

FUSE

MAGAZINE

Volume 20 Number 1 \$5.50 A magazine about issues of art and culture

CAN I HAVE MSG?

Food and Asian

American Media Art

by Yau Ching

Also... a look at Paul Wong
& *Sex in the New World* by G.B. Ingram

Plus reviews of Wendy Oberlander, b.h. Yael, Yasufumi Takahashi,
Laiwan & Michael Belmore



FUSE

MAGAZINE

VOLUME 20 NUMBER 1 WINTER 1997

Board of Directors

Millie Chen, Su Ditta, Judith Doyle, Richard Fung,
Marilyn Jung, David McIntosh, Francine Périnet,
Renuka Sooknanan, Kathryn Waller

Contributing Editors

Clint Burnham (Vancouver), Joane Cardinal-Schubert (Calgary),
Allan deSouza (Los Angeles), Thea Demetarakopoulos (Toronto),
Cliff Eyland (Winnipeg), Andrea Fatona (Peterborough),
Sylvie Fortin (Ottawa), Anne Golden (Montreal), Jorge Luis Marzo
and Tere Badia (De Calor Magazine, Barcelona), Ashok Mathur
(Calgary), Ian Rashid (London), Clive Robertson (Montreal),
Nell Tenhaaf (Pittsburgh), Reginald Woolery (New York)

Contributors

Yau Ching, Kuan Foo, Samir Gandesha, Sandra Haar,
R. William Hill, Gordon Brent Ingram, Karlyn Koh, Patti Kim,
Kyo Maclear, Nancy Pollak

Staff

Petra Chevrier (Production & Design)
Lisa Deanne Smith (Advertising, Circulation & Promotions)

Thanks to Richard Fung and Renuka Sooknanan for issue
coordination. Thanks to Millie Chen, Judith Doyle, Richard Fung,
Marilyn Jung, David McIntosh, Renuka Sooknanan,
Rinaldo Walcott and Kathryn Waller for copy editing.
Thanks also to John Maxwell and Shawn Syms for proofreading.

FUSE is published five times a year (includes one special issue) by Artans Cultural
Affairs Society and Publishing Inc., a non-profit artist's organization.
Our offices are located at 405 Richmond Street West, Suite 454, Toronto, Ontario,
Canada M5Y 3A8, E-mail: fuse@interlog.com, tel: (416) 361-8026, fax: (416) 361-
0496. All newsstand inquiries should be sent to this address. Publication mail
registration No. 4435.

Copyright © 1997 Artans Publishing Inc. All rights reserved under International
Copyright Union. Any reproduction without permission is prohibited. Artans
Publishing purchases First North American Serial Rights and copyright reverts to
the author after publication. Artans Publishing assumes no responsibility for
unsolicited manuscripts. Manuscripts not accompanied by a stamped self-
addressed envelope will not be returned. A copy of our Writers' Guidelines is
available on request. Publication of an advertisement in FUSE does not include
endorsement of the advertiser by the magazine. Opinions expressed outside of
specifically marked editorials are not necessarily held by members of the editorial
board.

FUSE acknowledges financial assistance from the Canada Council and the Ontario
Arts Council and the many hours of volunteer and partially paid labour that are
provided by everyone listed on our masthead.

Subscription rates: \$20 per year; Institutions \$32 per year
(in Canada only). Outside Canada \$24 U.S. per year; Institutions \$38 U.S.
Decisions regarding who qualifies as an individual subscriber remain the right of
the publisher.

Printed in Canada on recycled, acid free paper by PointOne Graphics Inc.

ISSN 0838-6938

FUSE is indexed in the Alternative Press Index and is a member of the Canadian
Magazine Publisher's Association.

5 Editorial

Columns

7 TOPOGRAPHIES: ASPECTS OF RECENT B.C. ART
Reflections of Diversity and Institutional Reality
by Kuan Foo

11 FOOD AS METAPHOR
Is Diversity the "Spice" of Life?
by Samir Gandesha

Artist's Project

16 PATTI KIM



The Red Paper, Dana Claxton; from the exhibition
"topographies: aspects of recent BC art"
at the Vancouver Art Gallery,
September 29, 1996 to January 5, 1997

