

“How about ‘fingers fluttering above the keyboard?’”

“Fluttering, poised, keyboard, paper, it doesn’t matter. So what do you write?”

“How the hell would I know?” laughed Andrea.

“You don’t write about a flower. You write about...”

I waited.

“I don’t know, really. Birds. The sunset?”

“Stu! You write about Stu! How you love him. How you hate him. How you miss him.”

“Whatever!”

“Or don’t miss him?”

“My point is, you don’t write about other people’s love lives, you write about your own. His poetry is about his love life I’m sure.”

“I thought Rainald was a monk.”

“His parents entered him in a monastery when he was pretty young. I don’t think he had any choice in the matter, and I think he left as soon as he was able.”

“He ran away?”

“No, not as a youngster. That was impossible. He’d never have survived. Children were viewed somewhat as non-entities. No, he seems to have left several years later. He did become a monk, there’s no doubt, but he rejected that at some point. Most men entered the monastery as a means to educate themselves. There weren’t many books available then, but the monasteries had more than their share, so religious conviction could be near the bottom of the list in terms of what drove young men to spend all that time in dreadfully restrictive circumstances.”

“Which would make Rainald even more anxious to leave, given that he hadn’t chosen the monastery in the first place,” mused Andrea.

“Precisely. But he had the foresight, the intelligence to make use of the resources he had at hand.”

“Did he ever marry?”

“I’m not sure. He may have. There seems to have been the presence of someone.”

“But no mention of her name in all that poetry?” asked Andrea in surprise.

“Not a woman’s name, no.”

I paused. Andrea continued to look at me.

“A man’s?” she asked finally.

“A ‘brother,’” I answered.

I wanted to treat Andrea to my discovery of a culinary gem called the Corn Dance Cafe, owned and run by the Potawatomi tribe. I went in to make a reservation for dinner while Andrea scanned the menu posted at the side of the entrance. What owner Loretta Oden couldn’t do with

buffalo meat wasn't worth considering, and the scrumptious flavour of her Blue Corn Wild Rice Johnny Cakes lasted way longer than it took to say.

"I could eat now!" Andrea greeted me when I emerged.

We wandered slowly up San Francisco Street to my parked car. The Toyota looked decidedly shabby wedged between its sleek neighbours.

"Why don't you stay over tomorrow. We could drive up to Ojo Caliente, have a soak, an herbal wrap, a massage," I suggested.

I suddenly felt anxious about her leaving. Although I sensed tension in Andrea, I didn't feel it was directed against myself. The source had to be Stu and the trip to Paris. I figured Ojo Caliente would be just the ticket to soothe her anxiety.

"You're becoming quite the native New Mexican," chuckled Andrea as we headed into the flurry of cars imitating rush-hour traffic.

"Beats writing," I grimaced.

The weather in Santa Fe is so predictable even I had stopped listening to forecasts. Throwing a change of clothing in my car we headed north on 285 to Ojo Caliente. The Spaniards described the springs as the "hot eye" of a deep volcanic aquifer. In truth, the springs had been used by Indian peoples long before the Spanish plunder of the Americas began. Ojo Caliente boasts a unique combination of five geothermal waters. The Iron Springs come out of the ground into a large pool, while the even warmer Arsenic Springs are pumped at 113 degrees into individual tubs for long relaxing soaks. The Lithia, Soda, and Sodium Springs are used primarily for drinking in order to relieve any number of symptoms, from depression to sluggish kidneys. I planned to drink all five just to keep my bases covered.

This was my first trip north of Santa Fe, and I was surprised by the lushness of the vegetation. The very porous soil quickly drains the rain during the frequent thunderstorms, which had given me the

impression of a desert climate. In fact the landscape wasn't desert at all. I punctuated the drive with gasps and whoops, totally enthralled by the dramatic shifts from mesas topped by forests of juniper trees to deep gorges slashed through tall tan cliffs. Andrea seemed lost in thought, responding minimally, but by the time we reached the springs she had brightened. We locked our valuables in the trunk, walked to the gate house to purchase our day passes, then proceeded to the women's bathhouse to change into our swimsuits. We decided to have our herbal wraps after soaking in the arsenic pool. The pool is about twelve feet square. You sit on natural stone ledges immersed in the water, rubbing your feet against the sandy bottom. Directly beside the pool a cliff face rises several hundred feet. By leaning back one's head one can watch soft wisps of clouds disappear over the edge at the top of the cliff, while buzzards circle effortlessly like traffic cops. The clientele in the pool varied from people like myself, awkward about the protocol of sharing an arsenic bath with total strangers, to the converted, oblivious to anything but the reputed healing powers of the springs. The heat of the waters quickly quelled my anxiety. Occasionally sipping the cup of arsenic water I'd filled from the tap before I entered the pool, I leaned back into the rocks and watched the clouds and buzzards do their hoe-down in the sky above.

I must have dozed, for Andrea's touch startled me.

"Time for our wrap."

She preceded me out of the pool back to the women's bathhouse, where we were led into a dim room with a long row of tables, some occupied by what looked like mummies. The place creepily reminded me of a morgue. An attendant motioned me to a table, folded my arms across my chest, and proceeded to wrap me in soft cotton until only my eyes and nose protruded. I had to struggle with a sense of claustrophobia induced by the binding and the warmth of the room. The woman left without a word. Just as well, given the restraints on me. "See you in three hours" would have induced near panic in me. The room was so deathly quiet I felt I couldn't even whisper Andrea's name. I just had to imagine her lying there on the next table.

This was a perfect time to meditate, I thought, except I didn't know how. I tend to make mental lists that, given enough time, propel me into a deeply agitated state, which only pacing can release. An unsuccessful attempt to wiggle my toes told me I wasn't going anywhere.

I began to mull over my suspicion that Rainald might have been bisexual, or gay. The irony didn't escape me that the two men most deeply involved in my life, James and Rainald, might *both* be homosexual. Recent scholarship argued convincingly that not only were homosexual men tolerated in the Middle Ages, but in fact same-sex unions through a form of marriage were not uncommon. Heterosexual marriage most often was a means of assuring lineage, the marriage existing in spite of rather than because of sexual or romantic love. The most enduring stories of passionate love beginning with the ancients on through the rise of Christianity in the Middle Ages, were about the remarkable commitment demonstrated by various same-sex couples. The pagan Achilles and Patroclus, Zeus and Ganymede followed later by the Christians Ruth and Naomi, Jesus and John, David and Jonathan; they were gods, warriors or saints.

I recalled stanzas from the collection of poems from the thirteenth-century *Carmina Burana*, which I attributed to Rainald, the rarely available translation of "I Am Already Changing My Mind."

(A): Help me, O God the Father,
 For Death is near!
 If you grant me tomorrow,
 I will become a monk.

(B): O my beloved,
 Whatever are you thinking of doing?
 Council yourself otherwise!
 Do not abandon me!

(A) replies: Your sorrow, brother,
 Moves me to tears,
 For you will be an orphan
 When I am a monk.

I considered it a rather striking piece of writing for the time. You might even say daring stuff for that period. The *Carmina Burana* was turned into a popular, passionate choral work by Carl Orff in 1931, minus "I Am Already Changing My Mind." The poem seems to have changed more than a few Christian scholars' minds against translating or even including mention of the work since its discovery in Germany in a thirteenth-century monastery. It languished seven hundred years

untranslated until 1980, when John Boswell, a gay American academic, shattered the prudish grip of Christian historians.

Later on in the poem, “B” weighs in with some (to me at least) persuasive arguments against “A” joining the monastery, cautioning that the food is lousy, that the wine does anything but flow freely.

If, as I imagine, Rainald is “A,” then who the hell was “B”? Was Rainald successful at dissuading “B” from signing away his terrestrial pleasures? If so, what happened to them? I was reaching an intense need to pace when the attendant began unravelling the constricting cloth. I looked over to find Andrea gone. I felt strangely uneasy. Looking back now, I view it as a premonition. Like faint thunder on a sunny day.

She was waiting for me on a bench by the gate an hour later when I emerged from the masseuse’s grip, a rubbery shell of my former self.

“How do you feel?” asked Andrea, her skin glowing pink. She lit a cigarette as soon as we passed through the portal of health.

“Light of mind, light of body. Wonderful. You?”

Andrea shrugged.

“The wrap was great, but my masseuse was a New Age numbskull.”

“I know what you mean,” I laughed, “Tiffany talked about her period for forty-five minutes.”

“That’s painful,” agreed Andrea.

We headed back down the 285 to Santa Fe. I checked the sky above the cliffs, but the buzzards had called it a day. Thunderheads gave us a menacing frown as we sped toward them.

“‘Living with the Dead.’ You going to tell me about it?”

We were in lounge chairs on my patio sipping brandy. The evening was cool, the air fresh from the late afternoon storm. Andrea and I had

almost single-handedly demolished the larders of the Corn Dance Cafe. Brandy seemed the only suitable punishment.

“I’ve been hoping to,” said Andrea, but she struck me as being tense, somehow reluctant.

“I hate it when people pry about my work. Some people. Tiffany, the masseuse, recommended I see Richard Gere in *The Last Joust*¹ or some damn thing, once she found out I’m a medievalist,” I offered.

“You’re hardly a Tiffany, Mal.”

“I’m waiting.”

“Indirectly, you’re responsible for the paper. Ages ago when you told me about the strong relationship to the dead that people in the Middle Ages cultivated, I decided to try to find links between their practices and contemporary paranormal experiences. Part of it is rather technical – you know – the tests, the data, all that, but I feel we’ve unearthed some interesting parallels between subjects we studied, and stories contained in Germanic sagas of the early Middle Ages. To get to the point, it has been argued, convincingly, I feel, that the idea of Purgatory was just beginning to emerge around that time. Consequently, there wasn’t that much separation between the worlds of the living and the dead. In fact, I’d say there was none. There are many stories of the dead returning to exact revenge, give advice, share meals, write letters and so on. You’re probably quite aware of this.”

“I didn’t know they lacked the concept of Purgatory. That’s fascinating. The dead coming back to visit falls into the creepy category for me.”

“Rather like today, isn’t it? We’ve come full circle. Our post-religious age has dismissed the idea of Purgatory, but we still have visions, dreams full of portent, psychic experiences that echo, perhaps surpass the documentation of similar stories or experiences from the Middle Ages.”

“You’re saying that your case studies today are one and the same as peoples’ in the twelfth century?” I asked doubtfully.

1 This may be director Jerry Zucker’s *First Knight* (1995).

“The circumstances are entirely different, of course, so they can’t be exactly the same, but they most certainly share striking similarities.”

