



Faculty of Art

1996

Life & life support systems: Zines, nets & outlets by artists — the late '70s & some now

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Suggested citation:

Doyle, Judith (1996) Life & life support systems: Zines, nets & outlets by artists — the late '70s & some now. Fuse Magazine, 19 (5). pp. 23-33. ISSN 0838-603X Available at <http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/1907/>

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life & life support systems

zines, nets & outlets by artists--

the late '70s & some now

by judith doyle

preface.archive

The old
warehouse
burned
furiously.
And with it my
matches.
—Patti Smith &
Tom Verlaine,
The Night,
Aloes Books
1976, London.

In a dark space made close by the crush of people, reading after performance after art band took stage; in between were film strips—scratched castoffs from the trim bin of pop cinema, spun by Martin Heath, the archivist film DJ par excellence, on his rattling 16mm projector. It was a hot night in May 1979, at 466 Bathurst St., one of the potent array of self-funded venues and publications set up in Toronto in the late '70s. They formed brief allegiances and working

crews, using borrowed office machines and low or no-rent spaces to create telecommunications networks, storefront window exhibits, film and performance venues, programs in bars, photocopied publications and distribution networks for books, films and videos. Now, these working methods proliferate again in an environment of cutbacks and constraints.

This network of short texts—reminiscences,

quotes, opinions—taps into this rich vein of Toronto history and activity, as a start for a longer project. It is also the first stage of a website I am developing. I hope it will be accessed as an archive and rendezvous point, not an artifact that “makes us history” through selective closure. But the reality of using the web is less like surfing than wading—up to your eyeballs—in a sea of junk mail. The good stuff is

buried deep in cybersilt. At best, the hypercommercialized Internet is an adjunct to our local, embodied contexts—word-of-mouth grapevines, rented buildings and small-run printed matter. Perhaps we can use the web, critically, as a cross-referencing tool, one among many circulation systems linking people, ideas, images, forgotten and out-of-print texts, anecdotes and forwarding addresses.



Martin Heath in the projection booth at the 317 Spadina Ave. Rear CineCycle, June 1991. The front wall of the booth had not yet been built, allowing a full view of his projectors. Photo: John Porter.

foreword.grants

It seems improbable that we suffer from a "lack of history." Perhaps, instead, we suffer from a lack of articulated histories, any history which is not constructed from within the narrow confines of an "art" discourse, within the confines of state-funded documentation and promotion. Perhaps it is not the history we lack, but an acknowledgment and interest in art practices and art politics that stray too far from the cultural mandate of the status quo.

—Dot Tuer, "The CEAC was Banned in Canada," *C Magazine*, 1986.

There is a strange calm as artists watch the immolation of government cultural funding in Ontario by the politically ascendant right. Other issues, like past and recent censorship, triggered more vocal and coordinated actions. Why hasn't a broad-based artists' coalition emerged to oppose the cuts yet? In this era of "workfare" purges when subeconomic babysitting gigs are prosecuted as social assistance fraud, does it seem outrageously self-interested to request, accept or mount a spirited defense of arts grants? Is it shock, guilt feelings, or a "lay low and weather the storm" sense of resignation? Or have artists have been making do with next to nothing for so long, nothing doesn't seem so big a stretch.

In the context of cuts, the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) awarded a \$75,000 "Venture Fund" grant to Bravo!FACT this year for a TV series of ad-length minidocumentaries "about" art. Most of the jurors who will dole this money out to producers will be CHUM-CITY staff. The projects will be screened in gaps between international flicks that are available for rent in any video store. Bravo! will placate CRTC regulators about CAN-CON requirements, and simultaneously avoid showing longer, independent film and video by Ontario artists. OAC's role in this project brings to mind 1980, when the Ontario Arts Council gave an indirect "grant" to the Ontario Censor Board, to pay censorship fees for the Funnel Experimental Film Centre. The OAC has, reluctantly or enthusiastically, long been in the business of brokering the arts through an array of government and corporate agendas. Now, as the reigning Conservatives and aristocratic benefactors headed by the Chalmers family pull out of OAC, artists pause before leaping wholesale to the defense of an arts bureaucracy that, by any analysis, isn't always accountable to artists.

Recent histories published by artist-run centres give scant attention to self-funded cultural practice, mostly noting it as a form of cultural collateral that registers as "deferral" on the line-items of grant applications, used to validate the next round of funding requests. The fact that artists are deliberately working outside



the subsidized model is minimized at best, and frequently dismissed. Except for the creatively or administratively impaired, the oddballs and sociopaths, self-funded publications and venues are portrayed as stepping stones for young artists and writers on the road to stable, subsidized careers and programming structures, and as fresh veins of cool new blood for the corporate culture milieu. This myth echoes through granting agencies, that rationalize themselves as social service stations en route to full participation in the culture industries. It has been internalized by even the most non-commercial artists, who reference their subsistence and practice in terms of civil-service unions, social service agencies, and nation-building bureaucracies.

Arguably, state funding plays a minor, though significant, role in the meager finances of most artists. The real funding bases for marginal and oppositional culture are volunteerism, hobbyism and do-it-yourselfism. Much of this art circulates through a network of microdistribution entities that are localized, transitory, embodied, and opposed to vertical integration and economies of scale, the monopoly mechanisms of corporate culture. The artist-run centres have internalized corporate and bureaucratic models, and this process has been actively encouraged in successive restructurings of cultural funding programs, as they adapt to power. Maybe it's time to own our self-funded production and distribution, and to include it in our cultural analysis.