contents

VOLUME 20 NUMBER 1 WINTER 1997

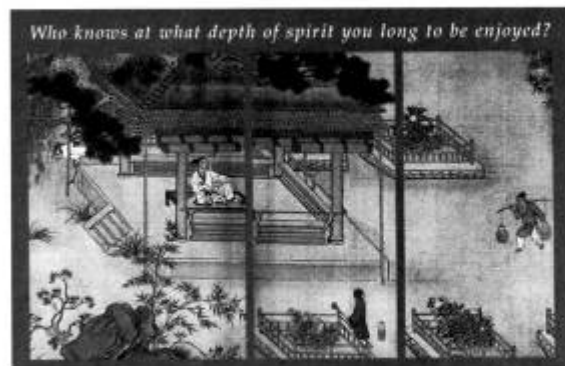
Features

- 17** SEX MIGRANTS
Paul Wong's Video Geographies of Erotic and Cultural Displacement in Pacific Canada
by Gordon Brent Ingram
- 27** CAN I HAVE MSG, AN EGG ROLL TO SUCK ON AND ASIAN AMERICAN MEDIA ON THE SIDE?
by Yau Ching

Reviews

- 35** GIFTS AND CRUELITIES OF DISPLACEMENT
Nothing to be written here
Video by Wendy Oberlander
Review by Nancy Pollak
- 37** FRESH BLOOD
A Consideration of Belonging
Video by b. h. Yael
Review by Sandra Haar
- 39** REFORMATION
Michael Belmore exhibition at Garnet Press
Review by R. William Hill
- 41** TRANSMISSION RUSES
small, medium and not large: books and collages, 1982 to present by Laiwan
Review by Karlyn Koh
- 44** CURTAIN DRAWN ON RISING SUN
Red Reflection I by Yasufumi Takahashi
Review by Kyo Maclear

Who knows at what depth of spirit you long to be enjoyed?
postcard by Laiwan, image from *The Garden of Solitary Enjoyment*,
16th century painting by Ch'iu Ying, China. (See page 41.)



Sex Migrants

Paul Wong's Video Geographies
of Erotic and Cultural Displacement
in Pacific Canada



by Gordon Brent Ingram

Paul Wong's latest video, *Blending Milk & Water: Sex In The New World*¹ is an important and indicative work from today's flux that once was, not so long ago, called the (Canadian) West Coast "scene." This tape works within yet subverts the genre of AIDS educational video, mapping a compelling "new world" of displacement, loss and fractured optimism. Over the last fifteen years, the AIDS educational video has become a crucial means for describing queer culture and for asserting a range of experiences of marginality. The AIDS pandemic and activist responses to it have progressively destabilized the hegemonies, the hierarchies and boundaries of the erotic, love, and death. *Blending Milk & Water: Sex In The New World* is more than a good introduction to the new worlds on the West Coast; one could say that it is the stuff of new Canadian mythology.



Paul Wong's World

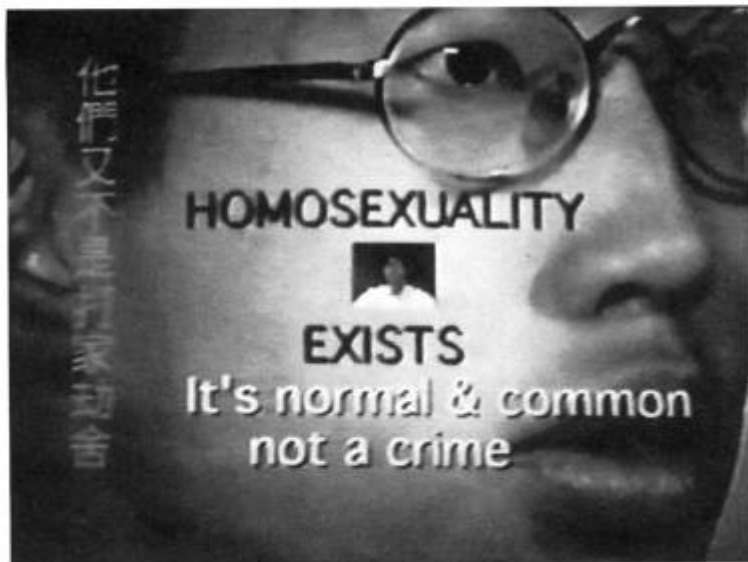
Paul Wong was born in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, and now lives in Vancouver. He has produced videotapes, performances, photography, and installations. Many of Wong's works have been exhibited and televised internationally, notably *Prime Cuts* (1981), *Confused Sexual Views* (1984), *So Are You* (1994), and *Body Fluid* (1996). He participated in the founding of several artist-run centres in Canada, notably Video In Studios and On Edge Productions. In 1992, he received the Bell Canada Award for Video Art for his many contributions to the field. In 1995, The National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa presented a solo exhibition of his work. His current work-in-progress is entitled *Cultural Baggage*.