“Maybe your test subjects have read the same texts you have.”

“We screen them rigorously. I don’t believe any can slip through the tests, the hypnosis, and so forth. We’d catch them.”

“Andrea, do you have paranormal experiences yourself?”

“If I told you.”

She said it without humour.

“Such as?”

“Who owns this house?”

“What has that got to do with anything?” I puzzled.

“There’s a curious coincidence,” said Andrea.

“I’ve never met the owner. What’s the coincidence?”

“You know that little cross resting on the mantle of the fireplace?”

I hadn’t thought of it as a cross. Made of granite, its solid circular shape has four raised spokes on it that roughly divide the circle into quadrants, with a circle inscribed in the middle. It was very old, no doubt, but the symbol meant nothing to me.

“It’s the Cathar cross,” Andrea said, the expression on her face grave.

“Cathar... the Albigensians?”

“The heretics.”

“The Albigensian Crusade,” I said, decidedly foggy fragments seeping to the surface of my mind. I’d lost interest in them after a cursory reading of their history. They were an offbeat Christian group that were wiped out in the 1400s. Burned at the stake, tortured. They were described as being the “true Christians,” who lived by the laws of

Christ in a way the leaders of the corrupt Catholic Church had never bothered to attempt. Since most of my research had been based in the northern regions of France and Germany, I hadn't dealt directly with any dark doings in southern France. My knowledge of the Albigensians remained superficial.

"Rainald was probably a Cathar."

Maybe it was the irregular glow of the candle light, but I felt Andrea appeared very agitated. I began to feel apprehensive about the direction the conversation was heading.

"Why do you say that?"

Lighting another cigarette, Andrea slowly walked away from me to the wall, leaning her hip against it, gazing up at the stars, her shoulders hunched against the growing chill.

"I've seen him. I didn't know who he was until I came here to visit you. When you told me about your work, it came together. I knew I'd seen him before."

"What do you mean, you've 'seen' him?"

I stared intently at her back.

"I know you have trouble ...," she paused, searching for the correct word. "Trouble – comprehending – some of the phenomena or situations that I'm involved in with my research."

"But ..."

She turned to me, waving off my protest as she approached.

"No, wait. I know what I'm going to say will upset you. But hear me out. The Cathars believed life on earth was Purgatory. They could envision no place more cruel, more torturous, more unforgiving than earth itself. As a consequence of that belief they discouraged procreation. Why bring an innocent into the world when it could only suffer the horrors of what life had to offer, or perhaps I should say, deny? Same-sex unions were promoted to avoid what they viewed as a disastrous misfortune – the birth of a child."

Andrea stopped in front of me, her distress now obvious to us both.

“James was Rainald.”

I’m sure my jaw dropped open.

“The night before I came here, I was visited, experienced a presence ... whatever term you’re comfortable with ... I thought at the time it *was* James. It had been an exhausting day of meetings, counselling students, grading term papers, the whole drill. It was late afternoon, almost dusk. I’d been lying on the couch in the study reading the newspaper. I guess I dozed off. I woke to my name being spoken. When I opened my eyes, there was James, your James, sitting on the edge near the foot of the couch. He looked different than I ever remember seeing him. His hair was shoulder length, parted in the centre. I wasn’t afraid, who could be afraid of James? He never hurt a thing. What I felt was this deep sorrow emanating from him. I looked away. It wasn’t, as I said, fear that made me turn away. Quite the opposite, I started to cry. I felt so happy to see him, but there was such a terrible sadness at the same time, that looking at him seemed unbearable.”

I could only stare at Andrea. A cold settled in my spine that had nothing to do with the sudden brisk breeze swirling through the darkness that enveloped the patio. She crossed her arms, hands clasping her ribs.

“Then he spoke, he said,

‘Never again will you see
Him who you love so much,
That most beautiful little cleric.

Alas! Poor me!
I do not know what to do,
I am far away in exile,
Without any advice ...
Look for one to find us both.’

Her words immobilized me.

“Those are Rainald’s words!” I finally managed, barely above a whisper.

Andrea ignored me.

“‘Who are you?’ I asked, ‘Are you James?’ I forced myself to face him. Too late. James was gone.”

She slumped into her chair.

I was fighting back tears. I didn’t know whether to believe her or not. Maybe she had become deranged living out here for so long. There were a lot of practitioners of hocus-pocus in these parts, drawn by the mystique ten thousand years of civilization generated. Had she succumbed to flights of fanciful delusion?

“Why do you say he was a Cathar?” was all I could manage.

“The Cathar symbol. It was sewn on his tunic. I understand now it must have been Rainald. But he also was James.”

[...]

Seven

[...]

One tore into the world bloody, screaming, surveyed. One died to an audience. That much I knew about Rainald. But what of the time in between, the years that marked a life, the brief walk from the cradle to the grave where the body was finally shed, discarded, disowned? How does one move from speculation to substantive revelation? How does one capture the ephemera of a life sparking briefly, then flickering out six hundred years ago? These were the questions I grappled with as I lay in bed, unable to sleep. I was physically on Rainald’s terrain, but I was here as the sighted blind, limited to fumbling about his world with my hands, trying to recognize by touch things long grown cold, disfigured, remote.

My night was marked by a fitful sleep, jagged with dreams. I felt I must live in my imagination, my dreams, for that was where I might find Rainald. Stark images cast against grainy backdrops reared up between sleeping and waking. One face was Rainald’s lover, Emmanuel, after the crusaders were finished with him. Having refused to recant Catharism, having refused to return to the Catholic Church, Emmanuel had been tortured. They gouged out his eyes to prevent him from identifying his tormentors. His lips were cut off to guarantee he

could never say their names. Or any other. Rainald's name was reduced to a babble, Emmanuel's face a sightless ruin. The image has the quality of a photograph in my mind, but now it, like all photographs, may be a lie.

How had they met, Rainald and Emmanuel?

I didn't, couldn't, know. Perhaps at Fontcaude, the Cistercian abbey nestled deep in a valley of the Corbières mountain range where Rainald had studied to become a monk. The countryside could almost be mistaken for Tuscany, with the abbey's austere exterior softened by the delicate hues of pink and yellow ochre of the Corbières sandstone. It was a fortress all the same. Beyond the safety of Fontcaude's walls lay pestilence, corruption, perversity. At night, brimming with guile, The Enemy lurked and crept. With dusk came danger.

I knew Rainald had never become a monk, for as his poems indicated, he was "already changing his mind." I was pretty sure what had changed it for him was Emmanuel. Emmanuel, the Cathar, the scholar, the worldly traveller, who, stealthy as The Enemy, had invaded Fontcaude, capturing Rainald's heart. But how had it happened? If people were never allowed to be alone, how could an unsupervised meeting have occurred between the erudite Emmanuel and Rainald, the inexperienced novice? I tossed the idea about like an ungainly medicine ball.

When Martha and I arrived at Fontcaude the next morning, we decided to first look at the scriptorium. To our minds, that provided the best possibility for a chance encounter. As we wandered through the vaulted, airy space, it was easy to imagine Rainald, the copyist, hunched over a manuscript in his writing chair, being discovered by Emmanuel. Perhaps it was here Rainald had surreptitiously composed his first poems, secreting them back to the dormitory to hide beneath his mattress. Had Emmanuel come to study a manuscript, spotted Rainald, paused to compliment the novice on his writing, and arranged a private meeting? Unlikely. The novice's task of transcribing manuscripts was no doubt closely supervised. Nor would Rainald have been the only copyist present. Such familiarity would have been a serious breach of conduct. So let's say they had seen one another there. Rainald had looked up from his copying to find Emmanuel gazing at him from across the room, book held before him, pretending to be

studying a manuscript. Their eyes locked. They came to know one another with a look, not words.

A noisy tour group invaded the space, dissolving my reverie...

[...]

Eleven

[...]

The final word belongs to Andrea. She has the last word on me, on everyone. I found Andrea's letter on the table in the patio. It sat there in the bright morning light, my last day in Santa Fe. The envelope was manila, standard letter size. "Mal" was written in the centre of that beige space, far from the edges, with no address, the writing in Andrea's hand, her script precise, elegant.

I didn't doubt the authenticity of the handwriting until I had read the contents of the envelope. I immediately thought of Martha, with her clever little forger's hands, but I couldn't imagine a motive. No less than four handwriting experts confirmed it was ninety-nine percent certain the writing matched samples of Andrea's I presented for comparison. The chaos of that missing one percent could never be resolved. All of science could stumble on that murky one percent, we just carry on as if it won't.

My last morning in Santa Fe ended with me a mute witness to others' lives, a mere reader of a narrative I had lost control over, had no explanation for, had no methodology available to prove its authenticity.

To accept the facts of what happened is a bald act of faith. I suppose I still haven't made up my mind as to where the truth resides. It is quite possibly beyond the reach of my lifetime. Having said that, the truth will be utterly lost, for nothing can persuade me that I will extend beyond the dust of my grave. The very idea, at age fifty-two, exhausts me. I know I could be running scared at eighty, ready to convert at the slightest hint of that final rattle sucking down my windpipe, but I don't think so. I could never convince myself that this struggle, whether heroic or pathetic, is a mere rehearsal. If I thought it was, I'd skip it.

I have this to add.

The night before I found Andrea's letter, I had a vivid dream, where the photograph of the woman on my desk revolved, or rather, she did, so at last I was able to see her face. It was Andrea. It didn't seem impossible in my dream, in fact it was even predictable. I accepted it as real. No photograph, however, is real anymore. No court of law will accept a photograph as evidence of anything. At long last I'd solved the mystery, only to have another take its place. For Andrea was, indeed, dead.

Twelve

"Mal, what happened to Rainald, to me, was this:

The water in the bathtub is about three inches below the rim. It has been sitting there for most of the morning, the surface disturbed ever so slightly by a slow drip from the discoloured, corroded faucet. The water seeps imperceptibly down the overflow, assuring the level in the tub remains constant. A black piece of cloth thumbtacked over the window blocks most of the light, adding to the chill dankness of the room. I've just received another injection.

I feel like I'm in the centre of an intense solar storm with massive jolts of static jerking through me, altering time, space, linear thinking. I go back and forth between centuries in a flash, a blink. I seem to occupy no real space. I'm outside myself, watching. They left me a few minutes ago. The two men and the woman. I'm getting incredibly drowsy again.

'She recognizes us,' said the woman as they left.

I know this is a bad thing.