We live in a mechanical age. It is an age of steel and electricity. Motors and carbon lights have come to be as familiar to us as horses and candles used to be, until we have to become a mechanic to-day in order to be of any particular use to society or ourselves. We cannot be happy and be simple any longer. We have been converted into strange forms, run on the electric principle, and controlled by the pushing of a button. If we appear to go wild sometimes and cut wide figures down the middle of the road, it is because we have pressed the wrong button. It is not safe to trust ourselves on the street for fear we shall suddenly dash off without anyone at the switch. Nobody is safe any more.

marketing.colony

The money [the US networks] earn from their shows in Canada probably wouldn't cover Disney/ABC boss Michael Eisner's annual bonus; one post-Superbowl, 30-second commercial for *Friends* earns the US network nearly as much as an entire season of one sitcom on a Canadian network.

— John Haslett Cuff, "Television," *The Globe and Mail*, July 15, 1996, p. C1.

Canada is a small market for corporate culture monoliths like SONY, Disney and



Time-Warner. Its importance is ideological. The success formulas of cultural conglomerates are being promoted. These are vertical integration—the corporate structure that maximizes profit through control of all aspects of research, production, promotion, distribution and spin-offs—and economies of scale—the strategy of maximizing profits by saturating the market with the largest possible number of units of a cultural product at once. Although Canada isn't a player in this superheavyweight Olympiad, our funding agencies haven't

spearheaded the defense of alternative models. Bureaucrats at film funding agencies wear their best business drag while meddling in the scripts and all aspects of production of local films, supposedly championing the commercial viability of these "properties." But these are quasi-moguls; their imitation-corporate overlordship occurs in a another, miniature universe from mass-market profit margins, because Canadian cultural producers never had access to the mass culture distribution system, which is controlled in Canada as elsewhere by an ever-smaller elite of US-based monopolies and their Canadian print and electronic counterparts, like Hollinger, Thompson and TorStar, that are openly hostile to state-culture funding and protectionism.



Left & below:
from a facsimile
transmission
series from Judy
Rifka in NYC to
Rumour
Publications in
Toronto, 1978.

equipment acquisition

Artist-run centres have also internalized market-driven metaphors to somehow rationalize our continuing existence.

The money comes and the material purchased becomes obsolete (through use) in several years. The programme established or furthered by the equipment previously purchased is now a form of symbolic capital invested by the (centre) and the funding agencies. Requests for upgrading go out, emphasizing the invested aspect, pointing out changes in technology and outlining how technological improvement will enhance the equity resident in the documentation and artifacts produced by the previous and continuing programme. The cycle starts again...requests, funds, obsolescences.

— William Wood, "This is Free Money?," *Whispered Art History: Twenty Years at the Western Front*, ed. Keith Wallace, Arsenal Pulp Press, Vancouver 1993, p. 182.

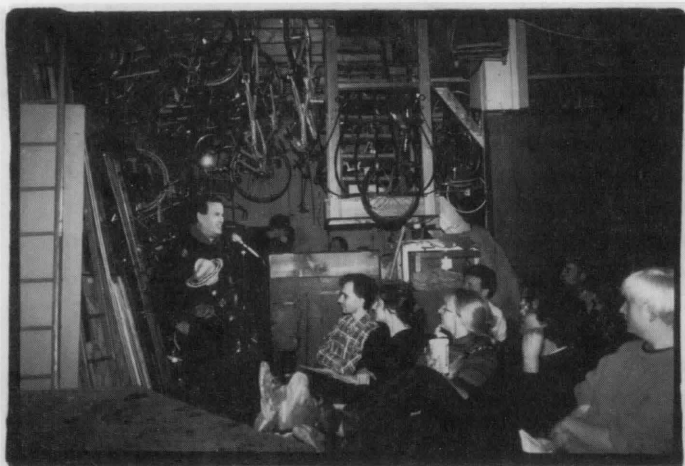
The reciprocity between cultural funding and the accumulation of collateral assets unfolds in the activities and maintenance of the artist-run equipment access centres, and in those of the cultural agencies. Hardware is the pretext to rationalize the continuation of both. The contestable assumption here is that it is costly but essential for artists to have access to the newest technology, whether it is to achieve "industry standard" quality, to provide low-cost "R & D" services, or to critically inhabit it before its commercial purposing is completely locked. If in

fact this "critical inhabitation" of technology has led to social change, the effects have been thinly documented. Contrast this spiral of upgrades with the dumpster-diving, cast-off collecting, borrowing and bricolage that sustains marginal self-funded publication and exhibition. Almost all "marginal" producers engage in recycling and repurposing obsolete imagery and technology. The bad xerox collage is emblematic of this cycle of garbage-scoring, tinkering, breakdown, cannibalizing and reconfiguring.





L. to R.: Holly, Gwendolyn, Morgana and Annie at Artefact for a screening of their film Out of the Blue, February 28, 1988.



Kenneth Anger speaking to the audience at CineCycle, April 10, 1992, during a retrospective presented by Public Access and the AGO.



Members of the Shake Well collective at CineCycle, January 14, 1993.
L. to R.: Zoë Hamilton, Jenny Keith, Kim Kutner, Clare Lawlor.
Members not present include Joey Myers and Louise Liliefeldt.