Wong has thrived through the kind of entrepreneurial smarts and drive that lay to waste any remaining illusions of a "laid back" West Coast lifestyle. His edge comes from growing up in Prince Rupert, on the north coast, a town built on the heady, toxic optimism of easy money and speculation that was the engine of Pacific Canada for over a century. Today, it has some of the highest rates of hard drug use and domestic violence in Canada. Wong got out, and he made a name for himself as the badly needed bad boy in Vancouver during the 1980s, when the art community was, yet again, grappling for an identity. In this current moment of expansion and contraction in West Coast contemporary culture, Wong is a survivor if not one of its most perennial tricksters.

More than Just an AIDS Educational Video

Blending Milk & Water begins as an AIDS education video, but ends as an important new map of the emerging geographies of spatial, cultural and social migration and displacement on the west coast of Canada. Communality is difficult to find, and yet life is almost terminally optimistic.

in the land that some Chinese dialects refer to as "Golden Mountain." *Blending Milk & Water* delves into the means by which people survive, travel, attempt to transform their lives, make homes and carry on. This work compiles excerpts from a Pacific Rim future that is increasingly bound to be one part *Blade Runner*, one part "information superhighway" and one part unstable political economy. The much touted affluence of the West Coast is tenuous, especially with the continued destruction of its forests and the decline of its industrial base. These conditions, masked by convenient infusions of foreign investment, provides a testing ground for new forms of



survival, culture and sometimes even community. In this way, *Blending Milk & Water* is a series of episodes from a latter-day Canadian saga in which the ending is far from being settled.

Education, especially that dealing with information on sex, has different functions for different social groups. Knowledge can nurture better environments for safe and consensual sexual practices. But, today the "target groups" are shifting, and in this not-so-very-brave new world nearly everyone experiences some kind of loss and terror around sexually transmitted diseases. As these feelings of displacement are internalized, they force various migrations between physical spaces and social affinities.

A decade and a half into the pandemic, the impacts of AIDS have intersected with other fundamental social and political economic changes, such as demographic migrations and formations of local cultures on the British Columbia coast. This might be generalized as the shift from "colonialism" to what, today, is barely understood in such vague terms as "postcolonial narratives." Wong's montage of interviews² focuses on the West Coast and on Chinese communities in North America. But, to slot *Blending Milk & Water: Sex In The New World* into a mostly gay Chinese and/or AIDS category would be to ghettoize it and bypass its broader implications. The underlying narrative of

Blending Milk and Water Sex In The New World

by Paul Wong

Blending Milk & Water: Sex in The New World is a cross-cultural documentary about the diverse views of sex from twenty-two people. The recollections, fears, and opinions of young people, professionals, health workers, educators, artists, community activists and people living with AIDS are mixed.

In January 1994, Henry Koo of ASIA (Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS) in Vancouver called a meeting to discuss producing new educational materials for the Asian community, particularly in Vancouver. We recognized that sex was not being adequately discussed in Chinese communities in North America. After numerous meetings, we decided to make a videotape. Because these communities are diverse and fragmented by many social, economic and political differences, the tape was designed to include a wide range of experiences. This project was difficult because Chinese Canadians and Americans are often sharply divided historically, geographically and sexually. And communications are often complicated by language differences.

We felt that a video would be the most accessible form to stimulate discussion on sexual health and "education" for the prevention of AIDS. Although the oral languages of Cantonese and Mandarin are very different, they have the same written form. Everything in the video is titled in Chinese and all of the Chinese segments are subtitled in English. Some subtitles are literal translations while others are more playful approximations. There are also key differences in nuances between Taiwan, Hong Kong and Beijing forms. This project has involved an extraordinary community process made possible by the commitment of dozens of volunteers. Each participant was interviewed for thirty minutes, and the shooting was completed in 1995. The following are excerpts from the interviews that touch on origin, identity, sexuality and place.

Chao Xin: My name is Lin Chao Xin, I came from Nanjing.

Cathy: My name is Cathy Cecilia Maria Gallagher. It is a mixture of Christian Catholic that was infiltrated into Indonesia where I was born.

Peter: I'm an investment immigrant from Hong Kong. I came here to open a restaurant.

Ed: My name is Ed Lee. I'm a Chinese-born Canadian.

Bao Ai: It's hard for traditional Chinese heritage to take root in Japan. The Japanese don't easily accept other cultures, but it's different here.