I see myself leaving the hotel after my fight with Stu. I'm pissed off. Frightened. Will Stu really confront me in front of everyone at the conference? He seemed angry enough. I get on the subway, but instead of changing trains at Gare du Nord, I conclude the idea of running into a colleague at the hotel is unbearable, so I check everything in a locker in order to go for a drink. The lockers are down a long set of stairs that turn twice before you reach the bottom. The room contains five rows of lockers, blindingly illuminated by banks of florescent lights. As I load

my suitcase into the locker, I become aware of this rather nondescript middle-aged couple surreptitiously observing me from the corner of another row of lockers. She's probably in her late fifties, wearing a cheap cloth coat and a beret. She's wearing black steel-framed glasses, holding a beat-up street map of Paris, that she and her companion pretend to consult when I look up and spot them watching me. He's wearing a tweed jacket and rumpled flannel trousers.

'Burly' describes him in a word. He's talking into a cell phone. They look like tourists, perhaps Belgian. Their curiosity doesn't alarm me. I assume I've caught their attention because I'm well-dressed, alone, seemingly oblivious to the menace of the isolated room. I'm too annoyed with Stu to pay much attention to my surroundings, but of course, looking back, I knew that Gare du Nord teems with petty criminals, pimps, lowlifes. This couple's appearance was too bland to raise my suspicions. I slam the door of the locker shut, load in some coins, grab the receipt it spits out with the combination printed on it, then leave. I go up the stairs and begin weaving my way through the crowd across the main floor of the station when I have a fatal premonition. I feel uneasy about the locker all of a sudden. I search my bag for the locker receipt. I examine it. It has the wrong date on it. It's a used one. That means the combination to my locker is somehow still in the mechanism, available to anyone. I turn back.

The water feels cool at first. By the time it rises to my crotch it seems tepid. It climbs to a level just above my pubic hair. I wait, motionless. I will sink into it. Soon.

'Rainald!'

Not a stranger's voice, but not the voice I want to hear. I turn just in time to see Brother Bernard, totally naked, begin to splash noisily toward me, then dive under the surface. His large body, white, distorted by the swirling river, propels itself toward me, a grotesque, malignant frog. I leap backward as he surfaces beside me, his dripping face haggard, a smile crafted to disguise his cold eyes. The current swirls around my waist, tugging, tilting me toward him, as it laps ineffectually against Brother Bernard's broad wall of a back. I shudder.

'Surprised to see me?' he asks, maintaining his jaunty demeanour, eyes probing, sharp. I can't reply. The danger silences me. What does he want?

‘You could look more pleased, Rainald. I’ve taken extreme measures to find you,’ he says, drawing his hands up across his face, squeezing the water back through his thick mane of grey hair.

I glance furtively at the trees along the shoreline.
No sign of Emmanuel.

‘Your friend’s still sound asleep, if that’s who you’re looking for,’ says Brother Bernard, cupping his hands, splashing water on his face. ‘Ahhh ... so refreshing! You’ve got the right idea, my son, a splendid way to greet the morning. But as I say, you’re obviously a creature of habit!’

‘You’ve found me. How?’ I ask.

I try to hide my fear. He can sense my dismay, but I don’t want him to detect the dread I feel.

‘God guided me to you, Rainald, you may be sure of it,’ he frowns.

His sarcasm scorches the air between us.

‘Smoking embers. I suspect you arrived deep in the chill of night, risked the warmth of a blaze, gambled on avoiding detection by situating yourselves well off the road,’ he says, openly studying my body.

I say nothing.

‘I found you asleep in one another’s arms. A touching sight.’

‘Why didn’t you awaken us?’

‘And shatter such bliss? I would never be so rude. Besides ...’

‘Besides what?’ I interrupt impatiently.

‘It’s you I wish to speak with, Rainald, not your friend. I waited in the underbrush of the riverbank until dawn. I watched you come down to the river. I knew you would.’

‘How?’

'I observed you at Fontcaude taking your early morning ablutions in the hot springs. You romped about like a naked young Bacchus.'

He notes the red rising up my cheeks.

'May I add, you were a sinful little satyr many, many times,' he laughs, looking pointedly down at the water edging the top of my pubic hair.

I turn away from him, mind racing. He means to take me back. Can I outrace him to shore?

'You must return to Fontcaude.'

'That's impossible. I can never go back.'

'But you can, my dear Rainald, you can. All will be forgiven. There will be no punishment, no confinement, I can promise you. You've technically completed your retreat. I shall see to it that you are admitted to the monastery with full privileges, that this unfortunate little history is never spoken of again. I shall protect you, be your special friend.'

I stiffen at Brother Bernard's words.

'My history at Fontcaude is what I want to forget, Brother Bernard,' I say gesturing at the shore. 'My history began the day I left Fontcaude.'

'You'll have a short history, Rainald, keeping company with the heretic Emmanuel. You'll die at the torturer's hand, or the stake, much sooner than later.'

His shadow on the water moves forward, beginning to merge with mine.

'My mind's made up. I'm sorry you've journeyed so far on such a fruitless mission. I shall not be returning with you. Nothing could convince me to go back.'

I say this firmly. I take a step in the direction of the shore. His hand clasps my shoulder. 'There is something else,' Brother Bernard says hoarsely.

He grabs my other shoulder, pulling me back against his body. I struggle, but he's much stronger. He holds me fast.

'I love you, Rainald. You must return,' his voice cracks, unused to pleading. His sex is rising, nudging against the top of my thigh.

'No!'

I try to pull free.

We struggle for a moment, nearly losing our balance on the smooth rocks of the river bed, but Brother Bernard grips me with an angry strength.

I've almost reached the stairs when I see the Belgian couple bound over the top step then head for the street exit. They're carrying my suitcase. I race across the floor, colliding with people, pushing them out of the way, I fly out the door, catching them just as they reach the curb. 'What the fuck are you doing with my suitcase?' I yell at them, making a grab for it. They're surprised, but not intimidated. I don't notice a car has pulled up beside us in the ensuing tug-of-war for the suitcase. The woman opens the back door of the car as I try to wrestle my bag from the man. He's by far the stronger, maneuvering me until my back is to the open door. Suddenly he releases his grip on the bag, which sends me staggering backwards. He throws himself at me, propelling me onto the back seat of the car. The woman pins my arms as he slides in beside me. He punches me in the face repeatedly until I lose consciousness.

'You could learn to love me, Rainald,' says Brother Bernard urgently, lightly kissing the back of my neck, then pulling my head back by my hair.

I cease struggling, and stand indifferently, cold to his rising passion. I turn my head to the side as Brother Bernard tries to kiss my cheek. He tightens his grip about my waist, his other hand groping me, fingers penetrating me beneath the water.

'You'll love me or no one,' he hisses into my ear.

He pulls me violently to him, entering me. It's useless to fight. His violence blandly disrupts the surface of the water around us. He spends himself quickly, pulls out, turning me to face him, fingers painfully digging into my flesh. His face comes up against mine. His mouth covers mine, trying to force his tongue in me. Attack repulsed, he pulls his head back, eyes gloating with triumph.

'Emmanuel's dead,' he says coldly.

The whole thing has lasted less than two minutes. They drive to the outskirts of Paris. Each time I start to come to, the man punches me in the face. I feel the blood pouring from my nose, my mouth. The top of my jacket grows soggy, dark. Their accomplice parks the car in a garage attached to some kind of industrial building. My eyes are puffing up from the blows, I'm too groggy to walk. They carry me through a side door of the garage into a chilly, dark, oversize room, dumping me onto a concrete floor. They huddle above me, whispering to one another. The room seems to be empty. Their voices produce stealthy echoes. The woman leaves, returning a few minutes later. The burly guy pulls me up to a sitting position, then pulls my jacket down off my shoulders, exposing my arms. The woman crouches beside me. I feel something jab my bicep. In less than a minute I've succumbed to the injection.

Can I believe him? He's capable of saying anything. He catches the doubt in my expression.

'I bashed his head in with a rock,' he sneers.

I thrash about in his arms until we lose our balance, falling beneath the surface of the water, still locked together. Kicking blindly at Brother Bernard's groin, he hangs on, equally intent at immobilizing me. Suddenly he lets go, only to grab my hair as I struggle to break the surface for air. He regains his footing, keeping my head under the water by pulling down on my hair with both hands. I thrash under the water, frantic to breathe. I'm about to black out when Brother Bernard pulls my head above the surface, kicking my legs out from under me as I try to stand. I vomit water.

They come back into the room. All three of them.

'She knows our faces,' says the woman, probing my face with her foot. She's wearing dirty white tennis shoes. They smell. I'm lying on the floor, immobilized by the drug. I'm conscious, but I can't move or speak. The bathroom floor is filthy, littered with cigarette butts. A cockroach crawls out of a discarded paper cup near my face.

'Kill her,' says the accomplice quietly, then leaves.

'Come with me!' he screams.

I sputter, up to my neck in water, my lungs burning. I can only shake my head.

He pushes my head beneath the water.

A tiny voice calls.

'Goodbye! Goodbye!' it sings.

My lungs burst.

My limbs begin to wave slowly in the current like reeds in the steady flow of the river.

They each take one end of me, the woman at my feet. They lift me to the edge of the tub, then let me slide beneath the surface of the cold water. The man raises his foot over the edge of the tub. He's wearing a heavy black boot with thick soles. It descends through the water, sinking heavily onto my chest, pushing me to the bottom.

We stare at one another.

He presses down.

He begins to boil. A cluster of bubbles bangs about his face. I realize it's the air being forced from my lungs. He releases the pressure. Water sucks into the vacuum. He bears down again. Fewer bubbles. He releases the pressure.

I die.

Black silk Donna Karan jacket. Gap blue jeans. Calvin Klein jacket, new, worn once. Konica camera, semi-automatic. Black cotton Armani shirt. Assorted t-shirts. Black leather belt with a silver buckle. No jewellery. Passport. Airline ticket. Traveller's cheques, some cash. An expensive leather suitcase.

My speech.

Not much to die for is it?

Most of it ended up in the *Marché aux Puces*, the flea market in northern Paris. Except for the Donna Karan jacket. It made it all the way to a small shop in Istanbul's Old Quarter bazaar. It was too hard to get the blood out, I guess. In any case, it still hangs there, a pathetic relic of my life. They threw away my passport, my airline ticket. You already know this. Things aren't so bad. But I should give you a tip concerning my well-being. You know how you pace about when you're mentally debating a problem? And kind of wave your arms about, or jab at the air? You've knocked me over twice. Daytime, no problem, I'm not around then. But keep those elbows in at night.

I don't expect I'll manage to write you again, so don't think anything bad has happened if you don't hear from me, it's just that there's a vast waiting list of people wanting to make contact. Most just run out of time, the same as on earth, where the person they are trying to communicate with dies before a message can be sent or received.