Above photos: John Porter.

symptom hall.space

Symptom Hall is an ex-Lithuanian Hall run since 1993 by a group of art students and graduates as a performance venue. It is one in a long lineup of self-funded art venues financed, not by grants, not by corporate tax write-offs, not by wealthy collectors or aristocratic private foundations, but by booze cans and Joe jobs. Symptom Hall survives by subletting the space, which was originally occupied by Martin Heath's CineCycle, then Kensington Carnival, who drew on the services of an anarchist plumber to upgrade the building to code. At Symptom Hall, a lot has happened in the quest to make \$2,700 a month rent for almost four years. Sadly, in order to pay the rent, Symptom Hall charges nightly rental rates (about \$250) that are too rich for some self-funded promoters or collectives to break even.

Symptom Hall was initiated by the performance collectives Shaved Monkey, Phredded Phred, Pow Pow Unbound and Shake Well. The Shake Well artists share an interest in the representation of women's bodies through new technology. Shake Well began by organizing performance nights at CineCycle. Moderated by the hilarious dyke performer Clare Lawlor, long lineups of performers arrived with voice, music, sound effects, key lighting, slides and moving-image projection requirements in what invariably became a last-minute logistical nightmare for the small band of organizers who doubled as the tech crew. It is hard to imagine these anarchic groupings of unknown artists with their rickety array of complex technical setups exhibiting anyplace but CineCycle. It would have taken six weeks of paid administrative labour at most artist-run centres even to write a grant application for this unwieldy programming.

In trying to come up with a "rock solid" organizational structure, the artists recently invited me and several others to an "elder's session" to share our stories and survival tips. Consulting with "elders" was only one element in Symptom Hall's multi-pronged survival plan. Other strategies included offering a series of workshops in "Dumpster Diving" and insisting that everyone who attends a meeting bring a 2"x4". We discussed problems in attaining organizational stability without government or corporate money, and traded gossipy anecdotes about takeovers, burnouts, breakdowns and infighting in the artworld of yore.

phoenix.cinecycle

CineCycle is one of several self-funded spaces that Martin Heath has operated and lived in with his bicycle repair business over the last twenty years. Repeatedly closing up shop under pressure from angry neighbours, he always resurfaces, phoenix-like, with another programming configuration. Martin Heath owns a vast collection of aging projectors and spare parts and offers the service of hauling his hefty "portable" 35mm film projector to screenings in other venues. For marginal and oppositional programmers, this is the only reliable access to 35mm projection.

Martin Heath's spaces and programming have been sustained by many cohorts and tireless volunteers over the ages, who bring some semblance of order to his packrat style of

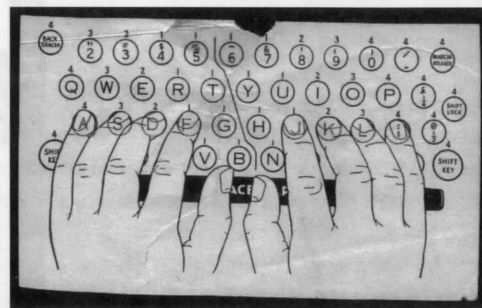
operation. Martin is a "thrift score" expert, a yard-sailing pirate, node in an underground network of nighthawks who cannibalize the growing cinematic scrapyards. His collection of 16mm prints includes Cuban and African third cinema, radical documentary, go-go music shorts, art films, roaring twenties hard-core porn and much more. Teachers and programmers committed to presenting activist film in an historical context have relied on Martin Heath's collection and projection. Artist-run centres and



Andrew Paterson performing at 466 Bathurst, c. 1979.

filmmakers have sublet the CineCycle facility. Marginal programming entities such as the Pleasure Dome and Shake Well inhabit CineCycle, especially at the points in their existence when they have no money.

Many "Cinemateque" exhibition venues, festivals and artist-run centres have been well-funded to mount screenings, make archives and build equipment access facilities without providing marginal producers with the consistent access available at Martin's for decades. Funders and some of the alternative arts aristocracy might write off Martin as an obsessive-compulsive anomaly and argue that it is structurally impossible to fund his spaces, let alone expect that his deviance can or should be replicated in the exhibition infrastructure. As individualistic as Martin Heath is, he is not an isolated blip in the matrix of cultural production here; he does not operate in a vacuum. Atomizing his practice erases a history, for Martin Heath is only one gifted member of a legion of cultural producers in this town who for years have moved from one volunteer formation to another — publishing, programming, working on live art venues, in retail outlets, participating in committees and cultural working groups. This disruptive, nomadic art workforce perennially operates with only the most tenuous links to administrative sinecures in stable, well-funded art power-bases.



ancient futures.the net

There are rich historical links between junkyard-dog equipment stashes and Paleolithic cyborg theory and experiments with new communications technology. This technological work explores distribution potential and ramifications, rather than superior "grain free" image-making production capabilities. Early art telecommunications experiments in Toronto were a product of the self-funded "marginal milieu" that published zines and set up performances at 466 Bathurst, Martin Heath's space in 1978–81.

I have a hazy vision of the day when we all will have access to a computer network containing the entire body of known facts. In the meantime, we must start to construct our own network from our own shared needs.... The Computerized Arts Network... is now being implemented in two geographically displaced computing nodes, New York and Toronto.... Although CAN facilities are now going on line, this network is in a primitive developmental stage....