Dana: I think my mother wanted to be White because of the external pressures of living in a White supremacist society. She was ashamed of being Indian. For the longest time, it's so funny, she told people that she was Japanese and French. Because in terms of who was the ugliest on the list of minorities, the Japanese and French weren't as bad as the Chinese and the Indians.

Lillian: During the war, the family moved to Chungking, which was the war capital. After the war, we went back to Beijing and left there again just before the Communists took over.

Jennifer: I don't want to reveal my real name. I'll use Jennifer. For the first six months when I came here, I cried for many nights because of the unspeakable loneliness.

Chao Xin: I taught chemical engineering at University in Nanjing. I'm now working as a handyman.

Robin: I work in Chinese broadcasting as a vice-president in marketing.

Sushi Bar: I personally define myself as a screaming drag queen.

Winston: Heroin takes away your sex drive so when I was using a lot of heroin I really didn't have sex.

Lin Bo Ai: He should be heavier than me and not bald. I like him slim but not wimpy. I prefer him slim now because later on he'll get fat anyway.

Henry: My current partner is the only relationship that I've ever had. He was the first for me, my first date, my first relationship, my first sexual encounter. I believe, it was after the third date—we became physical.

Lin Bo Ai: But Chinese men will do the grocery shopping. They help with housework and they protect their women.

Dana: It's not so much why not a Chinese man, it's that I just want to have children with an Indian man.

Ed: I remember a line from a movie—"it was like an ice-cream world." I was charmed. Everything came very easily. I was educated. I had a very good job. I had a wife from a very prominent family. We lived very well. We didn't want anything. It was idyllic.

Robin: When two people who get together, get to know one another and grow together as a couple, relationships often fall apart when they move to a new place or have new developments in their lives. These are genuine emotional crises.

Blending Milk & Water reaches beyond a sort of discrete, queer "Chinatown" where there are now more than a few culturally displaced non-Chinese and heterosexuals.

Most Canadians, whether they have been born in Hong Kong or Halifax, experience the loss of older forms of community and a rootlessness that forces many to move to larger metropolitan areas such as Vancouver and Toronto. And, most of us are leading lives as sexual beings in a context in which AIDS has displaced our erotic and emotional worlds in ways that make us "migrants." The perilousness of sex places many of us in new classes of social migrants, moving within and between communities, in a manner that makes the distances between Vancouver and, for example, Hong Kong not seem so far.

Blending Milk & Water is not just about being Chinese or loving someone who is. This video is not just about worrying about HIV and having safer sex, or finding comfort and communality despite ongoing loss. In this period of increasing social instability of migrations and displacements, the very personal terrors and losses of living through an epidemic collide with arid theory that has only begun to tell the "difference," in tangible terms, between "colonialisms," "neo" and "post."

The West Coast is a Canadian region hit especially hard by AIDS, from



gay ghettos to Indian reserves. The transformation, or at least the initial displacements of the roles and experiences of sexuality and erotic relationships, have taken place in a period of major demographic shifts in culture, class, and broader economic conditions. It should be mentioned that only one half of the people who have migrated to Pacific Canada in the last decade are from overseas while the other half come from the rest of Canada. Only a

portion of overseas immigrants are from east and south Asia. Therefore the spectre of the "influx of rich Chinese" as perceived, for example, by the anglophiles of "Little Rhodesia" in the Vancouver suburb of Tsawwassen, is more myth and paranoia than reality.



Race is a code word for loss of security, and cultural security for many is still tied to British Columbia as the lingering vestige of a far-flung colonial outpost. The shift in the cultural location of British Columbia from European imperial margin to picturesque Canadian window on the Pacific Rim has involved many yet-to-be-resolved political questions classified under the heading "greater equality"; persistent inequities in the control of "public" lands must be confronted.

Since entering Canadian Confederation in 1871, British Columbia has barely decolonized with respect to aboriginal land ownership and sovereignty. And it was only in 1949, not so long ago, that Chinese Canadians were finally given the vote. The vision of some sort of "postcolonial" reality is still a long way off. Chinese immigrants, among other immigrants, always made up a significant portion of the non-Native population.³ The Chinese "settler" was building British Columbia decades before its entry into Confederation. Today, hybrid east Asian and south Chinese communities that were formed in the colonial period, increasingly mediate between the last gasps of anglocentricity and the growing challenges to it. Not coincidentally, strategies for AIDS prevention on the West Coast have been increasingly cross-cultural and often focus on culturally based questions of intimacy, communication and security rather than earlier dichotomies of "gay" and "straight."