I've opted out of reincarnation. I regard it as too risky, too chancy. One has the choice just to knock about, or to go back. Rainald got pretty lucky. It took 642 years, which is another drawback to the whole procedure, but I was right, he did come back as James. You don't know you've come back, not until it's over, until you're dead again. James didn't know he was Rainald, nor did Rainald know he was James.

James felt incredibly fortunate to have spent time with you. You must understand. You have no control over when or who or what you come back as. There are risks. James gambled and came as a magpie. Sadly, he was mortally wounded by two teenagers with a pop gun in almost no time, but not before he paid you a visit. Remember those herbs Stu brought you in Santa Fe? The ones trashed by the magpies? One of those magpies was James. He says he still can't figure out whether he was jealous about Stu sleeping with you, or, Stu being such a hunk, you sleeping with Stu. In any case, he apologizes profusely, posthumously.

I haven't solved all your mysteries. By the time I do, if I ever do, you'll likely be long dead. Mysteries, like photographs, just fade away, until no one asks the question any more. Who was that? What did it mean?

Emmanuel. His connection to me through you was, it seems, too tenuous. James knew only of Rainald, not Emmanuel. We can only

speculate if Emmanuel ever solved the mystery of Rainald's disappearance. Your theory that he adopted Rainald's name as his own, writing under that name as a way to honour his lover's brief life seems plausible, so I wouldn't abandon that path of investigation just yet. On the other hand, the real substance resides in the writing of his that you possess. You may have to content yourself with that.

I have little to say for myself, about myself. In many ways, the letters Stu forged in my name and sent to you were accurate. The facts at least. The motives were perhaps not quite so simplistic, but the results remain the same. It's not that I changed, became another person. I lost my ambition. One can't afford that, Mal, not ever.

Love,

Andrea.

P.S.

I know you'll be intensely skeptical about this letter. I long to provide some sign that would convince you it really is from me. I can't.

KLM

Ticket issued to:

Mallory Ryder. July 18, 1998.

Apt. 4A, 466 Bleecker Street.

New York City, N.Y.

U.S.A.

Depart: New York Flt. 103. 16:10 Arrive: Frankfurt 8:35. Confirmed.

Depart: Frankfurt Flt. 1406. 12:15 Arrive: Istanbul 16:48. Confirmed.



Video still from *Rendez-Vous*, 1997

RENDEZ-VOUS

1997, 13 minutes, colour;
“In *Rendez-Vous*, Campbell introduces a new character, the pansexual expatriate performance artist Colleena. It turns out there’s more than a passing resemblance between Colleena and characters Campbell has explored in previous tapes. *Rendez-Vous* is a form of archaeology, providing a different context for some of Campbell’s previous characters such as Robin and the Woman from Malibu. The tape portrays the aging Colleena trying to settle the past as she forges ahead to the dubious harvest of the millennium. *Rendez-Vous* is a low-tech, back-to-basics work, where the biggest budget item is baguettes...” (Vtape).
Colleena: Colin Campbell;
Maurice: Marcus Klee;
Suzanne: Susan Ehrlich.

Colleena (voiceover):

My name is Colleena, and we have a rendez-vous. I’m a performance artist living in the south of France thanks to the generous support of my patron, the Italian count Dix-Ten. There are rumours that Dix-Ten may have bought his title. I don’t know. I don’t recall my cousin Miranda ever calling Dix-Ten a count when he was her benefactor many years ago. All I do know is that I am most grateful for his support, and that I can bear whatever he demands in return. When you think of it, things that are free are probably worthless. You already know something about me, though you probably think that you don’t. We shall see.

[Title: Mildred]

Colleena:

I never did like Mildred. As sisters, we were as different as night and day. “But Colleena,” she used to say, “we’re so similar: you live in the south of France and I live in Southern California.” As if there were any similarity! There’s absolutely none, absolutely none. She would never come here, of course, so I had to go to Malibu, be dragged around the shopping malls – Culver City, Fox Hills, Century City, it was endless. She never tired of them. And she was always critical about the way I dressed. “God, Colleena,” she’d say, “do you have to look so butch?” Butch! Moi? It’s ridiculous. I mean, I’ve never said this to anyone in my life, but I thought Mildred looked like *she* was in drag half the time, that ridiculous bleach blonde hairdo and fake Ray-Ban sunglasses – it’s just the worst. But I said nothing.

It’s an exciting day today: the gardener is coming. I don’t even know his name. I’m rather hoping, though, that it starts with “M” since I’m working my way through the alphabet.

Bonjour, monsieur! The door’s open but just give me two minutes.
Merci! [Aside:] He’s cute!

You may come up, monsieur. My name is Colleena. Et tu?

Maurice:
Maurice.

Colleena:
Maurice.

[Title: Robin]

Colleena:
I have to confess, I always liked my younger sister, Robin, better than Mildred. Robin was trying to improve herself even as she was trying to improve the world – a little bit like Princess Diana. She started off as a Xerox operator, and let me tell you she was top-notch. Just the best.

[Robin in clip of *Modern Love*:
You guys are always just carrying on. I have so much work to do, if you can just lay off the smart comments. Pick up your pencil and bring me over here some more paper, I'll never get this report done otherwise. Oh, the machine's jammed now.]

Colleena:
And Robin had an artistic bent, as well, and I like to think that I had something to do as an influence on her as an older sister. It was back in the '80s and she formed this punk band called Robin and the Robots. Well they became very well-known, very successful: magazine articles, talk shows, and she even did a nude centerfold for Larry Flynt's *Hustler* magazine.

[Robin in clip of *Bad Girls*:
My hands were shaking as I, you know, tried to undo my bra.

Photographer in clip of *Bad Girls*:
Robin, you know, we don't have all day, come on.]

Colleena:
Say what you will about Larry Flynt, Larry and Robin had freedom of expression at the very core of their being. Of course, it was understandable she would do a centrefold because Robin had all the looks between us girls. She really did, she was an absolute glamourpuss. Ah, goodness, you should have seen her on those talk shows. And then suddenly, just at the height of her career, she walked away from it all

and joined CUSO. Her first assignment was at the Betty Ford Clinic in California – oh my goodness, she just worked with the top people in the entertainment industry, well like Liza Minnelli, Liz Taylor ...

[Elizabeth Taylor in clip of *Bennies from Heaven*:
Elizabeth Taylor Hilton Wilding Todd Fisher Burton Burton Warner.]

Colleena:

And, of course, Robin always understood my need to celebrate and express my innermost creative feelings. Whereas Mildred, I think, was jealous.

[Title: Pied à Terre]

Colleena:

I don't know if I've ever told you that I maintain a pied-à-terre in Toulouse. It's right outside the Saint-Sernin Basilica and every morning I watch the swallows swoop and circle the Saint-Sernin tower – it's a delightful, delightful sight. It was after watching the swallows one morning that I devised the small dance performance piece called "The Dance of the Swallows." And I really had in mind that the lead role could be played by my dearest friend and expatriate, Suzanne.

Bonjour, Suzanne!

Suzanne:

Colleena, ça va?

Colleena:

Come join me. Bien, très bien. Ça va?

Suzanne:

Ça va.

Colleena:

Ça va ça va ça va. Now Suzanne, about this performance, please say you'll be the queen of the swallows.

Suzanne:

Colleena, I don't feel like being a swallow today.

Colleena:

Suzanne and I are such kindred spirits, which is rather unusual. Me being a multimedia artist and she being a linguist. A linguist – I call her “the word witch.” Well not to her face, if I have to tell the truth, ha ha.

[Title: Sisters]

Colleena:

Suzanne, I think it's, um, D-17, I-A, about four kilometres. Oh, you're doing a lovely job darling, I'm sure we'll find it. We're on our way to Roquefort – the caves. Oof, I'm trying to forget what today actually means – it's a distraction. Mildred disappeared twenty years ago today. You know I think that Mildred, in fact, was jealous of me. She pretended to misunderstand the success I had in the south of France. It was jealousy. She had really turned rather strange after her husband fell off the mountain in the Himalayas, it was a terrible accident. But she became more secretive, more inward. So when they phoned me that she had disappeared in the Mojave Desert, I wasn't that surprised. Next right, darling! I don't know what happened, it was a travel agent's mistake, a faulty connection, a bad connection, bad French, I'm not sure how it happened but anyway I ended up in the desert in Utah not the desert in the Mojave looking for Mildred. Of course I never found her – wrong desert, wrong state. She never was found and was presumed dead. But what I did find – oh those motorbikes, don't you hate them? – what I did find in the desert in Utah was very, very interesting, mes amis, but that is the subject of another rendez-vous avec Collenna. Au revoir mes amis, au revoir! Turn right darling! Merci beaucoup!



Video still from *Deja Vu*, 1999

DEJA VU

[Mildred in clip of *The Woman from Malibu*:

They began to descend together. They came down to about 22,000 feet, then I saw them fall. They slipped. Down they went, 3,000 feet, to about a height of 19,000 feet.]

Colleena:

Oh, Mildred! How completely terrible! You must have been utterly frantic. So you called the rescue party?

[Mildred in clip of *The Woman from Malibu*:

It was 4 p.m., it was too late for me to do anything.]

Colleena:

Of course, dear, of course.

His name was Daniel. He was twenty-one, and a real looker. He was a scientist in search of the ruins of the ancient cliff-dwellers. He was on leave from the Museum of Natural History in New York, when he disappeared in the desert in Utah. He had about two weeks' supply of food, two pack horses, and some bedding when he left. That was twenty years ago. He was searching for ruins. I was searching for my sister Mildred, whose life – without exaggeration – was in ruins. Daniel knew where he was, but I didn't. I thought I was in California – the Mojave Desert. They'd called me in my home in the south of France to tell me that Mildred had disappeared. Well, Utah, Mojave, Béziers, nothing really sounds like it's spelled, so when I booked my ticket for the Mojave in Béziers I ended up in Utah. How? I'll never know. And of course that's where I met Daniel. He didn't know that he'd be declared missing, and of course, well, neither did I.

Mildred watching her husband fall off a mountain in the Himalayas was like watching her future die. I know I may sound cold but Mildred was hard to warm to. She was so ... clinical.

[Mildred in clip of *Hollywood and Vine*:

I almost ran over Liza Minnelli today.]

1999, 18 minutes, black and white/colour; "*Deja Vu* is a narrative about the histories, fictions and deceptions of three sisters, all played by Campbell. The emotionally distant Woman from Malibu and the permanently star-struck Robin are revealed as Colleena's elder and younger sisters. Colleena takes the viewer back twenty-five years to reveal long lost conversations with her sisters. Are these dialogues real or imagined, fact or invention? Colleena's grip on the present may be as fragile as her delusions about the past. *Deja Vu* is a tape about the anxiety of aging coupled with unsettling revelations from the past that profoundly impacts on Colleena's present circumstances" (Vtape). Colleena: Colin Campbell; Gloved Hand: Margaret Moores; Angel: Nigel Ruse; Cameraperson: Almerinda Travassos.

