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Mau Mauing Multiculturalism

Booing Bissoondath

Language Anguish

Toronto Rap's Back

Talking B(l)ack

Is Madonna Quebecoise?

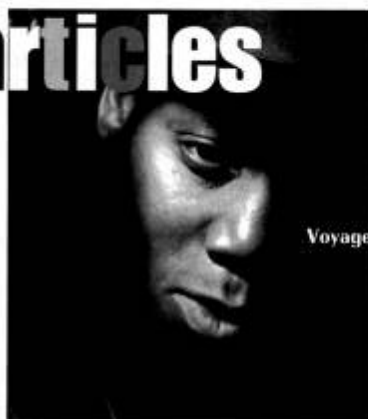


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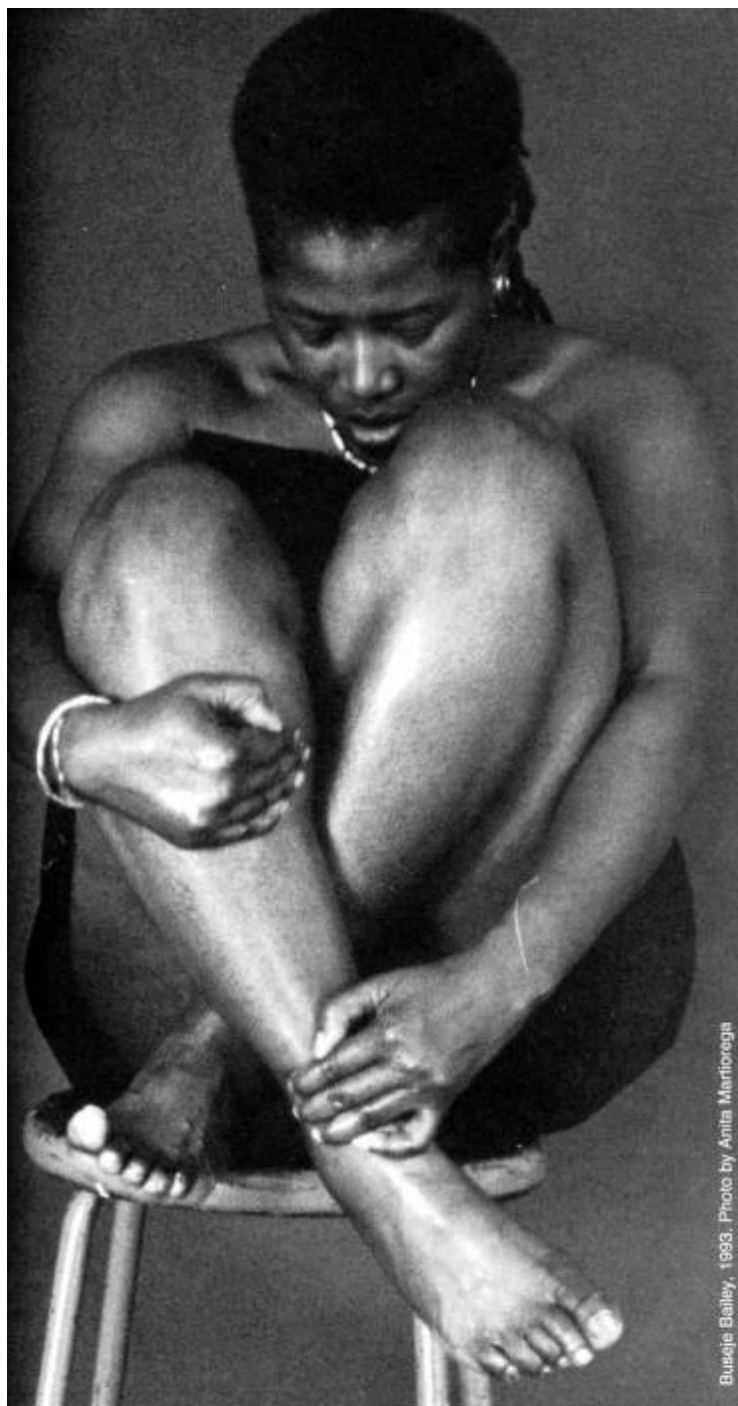
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Buseje Bailey, 1993. Photo by Anita Martorella

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Jeanette Silverthorne on
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art

Plus:

Buseje Bailey
June Clark-Greenberg
Jamelie Hassan
Robert Houle

Cover: Jamelie Hassan
Citizen's Arrest, 1993.
Photo by William W. Wilson.