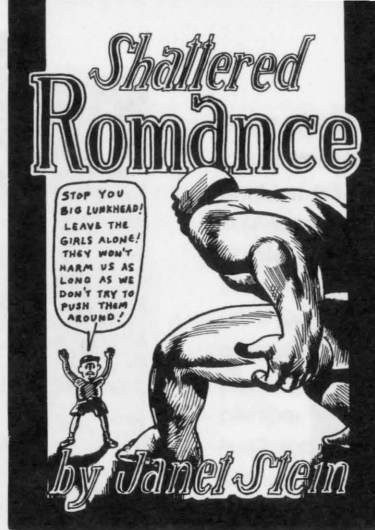
[Many] aspects of CAN must be discussed if we intend to create a workable global communications network. And if we don't do it, others, with their rather than our interests at heart, will."

— Willoughby Sharp,
"WORLDPOOL: A Call for Global
Community Communications,"
Only Paper Today, December
1978, p 9.

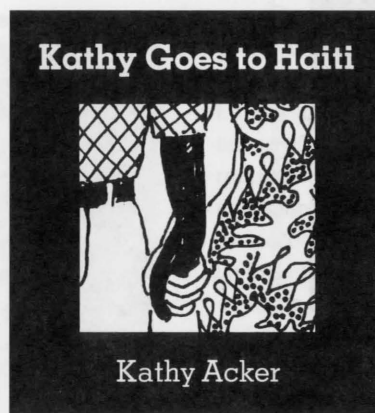
In 1978, less than a block from Symptom Hall in a former Ukrainian jewelry shop in a seedy, Queen Street west-of-Bathurst location, Fred Gaysek, Kim Todd and I opened Rumour, a storefront to produce and distribute

zine-type publications; two of us lived upstairs. The cheap xerox pamphlets and artists' books didn't pay for themselves and weren't meant to. There were no grants. We survived and paid the rent by collaboratively writing novelizations of horror movies and giving workshops on topics like, "How to Not Make Money From Your Art." Victor Coleman, A Space and Coach House Press Founder, published Only Paper Today there, after the tabloid was ousted from A Space in 1979. Rumour published xerox books and pamphlets, including the first printing of Kathy Goes to Haiti by Kathy Acker, and zine-type books and pamphlets by Philip Monk, Willoughby Sharp, Judy Rifka, Brian Kipping and others, and held rotating exhibitions in the window including John Greyson's first show which prompted a bizarre police interrogation. The local Ukrainians were concerned that his project, which involved the daily unfurling of red clothing items from a garbage bag, signaled the arrival of a Communist sect in the neighbourhood.

Rumour Publications hosted WORLDPOOL, Toronto's first continuous computerized arts network node (primitive Internet site). The group met weekly and was open to all. Artist and Ontario College of Art (OCA) electronic animator Norman White was a founder and many artists, theoreticians and young proto-hackers attended, hearing about WORLDPOOL through the arts and computer mailboxing grapevines. Interactive telenetworking by computer mailbox, slow-scan video and "facsimile transceivers" (the first demo portable fax machines) was often accompanied by a meal in these "dine on line" evenings. WORLDPOOL remained on-line from 1978 until 1981. Artists' distributed digital database networks of the 1970s are ignored in official histories of the Internet, that jump from early defense applications to the proliferation of modem-linked home computers in the mid-eighties. Art on the net did not begin with the defense department, techno-nerds, the McLuhan Institute, the OCA "Photo/Electric Arts" Department, the



#12 from the series TOP STORIES, 1982.
Published by Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York.



Cover artwork by Robert Kushner.
Rumour Publications, Toronto, 1978.



Rumour Publications pamphlet series,
Judy Rifka, Toronto, 1978.

Art Research Centre (ARC), and certainly not the "established" subsidized video art centres and their entourages, though all these groupings became involved with WORLDPOOL.

By the beginning of the '80s, Rumour, WORLDPOOL and a number of other spaces and programming entities were sermonizing in print and workshops on grant-free do-it-yourself art survival tricks. Like rave now, these artists twisted business imagery into insignia—clip art of telephones, urgent memo pads, logos, graphs and charts. A performance series was billed with the sub-title, "An Anti-Granto Production." That many younger and punk artists were disenfranchised from the grant system was only part of it. The attitude was that grant procedures and regulations were creatively and politically compromising. Self-funded venues were less subject to "prior approval" mechanisms, allowing for more spontaneous creation and dissemination of art, and a certain dissolving of the barrier between artists and audiences, producers and consumers. The Cabana Room was established in 1979 by Susan Britton and Robin Wall. Britton's 1979 letter of resignation from A Space registers this anxiety about artists' links to government:

Call me paranoid but, it is my opinion that in Canada artists are encouraged to pay their bureaucratic dues. In fact, it's likely that early in his or her career a Canadian artist may suddenly realize that he or she is hanging out with none other than agents of the federal government!... My suggestion is to loosen the obnoxiously close relationship between artists and funding bodies.... I think artists should reinvent the artworld rather than just fitting in where they can.

—Susan Britton, letter of resignation as A Space's "Visual Arts Curator," July 24, 1979.



performance.women's work

In my files, I found an unpublished story by Kathy Acker wedged in with material for a performance night at Martin Heath's, blacks of the smeary typewriting so dark and sensuous—there is a sense of obscure violation.

"The Scorpions": excerpt from Janey's diary

My friends were just like me. They were desperate—the products of broken families, poverty—and they were trying everything to escape their misery. Despite the restrictions of school, we did exactly what we wanted and it was good. We got drunk. We used drugs.