Ed: At times when the urge came it was difficult to quash. It would reveal itself like an ugly monster. I would do silly things like go have sex in the park.

Cathy: I enjoyed being almost like a voyeur and being paid for it. But it cost me my marriage.

Robin: God does not intend for homosexuality to happen.

Ed: My mother was very Christian. So, I was like their gift from God. I got married for them. I was living their lives. I did what they wanted.

Jennifer: They didn't know I was a lesbian. I did want to tell them. I'm not a coward, I just couldn't because of the social pressures.

Winston: It was a rebellion because if society didn't accept me as a gay man, well, I would just live in the fringes of society with all the other assortment of outcasts.

Cathy: I have a son who is fifteen and I remember living on Sunset Beach. He would walk out to see the beautiful sunsets. One night he said, "there's a man, he asked me to go to his house" ... I realized that it was a pick-up place for gay people, which I'm totally open about except my son was so young. You know, I didn't know what to do.

Peter: If I noticed gay tendencies at the childhood stage, I'd try to reform them.

Ed: I finally told my wife after five years of marriage that I was gay. And the marriage continued on for another eight years. We were married for thirteen years.

Arika: I'm very close to my aunt. The funny thing is that I haven't come out to her yet. I plan on doing that soon cuz she's taking me to San Francisco.

Jennifer: I left the country that I was in. I left a very well-paying \$100,000 a year job. I left all that because I was dying spiritually as a lesbian and physically as a human being.

Gilbert: Homosexuality exists. There's nothing bad about it. It's not like they rob or commit crimes.

Robin: If my son tells me he's gay, I would assess the situation to see if it's a delusion.

Jennifer: My sister wrote, "I cried when I found out, not because you are a lesbian but because I couldn't support you not knowing all these years. I cannot imagine all your pain and your sorrow. I love you and am happy that you have told me."

Arika: Just being proud of who I am and being myself. I have friends and family who support me.

Video as Geography:

Mapping West Coast Queerscapes



In AIDS videos, two very different sets of educational goals and pedagogies are increasingly blurred. The first agenda is to distribute basic information on the mechanics of safe sex as clearly as possible, and the second is the longer-term and still vague project of creating "space" for effectively asserting erotic desire, and supporting more careful and consensual decision-making around sexual acts. As more and more people are gaining access to the basic information, this latter goal becomes increasingly important for "the long haul," and for the development of eroticized culture, as the ravages of AIDS continue to shock and force us, no matter how numbly, to react. Confronting AIDS, whether for educational purposes or for the making of art, requires a fuller exploration of specific locations, both cultural and geographic. New examinations of race and gender must be precisely situated in contexts of political and cultural economy for there to be any relevance and credibility.

Today, many AIDS videos are as much about determining the nature of "context" with respect to the places in which particular people are, and how they choose where to go, as they are about the epidemiology of the virus itself. In this sense, a video such as *Blending Milk & Water* looks at the pathos of place and placelessness as much as the dis-ease itself. The tension emerges from the often contradictory and obfuscated relationships between various groups of Chinese Canadians and the not-so-cohesive society called British Columbia, as much as from the general history and trajectories of HIV. But what kinds of maps can a video compiled from interviews create and where can they take us? Here, it is worth looking more closely at the history of marginalized sex and sexualities on the Pacific Coast.



Vancouver, Victoria and Prince Rupert are relatively new colonial towns built on Native cultural centres, some of which may have existed for at least 5,000 years. Vancouver was established as a city in 1886 with the completion of the Trans-Canada Railway. Two decades before this, Victoria became a Hudson's Bay Company town, and two decades later Prince Rupert was established as the Pacific terminus to the northern rail line. Soon after its founding, Vancouver also

became the northern terminus of the Great Northern Railway. These towns existed, for most of the first part of the century as way stations in a colonial landscape between Europe, Asia and later the United States. Like nineteenth century San Francisco, with its similar patterns of labour and immigration, Pacific Canadian towns became major sites for both "sexual, racial and gender

crossings⁴ and the institutionalization of racist policies. This contradiction remains central, even today, in any exploration of Chinese Canadian culture, sexuality and risk. For example, as the Trans-Canada Railway was being completed by Chinese workers, in 1885, an anti-Chinese head tax was enacted and maintained for thirty-eight years, followed by policies of active exclusion until 1949. In the months following the incorporation of Vancouver, sodomy was criminalized in Britain, largely in response to the expansion of spaces of relative sexual "anarchy" that extended from central



London⁵ to the saloons on the frontiers of British Columbia. The chill of this new repression was soon felt in the margins of the Empire, particularly in emergent centres of Sodom(y) such as Vancouver, and it came to be embodied in its landscapes and architectures. In the first half of the twentieth century, these West Coast towns were hard port and railway terminals where prostitution and other "vice," including male and female homosexuality, was partially tolerated when it was not outright flourishing.