Colleena:
God, Mildred, how?

[Mildred in clip of *Hollywood and Vine*:
I had the *National Enquirer* on the seat beside me, with the Farrah Fawcett-Majors headline. I just glanced at it when suddenly she was right in front of me.]

Colleena:
Darling, I've warned you about reading while you're driving!

[Mildred in clip of *Hollywood and Vine*:
I slammed on the brakes and I managed to stop the car. I rolled down my window and I tried to explain to Miss Minnelli that I had just glanced at the Farrah Fawcett-Majors headline, but she just smiled and didn't seem to want to hear my explanation.]

Colleena:
She was probably on her way to the clinic ... those big sad eyes.

[Mildred in clip of *Hollywood and Vine*:
She's not as pretty as her pictures!]

Colleena:
That was the last conversation I ever had with Mildred, the last time I ever saw her. Odd, isn't it? The last time you ever see a person and you end up talking about absolute trivia.

[Mildred in clip of *Hollywood and Vine*:
The bones of the pony skeleton will be bleached very white by the sun. It is very hot here today in the motel, but I have brought plenty of water with me. I am hopeful that today I will find one.]

Colleena:
When they searched Mildred's motel room, they found a videotape that she'd left behind. It was almost like a suicide note. That's how they knew to look for her in the Mojave. When I watch that videotape of Mildred, I can't help but think that she'd already lost her mind. Losing her body was simply the next step.

Angel:
I'd say that Colleena's just a bit past her prime. I mean, I'm happy to appear in her performances, and she has nudged my career along. But

those get-ups? I mean, I do have my standards. Besides, I'm way more interested in doing porn – it's way more money.

Colleena:

I can't imagine what Angel said about Daniel and I. I know it sounds like I fell for a man twenty years my junior and yes, he was handsome and charming, and yes, I'm not above kicking up a bit of sand in the desert – believe me! We'd felt attracted to one another and maybe even felt desire. But Daniel gave me something so precious: he gave me hope that Mildred was still alive. You see, Daniel suggested Mildred had planned her own disappearance. Think about it! The glamorous widow, ruthlessly harassed by perverts in the media after her husband's death, she simply had to escape. I really wanted to believe Daniel. I told Angel that Daniel and I were lovers. I guess that's what I really wanted. But lies are their own trap. Angel admires me so much, I can't possibly tell Angel about my lies. Nor about the letter. In fact, I'm really afraid to tell *anyone* about the letter.

I've decided to recreate that moment where I discovered Daniel in the desert. I've flown this marvelous cameraperson over from Toronto to my château here in the south of France. Of course, she's completely enthralled by the script. So, I thought maybe what I'd do, is just climb up a sand dune and peek over the edge.

Cameraperson:

Is there sound?

Colleena:

Well I think it's pretty quiet in the desert, sweetie.

Cameraperson:

Do you say anything?

Colleena:

Oh – well I think I say “yoo hoo!” Something like that.

Cameraperson:

But you find this guy Daniel instead, the one who's missing?

Colleena:

Well you see he doesn't know he's missing and neither do I know he's missing. I think everybody's there looking for Mildred because I think I'm in the Mojave, not Utah.

Cameraperson:
So where's this guy Daniel, where is he?

Colleena:
Well he's dead, I mean that was twenty years ago, darling.

Cameraperson:
I mean the actor.

Colleena:
I can't be flying actors back and forth between Toronto and France, this is strictly low-budget, darling, with the budget cuts and everything with the Harris government.¹

Cameraperson:
So how do you find a guy who's not here?

Colleena:
We'll just have to fake it.

Cameraperson:
Fake a real person?

Colleena:
Well that's why I hired you, darling, you're the best!

Cameraperson:
Great.

Colleena:
I never thought I'd end up living in the shadow of my sister Robin. I mean, after all, I taught her every trick in the book. Well ... almost.

[Robin in clip of *Modern Love*:
When he said "water sports," I thought he meant swimming. I certainly never knew that people did things like that!]

Colleena:
Oh for God's sake, Robin, spare me the details.

¹ The Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris (b. 1945) slashed spending in Ontario while in power from 1995 to 2002.

[Robin in clip of *Modern Love*:

And all those little machines and instruments ...]

Colleena:

I'd say, if you think Lamonte Del Monte's in love with you, you're dreaming.

[Robin in clip of *Modern Love*:

And I always thought a "French tickler" was some kind of bilingual joke.]

Colleena:

Honey, you're young, you're beautiful, you're talented. He's using you for your body – he's a cad! Look, I phoned Anne Murray this morning to see if this joker's really working on her TV special and she's never heard of the guy! Besides, you know all these guys in show business are queer! Drop him, honey. He'll break your heart.

[Robin in clip of *Modern Love*:

Oof, now I'm all bunged up.]

Colleena:

Think of your career!

[Robin in clip of *Modern Love*:

If he likes kinky sex like that, it's ok by me. 'Cause I really love him.]

Colleena [looking at pore strip]:

Oh my God!

Colleena:

Mildred was always so morbid. Morbid Mildred, morbid Mildred. Not Robin. Perhaps that's why she became such a big star so young, so incredibly fast. I was always caught in the middle. Not anymore – Mildred's dead. Daniel was wrong about that. Like it or not, I've moved to the front of the line. I'm next. Death doesn't take vacations, darling, not even in the south of France!

Gloved Hand (voiceover):

You don't know me, but let me tell you what I know about you. You're the middle of three sisters: Mildred, Colleena, and Robin. The dumb fuck. Mildred's husband falls off a mountain. Mildred collects the

insurance. Mildred disappears in the Mojave – disappears so good that nobody can goddamn find her! Seven years later, she's declared dead and bingo! An arty little life in the south of France for Colleena on Mildred's life insurance, working the performance art circuit. You were big in Béziers, but it don't play in Montpellier! Lucky you have that cushion to fall back on. You gals are real cute. Too bad about Mildred's hubby taking that big fall. Too bad if he was pushed! You're a good-looking gal, Colleena, I get itchy all over just thinking about you. Only I don't know if it's you, or your money. So let's find out. Bring forty thousand francs in an Intermarché bag to the olive stand at the Pierre Sémard market this Saturday, 10 a.m. If you want to keep Mildred out of the slammer, don't stand me up. You heard me right – Mildred's alive. She's kicking up her heels in Tuscany.

[Music: Orff's *Carmina Burana*]



Video still from *Dishevelled Destiny*, 2000

DISHEVELLED DESTINY

2000, 28 minutes, black and white/colour; “Why do artists come to Sackville? Various reasons. Nefarious reasons in some cases!” So muses Colleeta Sackville-West, unofficial historian of the Tantramar. Art Star, who left under a cloud has returned twenty-five years later to discover his artistic legacy collecting dust in the vault of the Owens Art Gallery. Although Art Star and Colleeta Sackville-West don’t meet, Colleeta has plenty to say about Art Star. *Dishevelled Destiny* is an affectionate glance back through the often irreverent and amusing stories that populate Sackville’s colourful art history. The tape ends at the beginning of the millennium, with the Tantramar Marsh (Tantrum, for short) brooding menacingly about her future” (Vtape). Colleeta Sackville-West and Art Star: Colin Campbell; Green-Haired Boy: Dean Lisk; Art Historian: Gemey Kelly; with Fredette Frame and John Murchie.

Colleeta (voiceover):

Tantramar is a harsh mistress, her secrets guarded, hidden, best unspoken. It was a sultry June evening one thousand years ago when Tantramar fell from the heavens. Now, at the end of the millennium, she hunches her shoulder to the wind, stubborn, relentless, moody, unpredictable. Her beauty has been the subject of poets, her vengeful violence the text of final prayers. Time piles creases on her face still scarred by the violence of her birth. Tantramar. I call her “Tantrum” for short.

Her horizon commences as a smudge, a mere whisper of tangibility, with the blurred smile of a faintly familiar temptress. At dawn you wander into her elusive embrace but be careful: her proximity is deceptive. You may find yourself in the watery clutches of the Fundy tides instead. The millennium is ending. Will Tantramar remain or move on? Courtesan to the twentieth century, she pauses, she hesitates, she ponders her fate, and the fate of others. Only a fool would meddle with Tantrum.¹

John Murchie (on radio):

This is CHMA 106.9 coming to you from the heart of the heart of the heart of the Maritimes: New Brunswick, Sackville.

[Music: Flying Burrito Brothers’ “Sin City”]

Colleeta:

I’ve never disputed the lore surrounding the birth of the Tantramar. A marsh seems like a simple concept – a benign act of nature. I see people wandering the marshes every day, in fact for centuries they’ve plundered her succulent mushrooms, taken away the heady cow dung for their rock gardens, or perhaps found a sea shell from another time and another era. But I should introduce myself. My name is Colleeta, Colleeta Sackville-West, unofficial historian of the Tantramar. Now I’ve never been accepted as such in Sackville, perhaps because I’m

¹ The Tantramar is a region of tidal salt-marshes that includes the town of Sackville, New Brunswick.

“from away,” as they like to say here. I’m treated as a bit of a mirage. And most appropriately. People “from away” had best mind their P’s and Q’s.

[Music: Flying Burrito Brothers’ “Sin City”]

Art Star:
Sin City, the Flying Burrito Brothers.

[Title: Former Residence of Alex Colville]

[Music: Bob Dylan’s “Ballad of a Thin Man”]

Green-Haired Boy:
May I help you?

Art Star:
I have a reservation.

Green-Haired Boy:
You must be Art –

Art Star:
Star! Is my room ready?

Green-Haired Boy:
Yes, sir.

Art Star:
Oh and bring me a bottle of –

Green-Haired Boy:
Dom Pérignon, sir?

Art Star:
Moosehead, actually.²

Colleeta:
A historian is bound to the truth, unsavoury though that may be on occasion. Artists have always been attracted to Sackville for various

² Brewery founded in New Brunswick in 1867.

reasons, nefarious reasons in some cases. Why do they come? Well, for the university art department, for the Owens Art Gallery, for the Swan Pond – how would I know why they come? I used to see them wandering the campus in their smocks and their berets – lovely sight! – now it’s all cargo pants and headsets. They come and they go. Mostly go. In some cases, good riddance. Hoity-toity does not wear well here.