We fucked.

We sexually hurt each other as much as we could. The speed, emotional overload, and pain every now and then dulled our brains. Demented our perceptory apparatus. We knew we couldn't change the shit we were living in so we were trying to change ourselves.
—Kathy Acker, "The Scorpions," draft manuscript, 1978. (in the margin, Acker has scrawled, "French girl, fat lady, middle-aged shriveled man." These are my parts to read at Martin's)...

Much of the history of performance by women in Toronto is buried in the artists' filing cabinets. Depending on how you look at it, live art by women either thrives or subsists in the self-funded margins. Certainly, many women never get off the "stepping stone" of this invisible economy. A 1980 listing in SLATE magazine for the Cabana Room of the Spadina Hotel includes art bands (The Lounge Lizards from New York, The Government), a video night, and several evenings of performance cabaret. Susan Britton and Robin Wall, the Cabana Room producer/programmers, put a spotlight on live art by women; some worked as hack writers and arts bureaucrats; others, like Margaret Dragu and Electra, worked as strippers. Many of the rants, readings and actions deployed the feminist strategy of representing women's work (housewife, stripper, typist), in various breeds of "femme drag" attenuated to the registers of neurosis, anxiety humour or violence. The Cabana Room stage was puny, tech support minimal, and the crowded smoky booze-soaked ambiance fueled lapses and eruptions in the levels of audience attention and interaction. Perhaps the Cabana Room's fatal flaw was its lack of critical self-awareness around issues of performance, confrontation and controls; a performer (Margaret Dragu) was attacked by a "neoist" audience member

THE CABANA ROOM



Upstairs at the Spadina Hotel

Opens July 20th

RUMOUR

Kathy Acker



Reading Friday Feb. 23
9.00 p.m.
466 Bathurst St.
\$2

who argued that his degrading "intervention" that included pulling a tampon out, was an art initiative. In retrospect, it is hard to fathom how everybody just stood there—the artists in the room didn't boot the guy out or make plain that this wasn't their idea of art.

The art community's ambivalence about the attack and the performer's ensuing court case signaled the Cabana Room's demise and underlined the lack of a women's/feminist art venue in Toronto, an absence subsequently addressed by the Women's Cultural Building Collective. The name here is misleading because, although the collective was formed in a doomed attempt to inhabit the dreary and dying Pauline McGibbon Cultural Centre, the WCBC lived on as a nomadic programming entity, focusing on feminist performance and humour. An ideological formation took shape with the foundation of the WCBC in the aftermath of the Cabana Room debacle: feminist space=safe working environment=a place free of drunk punks. One could argue that the emphasis on safety was accompanied by a toning-down of content. The stances of punk-laced women's live art at the Cabana Room were less in evidence at the WCBC events—satire displaced provocative anxiety; mocking critiques of sexist popular culture and family life eclipsed noir-ish erotically-charged accounts of addiction, poverty, sexual power and sexual violence. Farce replaced in-your-face displays of anger and defiance.

As a footnote, Kathy Goes To Haiti, written by Kathy Acker and originally published in an edition of 1,000 by Rumour Publications in 1979 in Toronto, was

recently republished by Grove Press in a triptych of novels called Literal Madness. The Grove edition was held at the border by Canada Customs as allegedly pornographic. Of course, they didn't know the book was already here.

gender.performance

We created this production company to give voice to a new aesthetic—a girl gang, gender-fuck, engaged/enraged aesthetic. Not that the boy's aren't welcome.... Look around. Where are the forums for sexy, angry multi-talented performers. Enough already of this limiting notion of spoken-word OR music OR readings OR film events. We want it all!
—*Dirty Babette's mission statement, 1995*

Abrasive, class-critical, sexually loaded performance is erupting again in the '90s in self-funded venues as an assault against the resurgence of evangelical "family values" and the scapegoating of poverty. Dirty Babette Productions is a sporadic series of cabarets produced by dyke writer/performer Christy Cameron. Bars and private houses are inhabited for evenings with long, shifting line-ups of performers. The programming emphasis is on dyke/core reading-rants and media art, transgendered performance, pseudo-sex shows, and audience dress-up (the audiences are huge, unruly and interactive). Shows produced include Cabaret LesboMonde (Toronto & Montreal 1994); Drag, Slag & Skag Bash (1995), In Harm's Way (1995) and Piss Elegant Wank (1996). The latter received "sponsorship" from CKLN in the form of free radio ads (CKLN provides this essential exposure resource to a wide array of self-funded, community-based ventures), and part of the proceeds went to Maggie's (Toronto Prostitutes' Community Service Project).

Dirty Babette's was formed in part because Christy Cameron was "banned"

from Buddies in Bad Times, which has evolved to become the official venue for local queer theatre. Exclusion from subsidized, artist-run centres has always been a powerful incentive for the formation of new programming venues and collectivities in Toronto. "Exclusion" runs the gamut from outright banning, to systemic privileging of older artists (the generation who founded the space persists in showcasing its own peers), through the range of exploitative strategies (younger artists receive second-rate pay and treatment, emerging artists are used to advance the careers of established programmers, improper credit is given, young volunteers get joe jobs and are denied decision-making authority in matters of their own representation, selection occurs through personal favoritism and the casting couch, there is rampant racism and sexism, various art forms are excluded as naive or politically retrograde). Nomadic programming in bars eludes the rent problem. Some police harassment still occurs (a Dirty Babette event at the Cameron House was closed down for "overcrowding"). Programming in a bar may evade the internal and external censorship problems that have usually hounded this breed of work in heavily scrutinized gallery and performance venues including Buddies.