Inside front cover: Jamelie Hassan

Thanks to The National Film Board of Canada and
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Canadas [Semiotext(e) #17, Volume VI issue 2] 1994.
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BY Gordon Brent Ingram



Back cover, *Canadas*.
Photo by Linda Dawn Hammond

Borders and Fragments

As the Canadian state lurches through intensifying crises, this collection of fifty-nine short essays, on the cusp of politics and cultural studies, covers some of the more neglected strands of thought on identity, place, community, and collectivity. This is an anthology about the margins of Canada, but the vision of loosely connected fragments begins to suggest one of the more democratic futures that may still be possible. Unfortunately, *Canadas* is more a map of the disintegration of the neocolonial state and cultural apparatus with few clues to the authentic "empowerment" of local communities and artists. *Canadas* is a bumpy ride and its uneven articulations remind us that the only thing that came close to replacing, outright, the "continuity" of colonialism was the welfare state, which is now being dismantled. The "oppressed" are still struggling to communicate with each other. Unfortunately, the rhetorical and almost "tribal" nature of many of the perspectives in *Canadas* does much to explain why what remains of the anti-authoritarian Left and even the environmental movements has been so weak in advancing new visions of what is for today, at least, still called Canada.

Canadas is an extremely important book and should be key reading for the coming year. It is the first anthology in years that considers the future of the country, both culturally and politically, from the radical margins. After this read, it will be more difficult to use the adjective "Canadian," without a few additional qualifiers.

Canadas is carefully organized with a progression of sections entitled: "stations," "tracks," "switches," "monitors," and "signals." In "stations," Canada is first defined in terms of federal borders that are then broken down by particular landscapes and cultures. Just about everyone's experience, therefore, is on multiple edges. This inherent fragmentation, a far cry from Joe Clark's deceptively cheery "community of communities," becomes a device for unravelling myths of place, culture, and relationships to the Canadian state. The ineffectuality and contentiousness of the state's controls become one of the few unifying themes in

Canadas. Lorne Falk states the paradox of living in southern Canada and on the edges of divergent communities and provinces:

"Border culture includes a deep fear, the fear of being seen / caught / asked for identification. It also creates a space for resistance to this fear. . . . Border culture is a strategy, a strategy for facing the fear. . . the border prism represents the symbolic vision of a deterritorialized world."

Jody Berland deconstructs the use of satellite imagery of Canada and its role in supporting the myth of a "universally shared experience." Tony Hall's "Many Nations, Few States" examines the state, technology, and the control of aboriginal peoples through genocide in the guise of "standardizing." Anthony Wilden then provides a powerful framework for identifying the mechanisms of white, and in particular Anglo and French, supremacy. Pierre Vallières, of FLQ days and the author of *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*, then repudiates some of the more simplistic forms of Québec nationalism.

Unfortunately, the overall discussion of Québec and related francophone questions is the weakest of the book's central narratives. The editors symmetrically reduce Québec nationalism to a branch of white domination, thus conveniently relegating it, at a time when more lucid perspectives are desperately needed.