Similar to more segregated cities in the British Empire, Vancouver, in the brief period since its inception, has supported at least four very different homosexual or arguably queer subcultures: white male, primarily white lesbian, Chinese, and aboriginal—the latter two less publicly evident. Other marginalized social groups were situated around these divisions. In the frontier towns, there was remarkable spatial segregation especially between sexual minorities. Within every homosexual underground there were discordant and invisible networks that threatened to explode and become visible if broader political and economic factors permitted. In contrast to the formation of primarily white gay enclaves, the nineteenth-century homosexual Chinese

Winston: Society is very intolerant about differences. And as a kid you don't want to be different. You just want to be like everybody else and be accepted.

Crawfords: I have spoken to my three-year-old daughter—that a potential partner for her could be a male or female. She seems to think that she'd like a male for the most part because she wants to wear the dress and he's suppose to wear the suit at the ceremony. But now, she's entertaining ideas that they can both wear fancy dresses at the ceremony.

Sushi Bar: I went straight from a straight life. One week I was at a gay bar, the week after that I was in a dress.

Wayne: I know that my parents are very unusual for Chinese. First of all, they've been accepting of me being gay, and secondly, they've been accepting of all my boyfriends.

Peter: It was a little uneasy for me meeting Wayne's dad and finding him five years older than me and his stepmother eight years younger than me.

Cathy: That's the most practical thing, masturbate, learn to masturbate.

Dana: I prefer to be on top with big muscular men.

Winston: I like it fast, easy and anonymous. That's how I like to do my drugs, too.

Sushi Bar: This person wanted to take me home and I said, "Yes." But, the minute we got there, all he wanted was to go into my closet and try on dresses.

Dana: In terms of wanting to physically and sexually dominate, it has been with White men. It has something to do with taking my aggression out on White men and I have done this through sexual ways.

Ming: I met my partner through a personal ad. It said, "Sleek, 1948 Import, no liens, low-maintenance seeks single male for mutual TLC."

Arika: What does a lesbian do after her first date? She packs the U-haul and moves in with her partner.

Sushi Bar: The best part of relationships for me is having the security of knowing that when I go home, the make-up and dress comes off and the show personality goes back into the closet, that there's somebody there who will accept me for what I am and listen to what I have to say.

Crawfords: She refers to them as "one of those little bags that you put your penis into." And that if we find one on the sidewalk, do not pick it up.

subculture was established when 10,000 to 15,000 male workers were crowded into Vancouver after the Trans-Canada railroad was completed. The queer margins of this Chinatown undoubtedly had cultural links to the large homosexual enclaves in cities of China.

Vancouver has a less overt history of state-sanctioned segregation than many other cities in North America, but the fractured invisibility of large networks of racial and sexual minorities, indeed of much of the "queerscape" is remarkable. It is probably no coincidence that as the divisions described above began to break down over the last decade, a somewhat less Eurocentric, more sex-positive queer politics has emerged. But integration of these queer networks has only just begun, and will remain appropriate only for particular forms of communality, exchange, and erotic contact where modicums of equal power relationships, along lines of gender, race, language and ethnicity can be safeguarded.

In the same period as the queering and partial decolonization of West Coast sexual minorities, Vancouver has emerged as a centre for film and television production, exporting queasy and often pretentiously postmodern mythologies. The city is a major world centre for the production of the para-normal and fetishized paranoia, with Fox's productions of *X-Files*, *The Outer Limits*, and *Poltergeist* as some of the more celebrated corporate examples. This growing un-Britishness of British Columbia is increasingly at odds with the construction of sexual identities, including lesbian and gay, that remain rooted in anglophile world views.