In the early and mid-'80s, "Open Screening" nights at the censor-harassed and now defunct Funnel Experimental Film Centre became an important venue for queerpunk performers and filmmakers. The

queercore zine Dr. Smith promoted the screenings and called for submissions including "Pro-it home movies/lavender liberation flicks/films that don't make money/groovy films/wacky queer films." The Toronto zine J.D.s founded by dyke artist GB Jones, later including Bruce La Bruce as co-editor, is renowned as a prototypical zine for the queer-punk movement; it also marks a connection with no-budget film.



do it yourself ethos — zines

However varied, anarchic and obsessively individualistic zines are, together they form a significant, expanding oppositional culture model; zine producers, weaned on the soup of pop culture, underemployed as an effect of the widening divisions of wealth resulting from economies of scale and consolidation of ownership, are electing to operate outside the mass market instead of seeking a microniche in it. The most activist of these do-it-yourself producers also boycott consumption of corporate product—some drug and alcohol-free urban vegan punks do not buy or sell books, films or music by artists who have "crossed the line" of independent production.

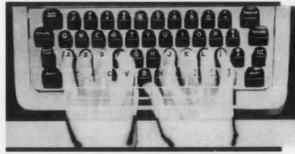
Zine culture is an alternative—not a stepping stone—to the mass market. Zine producers opt for dissemination outside the retail infrastructure—mail, handouts between friends, small zine fairs, listings in other zines and "catalogue" publications like Factsheet Five. Zines are vertically-integrated, but on a micro-scale. Usually, the core of participants numbers five or less. Often, one person is responsible for every aspect of creation, production and dissemination.



Contrary to vertically integrated mass media, there are no economies of scale to the photocopied print runs. Rejecting or abandoning the goal of remuneration for cultural labour (art work for pay), most zine-makers try to break even on production costs, ironically comparing the time spent to leisure activities like golf, or more politically, to anarchist street activism. Unlike 'artist union' initiatives or proto-business industrial culture, it is part of the zine ethos that people are unpaid for their creative labour; on the "take" end of this ethos of exchange, zine culture flagrantly violates copyright, reproducing, effacing and violating mass culture images, reprinting, recycling, rewriting and responding to material from other zines.

robot writing

The connection between Rumour (a literary zine publisher), and WORLDPOOL (a node in an arts/communications technology network), was elaborated in a species of theoretical fiction. A precursor to cyber-critique, this writing by artists was steeped in discourse from other fields: structuralism, psychoanalytic theory, physics, artificial intelligence books and bulletins from the Architecture Machine Group at MIT. The texts combined theory, fandom, sex fantasy and do-it-yourself pragmatic instructions. The network was speculative, playing itself out across a shifting surface of performance art venues, alternative art publications, street poster projects, mail exchanges and grainy facsimile and slow-scan video transmissions. For example, "Model for a Prose Algorithm" was an early manifesto on the potential character of interactive art fiction:



Connections are contingent, interchangeable — like the Perverse Telephone Network (A sub-network sending and receiving interactive pornography using new audio, video, and facsimile transceivers and the existing telephone system)....

Inserts, challenges, breakdown — a text without pre-determined sequence must prepare itself for all of these, for how can we determine this text's completion? At this point, the model of the network applies — impossible to locate, its coordinates are very shifty. The text is immediately implemented in any given transmission; more than vulnerable to transgressions, it seems composed by them at every point. Effective and effectable, it is a fictive effect.

— Judith Doyle, *Model for a Prose Algorithm*, *Only Paper Today*, vol. 6, no. 8, 1979.

This "robot writing" — techno-theoretical fiction and performance scripts by women in the late '70s — subverted techno-

logical metaphors. It stroked the sexual body of the robot, posited sado-masochistic surveillance games, attempted to inhabit signals and break them down like a mutant noise virus. Adele Freedman's 1979 description, like most popular press about this art, is a hopelessly confused mess, contrasting the ludicrous spectacle of performance for the slow-scan camera with a load of techno-mumbo-jumbo:

On International Women's Day, using the telefacsimile transceiver lent them by Xerox, Doyle and friends hooked up by image with artists in Boulder, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Pender Island, New York and Buffalo.

Two hundred Toronto networkers looked on as Doyle performed her interpretation of the life of a secretary — at one point she hurled her typewriter into the air — and sent facsimiles of her 12-frame performance to six different locations by picking up the telephone connected to a robot, which turns sound signals into 8-second video scans.

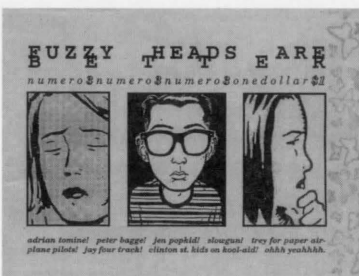
— Adele Freedman, "Overlapping key to house of glass," *The Globe and Mail*, June 16, 1979.