It is in the "tracks" section that the specific linkages among colonialism, assaults on aboriginal communities, and environmental destruction begin to be articulated. Scott Watson's "Race, Wilderness, Territory and the Origins of Modern Canadian Landscape Painting," on the Group of Seven, is, unfortunately, only a recap of twenty years of discussion of the notion of wilderness as neocolonial device. But what follows are some exceptionally well-crafted essays such as that by Lon Cayeway which powerfully describes the destructive impacts of clearcut logging on the central mountains of the British Columbia coast. Lorraine Gilbert's beautifully stark photographs of clearcuts, remnants of forest fires, and tree planters pro-

vide crucial visual evidence. But the credibility of the environmentalist strand falls down with the chilling psychobabble of "In Defense of Tree-Spiking" by "Captain Paul Watson" with his pathetic rationalizing for a highly dangerous and divisive practice that has been roundly denounced by activists. Similarly, Jim Campbell's chronicle of the 1982-83 escapades of the Vancouver-based Direct Action, including the bombing of Litton Systems in Toronto, is disturbingly revisionist given the lack of actual support that there was from activist groups for that violence. The almost obligatory rap on ecofeminism by Joyce Nelson fails to provide a basis for situating either that "critique" or the resulting activism in the context of anywhere in Canada.

Canadas is most powerful in considering the ongoing implications of genocide against First Nations and in looking at gender. Marc Drouin offers the beginning of a framework for analyzing the "power politics" of Hydro-Québec in James Bay and there is an interview with Alberta "militant" Milton Born With a Tooth. What follows are two disappointingly brief accounts of the struggles at Oka. The articles on sexuality and censorship are some of the most compelling in *Canadas*, particularly Jacques Boivin's account of the Butler Decision and Canada Customs seizures, Monika Gagnon's examination of public narratives of violence against women, Thomas Haig's playful look at queerness in the CBC television program, "Kids in the Hall," and Julianne Pidduck's chronicle of the formation of "uneasy" "nouveau-queer" alliances in Montréal.

The final section of *Canadas* is scattered, but contains good pieces on language and minority cultures by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood and Herménégilde Chiasson. There is a whimsical account of the post-situationist tactics of "La Patate Globale." The last word from the editors is an imaginary and somewhat cynical "message from the CIA concerning the possible breakup of Canada," ending with "everything is going to work out just fine." In *Canadas* we are left with a bleak ideological and cultural landscape littered with disintegrating artifacts. Hopefully, these clues can lead us to something far more authentic and sustainable than a neocolonial federation and

phony government-manipulated versions of multiculturalism. But *Canadas* well shows that the persistent contradictions and conflicts, indeed the obstacles to articulate points of collectivity, run as deep as the possibilities for new forms of cultural and political alliances.

Gordon Brent Ingram is from Vancouver Island and has been active in rainforest protection in the Pacific Rim for over 20 years. He is one of the founders of the recently formed organization, Queers in Space Vancouver.

An Alternative View

Look at it this way: It's the American counter-culture's equivalent of "Playboy presents the 'girls' of Ontario" or *The Wall Street Journal* noses around in Canada's wallet. Or, a bit more flatteringly, it's Peter Jennings or Lorne Greene doing American TV; ditto Kids in the Hall and k.d. lang. Like it or not we're going international in one of a series of (anti)national text(e)s--*Sovietext(e)*, *Semiotext(e)* U.S.A., etc.--as brought to them (mostly "them," the readers out there beyond our borders) by the gang out of 522 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, N.Y., N.Y., "U.S.A., the Evil Empire." Does that final self-framed disclaimer allay our anxieties? It's O.K., those of us suspicious of American packaging reassure ourselves: the editor of *Canadas* planted trees for us, got cold hanging out on our terrain. He gives Northrop Frye his curtain call (to be read as "I grow old, I grow old, I wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled [above my Oxford shoes made perhaps by Bata Canada]"). He also gives us our major cultural spokespersons: Joyce Nelson, Arthur Kroker, Anthony Wilden, Jody Berland. We're written as the many-faceted refusal of monolithic nationalism. We're queer, native and multi-lingual. We're pataphysicians, Lacanians and activists. *Canadas* is a mirror in which border-line or *Border/Lines* people will more or less recognize themselves. Very good. . . except we've seen the images before: **in Canada's alternative magazines.**

Stan Fogel

BOOK REVIEW