[Music: Suede’s “The Next Life”]

Art Historian:

Good afternoon and welcome to a special screening of *Sackville, I’m Yours: An Interview with Art Star*. It marks the silver anniversary of Art Star’s arrival in Sackville, or, as some would have it, his four years of packing to depart. I’m glad so many of you could be here today to celebrate this special occasion. So, without further ado, roll the tape.

[Art Star in clip of *Sackville, I’m Yours...*:

Oh, now... what was it that you wanted to know? My name? I thought everybody knew. My name is Art Star. Art. Star. Yes. Uh, Sackville ... living and working in Sackville? Well, uh, Sackville is a ... it’s a great little town, it’s really, uh, Sackville is, uh, living and working it’s uh, a great town. Just a great, a great little town. Yes, oh yes.]

Colleeta:

Adjective frenzy, I was thrown into adjective frenzy, there’s just no other word for it. Imagine skywriting right over the Tantramar! It was unbelievable – a very Toronto kind of thing, maybe even New York, you know brash, in-your-face kind of thing. But I should set the stage as it were. You see, there are two histories here. There’s the written history and then there’s the other – that’s my mission: the other. Now most of you probably associate performance with the Owens Art Gallery “Animal Crackers” night, but did you know that twenty-five years ago there was performance at the Owens Art Gallery? It was a concert put on by the fine arts students on appliances, common household appliances: toasters, toaster ovens, pop-up ovens, Mixmasters, oh! I can’t remember what all there was. It all began with the kettle coming to a boil. I still get shivers when I think of it – the slow, rising scream of steam. I can still see Herménégilde³ – what flair, what timing, what genius. Starting at chop instead of mix and then drifting off to purée.

3 Herménégilde Chiasson, key figure in the arts in New Brunswick and alumnus of Mount Allison University (b. 1946).

The concert left me in an absolute tizzy. It made me feel totally liberated. Well, didn't everyone? Well, think of the history: the Alex Colville legacy;

[Title: Colville Legacy]

Lawren P. Harris, son of one of the Group of Seven;

[Title: Group of Seven]

It was branded on our lives here.

[Flashing title: Branded]

But I digress, I was talking about the skywriting art of Fredette Frame, and she can speak perfectly well for herself.

Colleeta:

Ok, is it too warm – should I open a window? I have so many windows overlooking the marsh, whatever ... Now where are you looking? The camera's going to be there, darling, so you just stare there, it's alright. I think I might do a little profile of you. Profile, darling! Your hair looks fabulous. Twenty-eight hairdressers – is it Hedy's? She won't tell me, I'm working through the list. Ok, darling. Just relax – are we silly or serious today? Serious, I can tell. Alright, it won't be just a moment. Now just keep focused on the camera – oh the John Hammond behind you looks beautiful.

Fredette Frame:

I really don't enjoy talking about my work, I just do it to be cooperative. I've been making public art since I was in high school. As a kid growing up in Saskatoon, I remember seeing my first Richard Serra there – I'm a big fan of his work. It's always a small world, that of public art, I mean it's never a mass thing. It's similar to the opera.

[Art Star in clip of *Sackville, I'm Yours...*:

I've had a tuna fish casserole at the President's house. The President – the president of the university, yes ...]

Colleeta:

That was a John Hammond painting I posed Fredette in front of for her portrait. John Hammond was the first director of the fine art

department – a marvelous painter! But did you know he used to paint backdrops for photographs for Notman in Saint John?⁴ He was quite the laddy. Travelled the entire country. Everyone adored him, of course. Unlike Art Star. Art Star blew in here one day from LA. To say he didn't fit is an understatement. He muddied the artistic waters then he left under a cloud. Let's just say he wasn't encouraged to linger. Not that he didn't have some cohorts here and, like Art Star, most of them have left.

[Art Star in clip of *Sackville, I'm Yours...*:

And, uh, Art Bank, of course, is a good friend of mine. Well, yes, he used to live in Sackville. I can't understand – no I don't know why he would want to leave, yes, it *is* puzzling, I can't think what could lure you out of this place?]

Colleeta:

Art Star was not the only person at the centre of controversy. The Owens Art Gallery was and still is the centre of the art scene. Art Bank's decision to renovate the gallery had many people genuinely concerned. Art Bank – that was Art Star's nickname for Luke Rombout. Now some people wondered if Mr. Rombout had not been tainted by his association with Art Star. After all, there was that trip to Toronto by Mr. and Mrs. Rombout where Mrs. Rombout came back a blonde! "She's gone Hollywood!" I heard more than one person sputter. Mr. Rombout carried on with renovations with a very firm hand, for which we were deeply grateful. This is not to imply we are just a bunch of happy Bay of Fundy clams. Dissension is everywhere!

John Murchie in front of a John Hammond! I think it's quite inspired. Now we're just going to do your portrait, John. Fredette left us a little martini so we'll just hurry right along. Now I want you just to look at the camera, be relaxed, be yourself – oh that is just lovely.

John Murchie (on radio):

It was crossing my mind, I wonder exactly what it is that a place like Sackville, New Brunswick – notwithstanding that we're at the heart of the heart of the heart of the Maritimes, notwithstanding that fact – you just wonder what it is that a place like this has to do to get on the map,

4 William Notman (1826–1891), Scottish-born Canadian photographer who had studios across North America.

to be more than a whistle-stop on the way to Prince Edward Island. You just wonder, what do you have to do? It was big-time, yesterday's news here in New Brunswick. The headline in the *Times & Transcript* was, "Falwell says: demon behind Lilith Fair. Evangelist says music festival namesake dwelt among the demons. The Reverend" – I guess you can get away with saying that, the Reverend – "Jerry Falwell's newspaper, which previously claimed that a popular Teletubbies character is a gay role model, now asserts that the all-female Lilith Fair concert tour is named for a demon." Blah blah blah blah blah blah. Actually, I don't know anything much about Jerry Falwell but certainly from this article he sounds like a roaring idiot. But he makes the news.

Colleeta:

Art Star understood that myth was more enduring than history – the mythier, the meatier, so to speak. Art Star also understood that a persona endured longer than a personality, so he invented himself right out of the blue. Some found it pretentious, but I was merely amused. I don't think Art Star has any intention of being relegated to the last century, let alone the previous millennium.

[Art Star in clip of *Sackville, I'm Yours...*:

Sackville is my home. Sackville – uh, what can I say? I'm yours.]

Art Historian:

Well, thank you so much for coming. Please join us for a small reception at Mel's Tearoom. I invited Art Star to come but his busy schedule – [earthquake]

Excuse me – aren't you, weren't you, Art Star?

Art Star:

The same.

Art Historian:

But you're here, why are you here?

Art Star:

I came to say –

Art Historian:

Say.

Art Star:
Like I once said –

Art Historian:
Said.

Art Star:
“Sackville, I’m yours.”

Colleeta:
The millennium is here! Tantramar is leaving!

The Tantramar *did not leave!* There are many others who have – most, unfortunately. John Thompson, one of Canada’s brilliant young poets, “a man covered with the bites of his imagination,” to quote John himself.⁵

5 English-born Canada poet (1938–1976). He taught in the English department at Mount Allison University from 1966 until shortly before his death.

Subject: message forthcoming
Date: Saturday, October 6, 2001
From: Colin Campbell

Unpublished.

hello everyone

george hawken will be sending everyone an email regarding keeping up to date with my present circumstances. your messages have been uplifting, outrageous, funny, inspiring, and all so very welcome and touching. much as i want to respond personally, i'm afraid i can't, so we'll have to communicate at a bit of a remove for a while. i find it too tiring to talk on the phone, write emails, etc. this is a bit boring for me, because i find i'm already running out of things to say to myself.

suggested forms of communication:

skywriting

little planes with banners trailing behind (colleena would be thrilled – but give her enough time to get gussied up and find her opera glasses)
cards (terribly conventional, i know)

letters – even more arcane. if you find you can't actually write anymore, printed messages are fine, or letters clipped out of newspaper ads.
colleena has taken up channeling – but keeps getting carol channing on her cell phone at some spa in palm springs – so this needs to be tweaked a bit.

in any case, your good wishes give me strength and stir my determination to get back in the mix. i miss you all.

love

c.



Production still from *The Woman from Malibu*, 1976

Colin Campbell: Chronology

Campbell is born in Reston, Manitoba on June 15, 1942.

Campbell completes his Bachelor of Fine Art degree (Gold Medal) at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg from 1962 and 1966, and his Master of Fine Art at the Claremont Graduate School in Claremont, California from 1967 to 1969.

Son Neil is born to Campbell and Janis Hoogstraten in 1967.

Campbell teaches at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, from 1969 to 1972, where he makes his first video works. Tapes from this period include *Hickey* (1972, withdrawn), *Self-Hickey* (1972, withdrawn), *True/False* (1972), *Edge* (1972, withdrawn), *I've Got Rhythm/I've Got Natural Rhythm* (1972, withdrawn), *Sackville, I'm Yours...* (1972), *Smile* (1972, withdrawn), and *Real Split* (1972).

In 1972, solo exhibition at the Mezzanine Gallery, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax.

Campbell moves to Toronto in 1973; soon after, he briefly spends time in New York. Meets Lisa Steele (1947-), who would become a close collaborator, friend, and partner.

During his four decades in Toronto, Campbell teaches at the Ontario College of Art (now Ontario College of Art and Design University) and, beginning in 1977, in the University of Toronto's Department of Fine Art. He was instrumental to the establishment of their Master of Visual Studies, which began accepting students in 2003. In addition to video production and scriptwriting, over the years he also taught painting and drawing, among other classes.

In 1973, solo exhibition at A Space, Toronto.

In 1974, solo exhibitions at A Space, Toronto, and Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, NY. Included in group exhibitions at the Musée d'art Moderne de la ville de Paris and at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

In 1975, solo exhibition at Art Metropole, Toronto. Included in the group exhibition *Video Art*, which tours the United States.

In 1976, exhibitions with Lisa Steele at Art Metropole, Toronto; at Artspace, Peterborough, Ontario; and at SAW Gallery, Ottawa. Also exhibits at the Aarhus Kunstmuseum in Denmark.

Tapes from this period include *This Is the Way I Really Am* (1973, withdrawn), *Janus* (1973), *Shoot* (1973, withdrawn), *Relationships* (1973, withdrawn), *Correspondence I* (1974, withdrawn), *Correspondence II* (1974, withdrawn), *This Is an Edit/This Is Real* (1974), *Love-Life* (1974, withdrawn), *I'm a Voyeur* (1974), *Secrets* (1974), *California: Myth/Reality* (1974–75, withdrawn), *Play Off* (co-dir. John Watt, unfinished), *Hindsight* (1975), *Insight* (1975, withdrawn), *Foresight* (1975, withdrawn), *Passage* (1976, withdrawn), and *Flight* (1976, withdrawn).