pamphlets.women's work

Files full of stone-age faxes, home-made postcards and pamphlets are the residue from Rumour's close creative link with Anne Turyn, responsible for publication projects and readings at Hallwalls Gallery in Buffalo. *Top Stories*, a pamphlet series she edited, included a wide array of writing and image/text hybrids by women: new fiction, performance scripts, photo-novels and comics, each by an individual author, including Laurie Anderson, Constance de Jong, Jenny Holzer, Kathy Acker, Janet Stein and many others. The *Top Stories* pamphlets received some NEA funding, were priced between \$1.50 and \$2.50 and sold in a few stores. However, as with zines, the vast majority of distribution was through the mails, often for trades with women who were writing/publishing them-

selves. "Top Stories," a precursor to the powerful flood of zine activity by "riot girls" in the late '80s and '90s, marks an axis of shared content and distribution tactics between women artists utilizing language in their performances and publications. Points of intersection include the unapologetic use of first-person accounts and personal experience; cannibalized imagery from lingerie and fashion advertising, home economics texts, typing manuals and so on targeted at women, reworked into defiant new insignia; recycled family photographs and kiddie cartoons, charged with sexual or personal meanings; and texts that expose the systemic sexism encoded in language, technology and the representation of women's bodies.

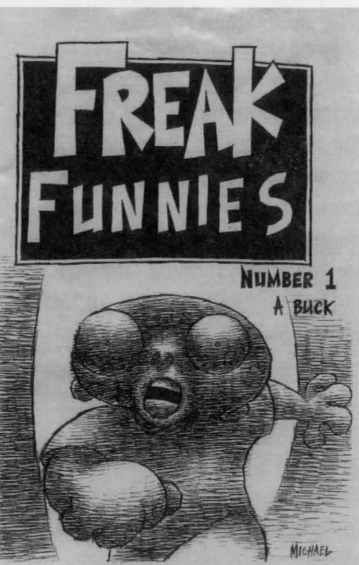
In the past and now, correspondence networking between women goes on, oblivious to nationalisms or



Cover of *Fuzzy Heads Are Better*, no. 3.
Published by Patti Kim, 1995.



Cover of *ab imo pectore*, no. 1, by Patti Kim.
Published by BHB Press, 1996.



Freak Funnies, no. 1, by Michael Pender.
Published by Devil Bat Comix, 1994.

state-imposed readings of national culture. Reducing these sensuous, colourful, sticker-laden souvenirs to the form of an "E-Zine" seems impossible, for each collage and tip-in is singular, with the powerful talismanic properties of a gift exchange, yet reveling in a cheapo, thrift-store approach, free of the elite, limited-edition mannerisms of fine art bookworks.

oca.zines

The Ontario College of Art student publications provided a context for student activism and oppositional art from the mid-'80s on. Collectivities that were spawned there reconfigured outside the school, working in self-funded contexts. In 1988, queer activist and satirist Barry Nichols started *Spurious Emissions*, a xeroxed one-sheet of scathing, sarcastic critique of the OCA administration, illustrated with cut and paste clip art in the spirit of John Heartfield political collage. He was assisted by Deborah Waddington, who in 1990 formed an editorial collective with sex-trade artist-activist Andrew Sorfleet and Symptom Hall founder Jenny Keith, releasing a double issue of *SPU*. The collage-infested mag contained extended critiques—of mass advertising (complete with a map for finding offensive downtown billboards), the exploitation of immigrant contract-workers at OCA, alongside art projects and alternative comix. Sorfleet went on to work at Maggie's Prostitute Centre. Maggie's is a flashpoint for artists, through programming initiatives like *WhoreCulture*, and its zine-type publication *Maggie's Newsletter*. While at Maggie's, Andrew Sorfleet developed his

important analysis of censorship law, and power imbalances between anti-censorship artists and porn workers/consumers. Andrew distributed his research materials in what became a community-access file-folder of clippings and commentary, hand distributed between students, writers and organizers.

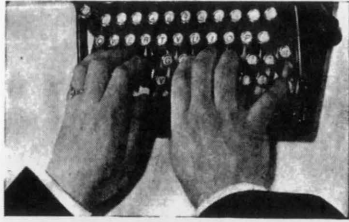
In 1992 Paul Lamothe edited *just BITE*, with an anti-homophobia stance, including a comic by Spirit on inadequate wheelchair access at OCA, the truth about cock-sucking by Andrew Sorfleet, fierce caricatures of OCA President Tim Porteous and an article on anarchist sampling and plunderphonic strategies. After this, the OCA administration threatened to cancel the "Publication Seminar," which provided academic support for the student/publishers. Through 1994–95, queer content was nurtured by OCA editors including Raymond Helkio, Christina Zeidler and Laura Cowell, culminating in the "Denying Queerness" issue of *Pushpress*, edited by Marc C. Tremblay. "Denying Queerness" takes issue with the absence of Queer curriculum at OCA. Notable was Marty Bennett's "Internalized Homophobia," a delicious script of a make-believe course called "Cinema of Change: The Art of Gay Porn Film and Video Making: The Recent Years," attended by the Moderator (resembling David McIntosh, instructor of *Cinema and Social Change* in 94/95) and his students: Id, Ego and Super-Ego.

As the Ontario College of Art morphs into the Ontario College of Art and Design,

downsizing, restructuring, and competing for patronage, it seems likely that the radical content prevalent in the student newspapers will disperse into the zines. Recent OCA zines include *ab imo pectore*, *Alternazone* and *Fuzzy Heads Are Better*, edited by Patti Kim, a women-centred, mail-networked zine with music reviews, dryly satiric accounts of everyday life, and interviews with indie cultural producers including musicians, zine publishers, filmmakers and comic artists. *The Remnants* by Dalton Sharp, *Freak Funnies* by Mike Pender and *Cash Grab* by Chris Brimacombe are alternative comix with anti-heroic protagonists negotiating the minefields of popular culture; these xeroxed comix draw on a rich history of classical and alternative comic practice.