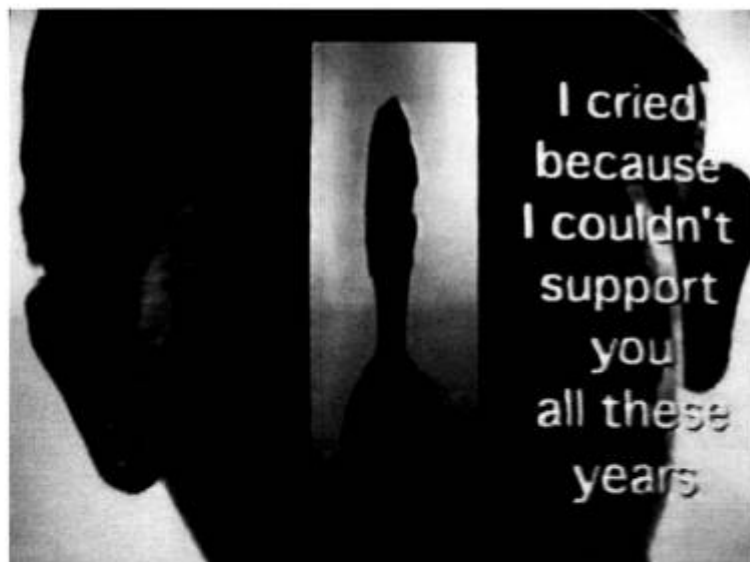
The colonial landscape was built with systematic homophobic repression through the isolation of sexual minorities while, at the same time, open spaces provided places to hide and tolerate minority sexualities. In other words, West Coast towns had the crucial combination of ingredients for making queer public space: lots of forest and outdoor space in which to hide, and crammed towns, saloons, pubs, balls and raves in which to make contact. And, perhaps more than most large North American cities, rampant prostitution, and reactions to it, were major factors in the formation of Vancouver's neighbourhoods. Even today in port towns, beaches are surrogates for more politicized formations of "public space."⁶ They have become the fulcra for social discourses and contesting boundaries, from cruising to political demonstrations that typically go on in the centres of urban fabrics.

Also, the city police of these Pacific towns have been relatively tolerant of the public presence of sexual minorities, especially of the white gay community, than other forces in major Canadian cities. Vancouver has, historically, had less incidences of violent and organized harassment by police than Toronto and Montreal.

In recent years, the West Coast has been a destination for international



capital, in large part, because of the unsustainability of the forestry, mining and fishing sectors.⁷ The Chinese “influx” is less about a fundamental change in the percentage of east Asians in the overall population as it is about the shift in economy to more expansive sectors of services⁸—communications and culture. This flow contributes to the transformation of Vancouver into what some, including Paul Delany, have argued is a quintessentially postmodern city.⁹ Delany’s argument is that cities such as Vancouver, which have been peripheral to the colonial and modernist centres of power, can better nurture hybridity and diversity. Less optimistic Vancouverites are convinced that



power brokers are hell-bent on concocting “fictional histories” of the city, re-iterating colonial fantasies as part of new marketing ploys.¹⁰

Despite continued attempts to elude the colonial past and (neo)colonial present, public space on the West Coast remains cramped and uncomfortable for “minorities” such as Chinese Canadians. There are many different ways of mapping these disparities, and *Blending Milk & Water* looks at how the culture of displacement and the establishment of first, second, and third (and more) generation Chinese Canadian experience intersects with the impacts of AIDS. Video provides a particularly strategic, alternative space to discuss these issues. The interwoven interviews in *Blending Milk & Water* locate only a few points, but the lines connect and begin to point to some trends and possibilities—not just for the “minority” but for the region as a whole.

The Uses of Video Maps (and AIDS Videos)

Blending Milk & Water represents a range of under-discussed experiences and information, in three languages—effectively challenging the supremacy of

Amber has suggested that we carry a pair of chopsticks to pick them up and put them into the garbage.

Dr. Simon Ko: Mistresses worry that their men will sleep around.

Ming: I know that how you practise safer-sex is important, wearing condoms and things like that. However, one of the main things is to reduce the number of partners.

Dr. Simon Ko: Wives worry about their husbands sleeping around when they go abroad, especially the “astronauts.” They ask me to check for sexually transmitted diseases. Usually they are just paranoid.

Chao Xin: AIDS is already a problem in Hong Kong, China and Canada, but I don’t personally know much about it.

Dana: I remember the first time that I heard about AIDS. I think it was 1983, twelve years ago. It was somebody who I have known for twenty odd years. He told me, he didn’t tell me, he was crying and I knew.

Ed: I found out I was HIV-positive in 1992.

Dana: I use to babysit him when he was a little boy. About a year ago, he was getting very sick, and asked if he could come and live with me. He thought he was going to die, and he didn’t want to die in a hospital. I said that would be fine for him to move in and die in my home.

Ed: I was on my own during that Christmas and it was really a trying time. Here I was just walking around with having just learnt that I was HIV-positive. It was Christmas and being away from family and having no one here. It just mounts and mounts.