In September 1976, Campbell and Steele move to Los Angeles and live in a house in Venice Beach, where they stay until May 1977.

Tapes from this period include: *The Woman from Malibu* (1976), *The Temperature in Lima* (1976), *Culver City Limits* (1977), *Last Seen Wearing* (1977), *Hollywood and Vine* (1977), and *Shango Botanica* (1977). Campbell appears in Steele's *The Scientist Tapes* (1976).

In 1977, Campbell's work is shown with Steele's at ThomasLewallen Gallery, Los Angeles. His work is also included in documenta 6, Kassel, Germany, the Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil, and the Southland Video Anthology, Long Beach Museum of Art, California. He is also included in a group exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

In 1978, appears in the large-scale group exhibition *Kanadische Künstler* at Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland, and in the group exhibition *In Video*, which tours Canada. Presents his work at Art Metropole, Toronto, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

In 1978, Campbell makes the tapes *Rat's Country* and *Modern Love*.

Campbell produces the artist's books *The Woman from Malibu* (1978) and *Modern Love* (1979), both published by Art Metropole. An excerpt from *Modern Love* is published in the "Transgressions" issue of *FILE* (4, no. 2, fall 1979). Decades later, *Modern Love* is included in the 2002 exhibition and catalogue *ars photographica: Fotografie und Künstlerbücher* at Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen, Germany.

In 1979, exhibitions at Cabana Room, Toronto; Arthur Street Gallery, Winnipeg; Foundation for Art Resources, Los Angeles; University Art Museum, Berkeley; and Canada House, London, UK. Meets John Greyson (1960–), who would become a close collaborator, friend, and partner.

In 1980, Campbell co-founds (and for many years acts as board president) of the Vtape video distribution centre, which continues to distribute his work. That year he also represents Canada alongside Pierre Falardeau/Julien Poulin, General Idea, Tom Sherman, and Lisa Steele at the Venice Biennale in the exhibition *Canada Video* curated by Bruce W. Ferguson. He also presents his work in New York in *Canadian Video at P.S.1* and at the Museum of Modern Art in their Video Viewpoints programme, where he gives a lecture entitled “Video: The New Audience.” Campbell’s work is shown frequently at MoMA over his lifetime.

Other 1980 exhibitions are held at the Cabana Room, Toronto; Pumps, Vancouver; Libra Gallery, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, Ghent; and Le Plan K, Brussels. Campbell performs the work *Peripheral Blur* in Toronto and Montreal.

In 1980, makes the tapes *Bad Girls*, *L.A. Flex*, *He’s a Growing Boy – She’s Turning Forty*, and *Peachland* (withdrawn).

In 1981, his work is included in the Video/Video section of the Festival of Festivals (later known as the Toronto International Film Festival) and the group exhibition *Persona* at the New Museum, New York.

In 1981, makes the tapes *Dangling by Their Mouths*, *Conundrum Clinique*, and *Snip Snip* (with Rodney Werden).

In 1982, scripts and performs *I Am Already Changing My Mind* with Margaret Dragu in Toronto. His work is included in the group exhibition *MANNERSm* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the large show *OKanada* at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, and in the Biennale of Sydney. Campbell’s work begins to screen regularly in specifically gay and lesbian contexts such as film festivals.

In 1984, performs *X’s and O’s in the Dead of Winter* (with Margaret Dragu) in Calgary, *My Wireless Is Running* (with Margaret Dragu) in Toronto, *A Piece of the Action* (with John Greyson) in Toronto,

and *You Taste American* (with John Greyson) in Montreal. Also acts as performance curator for DANCEWORKS, Toronto (1983–84), Moment'homme, Montreal (1984), and A Space, Toronto (1985–87).

Curates *Toronto Video* programme for the Rio Biennale in Brazil (1984) and *Video Tapes from Chile and Brazil* for the National Gallery of Canada (1985).

In 1985, shows all over Canada as well as in Buffalo, Houston, Long Beach, and Amsterdam. *Six Days of Resistance* takes place in Ontario in April.

In 1986, he exhibits at YYZ Gallery, Toronto, and at 49th Parallel, New York, and his work is shown on “Ghosts in the Machine” on Channel Four in the UK. He performs in *You Taste American* (with John Greyson) and *Pure Sin* (with Tanya Mars), both in Toronto.

Tapes from this period include *White Money* (1983), *The Woman Who Went Too Far* (1984), *No Voice Over* (1986), *Bennies from Heaven* (1986), *Black and Light* (1987), and *Fiddle Faddle* (1988).

In 1987, he has a retrospective at Video Inn in Vancouver, and appears in the first two exhibitions inaugurating The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto: first *Toronto: A Play of History*, then *From Sea to Shining Sea*.

In 1988, his work is included in the inaugural exhibition of the new National Gallery of Canada building by Moshe Safdie.

In 1990, retrospective exhibition (and catalogue), *Colin Campbell: Media Works 1972–1990*, was organized by curator Bruce W. Ferguson for the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 1990 and toured to the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; The Power Plant, Toronto; and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

Makes the short 16mm film *Skin* (1990).

In 1991, Campbell is included in a group exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

In 1992, Campbell is included in the Istanbul Biennial.

In 1993, Art Metropole publishes a three-videotape collection of his work curated by Peggy Gale (with an accompanying booklet) titled *Colin Campbell: Invention*. He also participates in group exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, and his work airs on Vision Television in Toronto.

In 1994, Campbell exhibits widely across Canada, at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio, and at the World Conference on AIDS in Berlin.

In 1995, solo exhibition *Colin Campbell: Early Tapes* at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

In 1996, Campbell receives the prestigious Bell Canada Award in Video Art. That summer, he makes the little-seen tape *Un mois dans Languedoc* on his first of several trips to France with friend Sue Ehrlich.

In this period, makes the tapes *Rendez-Vous* (1997), *Deja Vu* (1999), *Dishevelled Destiny* (2000), and *Que Sera Sera* (2001, with Almerinda Travassos).

In 1997, *Rendez-Vous* is presented at the “So High That I Could Almost See Eternity” Symposium of Performance Art organized by the Owens Art Gallery and Struts Gallery, Sackville, New Brunswick.

In 1998, Campbell is a key artist featured in *Picturing the Toronto Art Community: The Queen Street Years*, curated by Philip Monk at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto.

In 2000, *Dishevelled Destiny* is commissioned for and premieres in the exhibition *Sackville Addresses* curated by Emily Falvey at the Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, New Brunswick. That year, Campbell is also included in the wide-ranging survey exhibition *Magnetic North: Experimental Canadian Video* curated by Jenny Lion at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Campbell died of cancer on October 31, 2001, in Toronto, and is greatly mourned by friends and colleagues.

In 2003, Vtape commissions new works inspired by Campbell by Johannes Zits, Sara Angelucci, Adrian Kahgee, Daniel Cockburn,

Nikki Forrest, Leslie Peters, and Mike Hoolboom under the title *The Colin Campbell Sessions*.

In 2006, Mike Hoolboom's feature-length film inspired by Campbell, *Fascination*, is released.

From 2008 to 2012, a posthumous retrospective exhibition (and catalogue), *People Like Us: The Gossip of Colin Campbell*, was mounted by curator Jon Davies for Oakville Galleries, Ontario, and tours to Saint Mary's University Art Gallery, Halifax; Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, New Brunswick; OBORO, Montreal; and Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa.

Vtape releases the ten-DVD remastered box set *Dangling by Their Mouths: The Collected Works of Colin Campbell* in 2008.

Steele and the University of Toronto organize the symposium "Luminous Bodies at Nightfall" on January 18, 2009, at the Gladstone Hotel.

Campbell's works are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art (New York), National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), Art Bank (Ottawa), Vancouver Art Gallery, Canadian Cultural Centre (Paris), New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Museum of Modern Art (Ghent), Kunsthalle (Berlin), Winnipeg Art Gallery, Oakville Galleries, and many others. His work has also screened at dozens of international film festivals not listed in this chronology.

Appendix: John Bentley Mays, Lines on Video Art

1

The short passages which follow are derivative, contradictory, fragmentary, and serious. Thus, they accurately reflect both the state of my knowledge and understanding of video art and the state of the art itself. They are for Dan.

Published in *Only Paper Today* 4, no. 3 (undated [early 1977]), 6-7.

2

Video may be the first artistic activity in history to refuse absolutely to “develop.” It is an art in perpetual infancy, and shows no signs of settling down to a limited repertoire of prescribed styles, subjects, techniques, unless the refusal to narrow the range of possibilities is itself video’s definitive style.

3

Video emerged fully formed, like Athena from the head of Zeus, and immediately began disclaiming (by its disingenuous charm, its accessibility, its rusticity) kinship with its tyrannical father, TV. Video art remains, however, fascinated by the formats and image patterns of commercial television; this fascination is manifested in its avant-gardist parody of TV and the most deliberate avoidances of any resemblance to its style (usually described as “slick”). Video art is stuck in a permanent Oedipal crisis.

4

I am certain that all the videotapes I have seen have not been tedious. I could easily name some that greatly engaged me during the actual time of watching them. But the recalling of them is tiresome. I am sure that this (which is certainly not familiar in my experience and recollection of other artistic modes) is not unique to me. I doubt if many members of the small, but literate and devoted, audience of video would say that this art-form is, on the whole, “interesting.”

5

I cannot imagine anyone saying that *some paintings* are interesting, but that *painting* is boring; yet such is the case with video art. Perhaps, for those who say such things, the utter crassness displayed by

commercial TV is as ineradicable as a congenital birth defect. Perhaps they feel more than ordinarily obliged to point to video's sorry origins and pitiable defects. Thus will the smallest glimmerings of genius and the slightest genuine accomplishment seem worthy of applause. Most serious criticism of video art never loses the tone of humane, utterly serious condescension which we reserve for the handicrafts of earnest imbeciles.

6

Most video artists whom I have met or read things by or about seem intelligent, and are often charming, and even have the appearance of being innocent. I suspect that this innocence – this apparent freedom from the morbid intellectuality of art history, freedom from the enslavement made necessary by the technical sophistication of television production, freedom from all constraint save “imagination” – is what makes video artists so attractive as targets for the art trade magazines. For two hundred years, the priests of high seriousness (professional critics, historians, academics) have been beating the bushes for the rude swain who in the flow'ry dell doth all hearts gladden with his untutor'd song. Because there is quite a lot to be gained by appearing to do so, many ambitious people in each of the last several generations of Western culture have tried for the rude swain award. If rejected in favour of better-fitted candidates, they dropped out or sought another route to high-culture recognition, or became prophets. I am at this time trying to find out whether Nam June Paik actually became a prophet without going through basic training as a rude swain; I believe he did, thereby reversing the normal pattern of avant-gardism.