Professionelle, Marc C. Tremblay's zine of the queer rave and transgendered club scene, inhabits and subverts the fashion-lifestyle mag format, in xerox form. Rave promoters, dancers and DJ's, long engaged in a process of inhabiting the machine while reversing its effects, are active on the Internet, using advanced visual and sonic software. World Wide Web sites like NIMM, organized by rave cultural participants, provide an anthology venue for web sites by artists. *Juice!*, Jame's Gardiner's zine on/for graffiti crews, combines zine and comix approaches. *This is the Salivation Army*, edited by Scott Treleaven, is a pagan-punk-homocore zine with an intelligent, literary edge, with pilferings from other publications, homoerotic collage, and finely-written stories and commentary. These zine's are distributed among friends and

through the mail, paid for by the editor/publishers' part-time jobs.



retail. books

Bookstores have long been street-level meeting places for artists and writers; in the '70s, Rumour was a zine-store and hangout. Who's Emma, a new volunteer-run book, music and zine store in Kensington Market, was initiated by Alan O'Connor, a Toronto queer-core activist who participated in the early eighties in Nicaragua solidarity actions. At Who's Emma, classic anarchist and activist texts are stocked on shelves alongside Profane Existence and HeartattaCk (Hard Core), magazines that draw anarchopunk communities to the store. Hard-to-get activist materials, music recordings and zines are available in a coffee bar-type space. Roots are in Chomsky, Goldman, Galeano, with an emphasis on do-it-yourself strategies—for example, Food Not Guns, a manual for setting up ad-hoc vegan street theatre food kitchens; Bomb the Suburbs—a graffiti crew testimonial/manual from Chicago; and Beneath the Underground, abrasive, formative zine critique and history by Bob Black.

The salient feature of the store is its refusal to stock any corporate product. Collective members stress the importance of living the "life" not the "lifestyle." Bands and writers who have "crossed the line" are not sold at Who's Emma.

The store is run by volunteers; orders are taken in person or by fax from a wide array of producers, listeners and readers. The same core of people who operate Who's Emma have set up a music/performance venue—the Laundry Mat—in the basement of a nearby functioning laundromat. Who's Emma operates like a renegade community resource facility—a "safe" space to research, talk and form associations. The fact that the space is volunteer-run and operates outside of grant-based or commercial financial imperatives mirrors the condition of most of the marginal producers whose work circulates there.

history.books

Since 1990, artist-run centres in Canada have published catalogues and books to commemorate ten, twenty and twenty-five year anniversaries; titles include YYZ: Decalog and Whispered Art History: Twenty Years at the Western Front. VIDEO re/VIEW and Performance Art in Canada are organized as retrospective inventories. Structurally, these projects stress the longevity and adaptability of the artist-run centres. Aiming for inclusiveness, the long enumerations of exhibitions over the years are an endurance marathon for readers. Perhaps this angle is due for reconsideration.

Coach House Press was Toronto's most experimental literary publisher, closely connected with the writing program at A Space in the '70s. Coach House encouraged micro-publishers like Rumour, and was internationally known for its translations of innovative fiction by women from Quebec. Coach House won't be mounting a nostalgic

end-of-century retrospective, because it is history—dead after a 74 percent cut of \$54,202. from its government of Ontario grants this summer, and the cancellation of a loan guarantee by the Ontario Development Corporation.

[Mike Harris said that] Coach House Press went under not because the province cut its grants to the publisher but because "they can't compete in the marketplace" ... (that) the company blames the province for its demise "probably speaks to their management capabilities." Harris told reporters that what the Ontario Government is concerned with is "the overall industry and how we ensure that new writers, for example, get access to be published and getting their start. In most countries in the world, that happens without government grants," Harris said. "Unfortunately we have a history of government dependency, almost, in Ontario. We're trying to change that. We'd sooner see our share go ... more directly to the artist than ... to the profit-making company that depends on government taxpayers' dollars to compete."

—James Rusk, "Publisher poorly run, Harris says," *The Globe and Mail*, July 17, 1996.

Coach House's history is an example of the things that did not endure, while Mike Harris's badmouthing is exemplary of the method by which Ontario Conservatives make cultural policy statements. The trend among politicians of attacking specific artist-run centres is creeping up on us now, for example, in Metro Toronto politicians' recent invective against Buddies in Bad Times. It brings to mind the rhetoric by politicians against the Toronto artist-run centre CEAC, after an editorial in its newsletter Strike that seemed to advocate kneecapping. In 1986, in The CEAC was Banned in Canada, Dot Tuer provided an account of CEAC's history, giving a context for the moment when politicians intervened to pull its funding. This alternative history traces gaps, fissures and breakdown, in the context of wider economic and political issues. As governments retract their support for artist-run culture, it is critical to locate the antecedents for this, and to identify our alternative sites of practice. Martin Heath's film and performance space, the proliferation of zines, nomad curators working in bars and storefronts, angry women hackers, writers and performers—provide an irrepressible source of replenishing energy. Authors of alternative histories will seek this, as artists shift their operations from one bit of holy ground to the next.

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I wish to thank David McIntosh for his insightful work as editor of this piece. I am also indebted to the artists, publishers and producers whose work I cite, and to Steev Morgan for his assistance with the website.

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