Winston: I was in a double bind being an IV drug user and a gay man, where the chances of me possibly getting AIDS was a lot higher.

Cathy: I can remember the time it came off, the Berlin Wall came down so I said the rubber wall will also come down.

Dana: You never know if somebody is telling you the truth about their sexual history. You can only hope that they are.

Winston: I’ve slept with men who were really drunk or high and they’ve wanted me to fuck them without a condom.

Dana: There’s no safe zone any more, it’s like everybody’s at risk, everybody’s at danger.

Arika: I don’t think there’ll ever be a time, unfortunately, that you can stop protecting yourself.

Ed: Our sexual activity is very safe because I would feel terrible if he were infected. He’s tested negative throughout our three-year relationship.

Notes

1. *Blending Milk & Water: Sex in The New World* (28 minutes, stereo), 1996, Languages: Cantonese, English and Mandarin; Executive producer and director: Paul Wong; Original soundtrack by Frederick and Jeet; Producers: Ming Chaing, Davina Chan, Nancy Li, Henry Koo, A Project of ASIA, Vancouver. Distribution: Video Out International Distribution, Vancouver, fax: (604) 876-1185; email: video@portal.bc.ca.

2. This article is based on the first screening of *Blending Milk & Water: Sex in The New World* at the XI World AIDS Conference in July 1996 in Vancouver. Wong has also expressed plans to present the work as a site-based installation with numerous monitors presenting longer versions of the interviews of various individuals.

3. See the 1891 and 1901 Canadian census for the Burrard Inlet, New Westminster and Vancouver (Island) divisions (National Archives of Canada, Ottawa), and Robert A. J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: Class, Status and Social Boundaries 1863-1913* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996), pp. 19-21.

4. Richard Fung, *Dirty Laundry*, video, Toronto: Fungus Productions/Banff, Alberta: Banff Centre for the Arts, 1995.

5. Paul Hallam, *The Book of Sufism* (New York: Verso, 1993), pp. 15-96.

6. Lance Berelowitz, *From Factor 13 to J'ai d'artifice: The Nature of Public Space in Vancouver* (Toronto, a/c, 1994-95), pp. 32-37.

7. Gordon Brent Ingram, "Landscapes of (un)lawful Chaos: Conflicts Around Temperate Rainforest and Biological Diversity in Pacific Canada," *Review of European Community & International Environmental Law*, 4(3), 1995, pp. 242-249.

8. Based on the 1891 census, the total population of Chinese/Chinese Canadians in the city of Vancouver has probably declined while the total percentage of non-European backgrounds has increased.

9. Paul Delany, "Vancouver as Postmodern City," *Vancouver: Representing the Postmodern City*, Paul Delany (Ed.), (Vancouver: Pulp Arsenal Press, 1994), pp. 1-24. See his discussion of "peripheral cities" on p. 4.

10. Trevor Boddy, "Plastic Lion's Gate: A Short History of the Post Modern in Vancouver Architecture," *Vancouver: Representing the Postmodern City*, 1994, pp. 25-49 especially pp. 38-49.

English. An emphasis on Cantonese acknowledges the culture that historically provided the primary source of cheap labour in the West. Mappable cultural space is created through the texture of fragments of experience; in this new cohesion, the video employs optimism, humour, and sly camp that extends the discourse into real time and useful discussions of political econ-



omy. As a West Coast AIDS video, *Blending Milk & Water*, even with its emphasis on Chinese Canadians and mixed couples, is far more inclusive and inspiring than many AIDS videos that speak more about the past than the future.

Blending Milk & Water does not equate the compounding of marginalizations with the advent of AIDS as experienced by Chinese Canadians, but Wong does not try to separate or negate their synergies and overlapping locations. People on the West Coast who feel acute displacements in the Age of AIDS, like loss of health and networks of friends, cannot necessarily "share" or equate their "pain" with the displacement of Chinese Canadians. But, the video is not specifically about Chinese Canadians, rather it is about sex in the New World. We all may be a bit displaced as sex migrants—but in different places, on different blocks in those crude frontier towns. The gaps in the maps of various experiences can tell us more about where we really are and the cultures and geographies of the West Coast than the increasingly re-marketed colonial mythologies of a past that never was.

Brent Ingram is from a West Coast family of diverse backgrounds involved in the modern founding of Vancouver, Victoria, and Prince Rupert. He has worked extensively on Canadian government projects in China and Indonesia. This article was supported by Canada Council Explorations grant, Queersville.