7

The artistic ideologies of modernism (whether “left” or “right” in political orientation) have in common an awestruck, even mystical fascination with machines and industrial commodities. It is therefore not surprising that war, the supreme display of technological organization, should have produced the metaphors most frequently encountered in those totalitarian, hysterical scraps of mania called “manifestos,” from Marinetti onward, through the surrealists, expressionists, conceptualists, etc. What is more surprising is that the appearance of video, the art medium of the peace and love generation, was heralded both as a means of creating the fuck-palace of stupefaction (the “global village”), wherein everything we call freedom and love would be eradicated, and as a weapon in the arsenal of the SoHo Pentagon. Nam June Paik declared: “TV has been attacking us all our lives, now we can attack

back.” And Paul Ryan, author of a piece of trash called *Cybernetics of the Sacred* [1974], tells us (among other things) that “having total control over the process of video puts you in direct conflict with that system of perceptual imperialism called broadcast television...” The struggle, then, is their TV sets against our monitors; our Portapaks against their big, ugly cameras; and so on. This use of the language of serious political struggle to describe nothing more dangerous than a panty raid or a game of cops and robbers in daddy’s backyard is shameful and degraded. It is also dangerous inasmuch as it leaves that impression that a painless escape from the oppressions of the present has finally been engineered (by Sony Corp., no less): where therapy, gurus, acid, Grace Slick, and astrology have failed, video will succeed. The vulgarity of all this would be overwhelming were it not so utterly familiar.

8

The imagery and particular style of process in every new medium are grounded in the biases, ideas, and ambitions of the artists who have acquired access to the medium in question. An ascendant class will favour a manner of artmaking that expresses its optimism, its new power and prestige, the dislike it feels for its ignominious past. Artists demoted from places of power and prestige will find ways to declare their anger and outrage against the demoters (of the history of modernist art). Because their rebellion was triggered by hurt pride and not by a sense of outraged justice, the déclassé intellectuals and artists of this century and, later, the bohemians of the postwar era, found it remarkably easy to adapt to ruling-class expectations once the pain had been removed by money, the best painkiller around; then they were able to play out their anger harmlessly and to even greater profit. Much of the best art of the 1950s and 1960s was produced by artists who had sold out, but who still felt anxious. The generation of artists who acquired Portapaks, however, seems to possess neither pride to be hurt nor fundamental social loyalties to be disrupted nor basic intellectual loyalties to be offended nor the desire to rise above idiosyncratic isolation nor that intense interest in the world that can, under certain circumstances, give an artist access to the deeper problems and needs of his fellows, and the normal anxiety of such awareness. I base these observations on the imagery of the videotapes I have seen.

9

Video is essentially a medium answering to the pastoral mood within bourgeois ideology. You don’t need talent, you don’t need experience, you don’t need technical expertise or even intelligence to make a

videotape. Anybody can do it, just like sex and neurotic routines (the central themes of video). In videoland, as in Arcadia, there is no such thing as “good” because there is no such thing as “evil.” (The most horrible thing you can say about a videotape is that it is “boring”; a mere slap on the wrist.) There are no rules; nor are there appropriate subjects. Far less are there inappropriate subjects. Arcadia: the world of video, either as a kosmos *produced* by video technology (as in the eschatologies of McLuhan and Ryan) or as one *anticipated* by the medium’s imagistic preoccupations: the naked, vulnerable bodies; the games and rites of childlikeness; the painful memoirs and long lyrical passages; the fantasy of an endless day in the technological rec room. Like all utopias, however, the ones offered by the video artists are empty wishes, and are (because unobtainable, infantile, and regressive) completely undesirable. They also function to repel discriminating attention to the artworks which promote them. This is hardly a new tactic; it is common to all self-aggrandizing, but intellectually intimidated, creative projects.

10

Video represents an art which has developed among persons who are preoccupied neither with serious aesthetic or moral questions, and, therefore, we find a resistance among both the makers of video art and its audience to such words as “good” and “bad.” A new terminology has developed to cover the styles of response to video: a psychological, “value-free” language has replaced an ethical/aesthetic one. Videotapes are “boring,” not “bad”; they are “interesting,” not “good.” The language of this criticism, because it has no ethical valence, because it avoids speaking from a position of commitment to ends beyond art, because it fails to take into account the full complexity of artistic production as human production (and a production of what we know as human) – is *itself* extremely tedious.

11

It would be easy to say that the adjective “boring” is just camouflage for “bad,” and does not really effect what is desired: the rescue of video art from the history of art and from the evaluative criticism which creates and sustains that history. But I am not sure. Despite the enormous range of subjects video treats, there is a surprising narrowness of emotional range, and this empty variety is certainly more easily dealt with as a psychological, rather than an aesthetic, phenomenon. Perhaps, in the end, video art will be viewed as evidence for a peculiar psychopathological syndrome which afflicted a remarkable number of

younger artists in the late twentieth century – a pervasive and pathetic boredom – and not as an aesthetic occurrence at all. Perhaps all the attempts to include video among art objects and processes – attempts now being made with great vigour by critics, curators, historians, and the artists themselves – will collapse, as it becomes clearer what videotapes are: symptoms, tics. I am not convinced that videotapes are aesthetic structures at all.

12

It may be that there are no pure (non-referential, non-symptomatic) aesthetic structures. I am inclined toward this view myself, so tend to see a thing in terms of the information it yields. The information video art yields about the world is incorrect, since it assumes the inconsequence of choice within the world, the unconditional freedom to choose the aesthetic subject with no regard to political or social imperatives. This methodology leads to the creation of tapes which are psychologically poverty-stricken, and which offer little or no nourishment for sense and sensibility, and no information at all. I assume that only the truth in all its naked ambiguity and complexity is interesting, worth choosing, worth giving time and voice to; I do not believe video artists share this assumption.

13

At the time of its introduction, video art was presented by its prophets as the ultimately democratic medium, as the free art and life form that would displace or at least seriously address the massive oppressions of bourgeois civilization. Nine years or so later, we are able to see videotapes only in situations resembling monastic libraries: the monitor is stationary, an attendant is usually required to handle the delicate cassettes and to operate the very expensive and eccentric playback equipment. The situations are quiet galleries and reading rooms and audiovisual archives, confined (I suppose entirely) to large urban centres. Video has become the art form most difficult to see, study, and appreciate. Most knowledge of it depends on hearsay and the often-misleading descriptions given of specific tapes and performances by the critics. Ordinary working people have no opportunities to see video art except at specially arranged “viewings.” Video has thus become an art form for students and the unemployed, and for artists; a very unstable audience indeed. It should be noted that this audience includes some of the most potentially revolutionary persons in contemporary culture, a point most video artists seem to have ignored.

14

Video art, more than any preceding form, is dependent upon the *immediate* technological, social, and ideological conditions of its birth. Had there not appeared a market glutted by too many TV sets and TV production units, portable video recording and editing equipment would never have been developed. Were imperialist civilization to be replaced by a more humane, less narcissistic, less bored, alienated and obsessed society of persons, many art styles would disappear, and the entire medium of video with them. If there is ever a widespread resurgence of ethical engagement and moral seriousness among artists, and if this resurgence takes concrete historical, revolutionary form, video, the instant recorder of surfaces, will fade into insignificance, and writing, which is more than any other medium capable of complexity, resonance, and urgency, all that is required by committed intelligence, will immediately reassert itself. Then writing, and all art, will disappear as society itself becomes the principal work of art of its people, who will have regained the hunger for reality that contemporary art, artists, and mass culture have forgotten.

15

Both as a medium, and in its structure of imagery, video symbolizes all that is impermanent in human existence. Its people are naked and vulnerable; its objects are in the process of being destroyed or transformed; its subjects consistently feature the temporary nature of reality itself. Inasmuch as it serves to discredit the ideology of the absolute permanence of bourgeois conditions, insofar as it shows the failure of contemporary society radically to increase the common good, video serves an informationally and psychologically important purpose. This potential advantage, however, is undercut by video's reduction of the viewer to a passive spectator of a version of the transitory which is either hermetic, or very personal, or tricky visually. Thus, the critical, negating potential of video is itself negated, rendering it just a novel, and unarresting, form of entertainment. This situation could be reversed were video artists to demote their equipment from an omniscient eye to the status of an appliance; and allow the video monitor to be what it is: a prop.

16

There is no future for video art, because there is no future for the exhausted images and strategies which preoccupy video artists. Obsolescence is the price they must pay for renouncing the commitments appropriate to their class, and to their medium. Neither is

there a history for video art. There is only a technology, a fantastically destructive economic and social environment (which feeds video artists their images), and the experiences, symptomatic, chaotic, and misbegotten, of the artists themselves. Video has no future and no history because its present reality has been wholly expropriated by the collective hallucinations of contemporary bourgeois culture. At this time, a video art devoid of empty personalistic fantasies, the fraud of “documentary objectivity,” or the lie that reality is the surface it presents is *almost* unthinkable.

17

The artist who is the exception to all my put-downs is Darcy Lange. Video breaks forward from its past and assumes a genuine present in the Hummer Sisters’ production, *The Patty Rehearst Story*.¹ It may well turn out that the Hummer Sisters have brought video home to itself, to the truth of its potential as prop. We have in their production an image of what revolutionary theatre can be, what critical consciousness in art can do, when it leaves aside the contemporary preoccupations with utopia, religious obsessions with technology, fears of Walter Cronkite; and opens itself to lucidity and irony, and with intelligent and appropriate forms of contempt.

1 The Hummer Sisters were a Toronto-based performance troupe then consisting of Bobbe Besold, Janet Burke, Marien Lewis, and Deanne Taylor. *The Patty Rehearst Story* premiered in 1976 at the VideoCabaret Theatre Club.

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Notes on the Type

More Voice-Over is set in Eames Century Modern, a Clarendon-derived serif family. Designed by Erik van Blokland, Andy Cruz, and Ken Barber, it was released in 2010. Influenced by the aesthetics of mid-century American designers Charles and Ray Eames, the typeface balances iconoclasm and functionality.

Sans serif elements are set in LL Unica77, released by Lineto in 2015 and drawn for digital typesetting by Christian Mengelt of Team'77 in collaboration with Maurice Göldner. Mengelt used the original drawings for Haas Unica, first released for Bobst Graphic/Autologic systems in 1980.