

Bimonthly  
July/Sept. 1995

# viceversa



49

Toronto

Montréal

New York

## ON THE WATERFRONT

Affleck, Ashley, Bruneau,  
D'Alessandro, Giorgini,  
Holden, Seleanu



*Vilho*

**André Gorz**

Beyond the Salaried Society

**Régis Debray**

The Myth of Art

**Jean Morisset**

Sentiers indiens. Caughnawaga:  
aux sources du Canada français

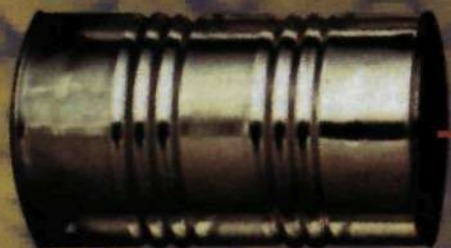




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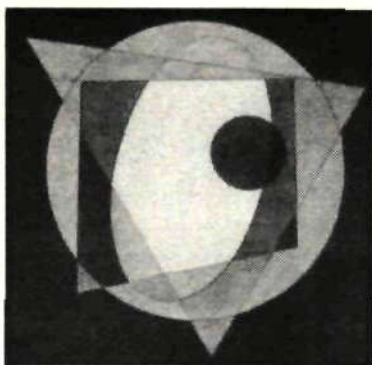


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CONSEIL  
DES ARTS







Ivan V. Klioune  
*Untitled,*  
circa 1917

Vice Versa, founded in 1983  
No 49 July/September 1995  
ISSN: 0821-6827

Vice Versa, the transcultural magazine, is published bimonthly  
by Éditions Viceversa, P.O. Box 991, Station A, Montréal,  
Québec, Canada H3C 2W9

All rights reserved. © 1995 by Éditions Viceversa  
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Station A, Montréal, QC, Canada H3C 2W9

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MANY THANKS TO William Anselmi

COVER: Vittorio

DESIGN: Fabrizio Gilardino/Anna Morelli

TYPOGRAPHY: Text: Matrix (Emigre), Meta (Fontshop),

Heds: 2 Rebels, Fuse, LettError

PROOF-READER: Elisa Shenkier

PHOTOGRAPHERS: Josef Geranio, Terry Losos

ILLUSTRATOR: Daniel Sylvestre

DISTRIBUTION: Messageries Dynamiques (Québec); CMPA (Rest  
of Canada); Speedimpex (New York and Boston)

PRINTER: Payette & Simms, Saint-Lambert, QC, Canada,  
ph [514] 672-6380

Second class number 6385

Legal Depot: Canadian National Library and Bibliothèque  
Nationale du Québec

Vice Versa is indexed in Point de Repère and Canadian  
Periodical Index

Vice Versa is member of SODEP and CMPA

Funding assistance from: The Canada Council, Conseil des arts  
et des Lettres du Québec, Conseil des arts de la communauté  
urbaine de Montréal

MANUSCRIPTS: Address to "Vice Versa". The magazine is not  
responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts

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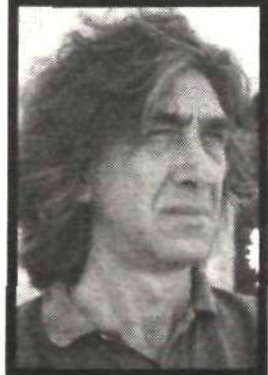
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# WHY THIS TRIANGULAR VICE VERSA?

Lamberto Tassinari



A new magazine after twelve years? Not really, *Vice Versa* has always looked beyond cultural and political borders as well as psychological ones, proposing an open identity, a hybrid. No surprises then. The truth is that *Vice Versa*, after reflecting at length globally, has decided to act locally by choosing a new territory and changing its linguistic balance (65% of the articles are in English, 30% in French and 5% in Italian and Spanish). The magazine has found itself within the "triangle" formed by the three big metropolises of Eastern North America: Montréal, Toronto, New York. Instead of circling the planet now we're "triangulating"! Quite a different thing! The means of connecting certainly aren't lacking. Just think: forty planes, a dozen trains and at least six buses leave Montréal for Toronto every day and return. There are also many different highways! The same is true as regards access to and from New York. This is not an ordinary little triangle but an extraordinary and bustling mosaic which goes largely unnoticed and, therefore, neglected. We, however, already love it because it allows us to step out of the national circle, because it harbors a diversified Americanness which is more exciting and real than any official national identity, because it is full of life, exchanges, people, languages and ideas. A critical yet witty journalistic style covers the hot flow of political, cultural, and economic events within the triangle: inquiries, reports, interviews, and commentaries from all three cities are presented in a comparative, unique manner. We will also confront and link different, at times similar but always peculiar, stories and facts.

In this issue you will read extraordinary articles by Régis Debray and André Gorz which reflect our political orientation. The latter's article puts an end to the lies of the economists ("create" jobs, the unbearable "luxury" of public health, education...). Régis Debray's article strikes out at "Art", the last religion, the ambiguous, trafficked activity which has been strangely overrated for the past, say, four hundred years.

Read, take a stroll along our three waterfronts. Then subscribe, support *Vice Versa* and feel free to write to us.

Happy reading and enjoy your journey.

## Pourquoi ce Vice Versa Triangulaire?

Une nouvelle revue après douze ans! A vrai dire *Vice Versa* a toujours transgressé des frontières: culturelles et politiques. Psychologiques aussi en proposant une identité ouverte, hybride. Pas de surprise donc. Le fait est qu'après avoir longtemps pensé globalement, enfin *Vice Versa* agit localement! C'est comme ça que le magazine s'est choisi un territoire en modifiant aussi son équilibre linguistique (65% des textes sont en anglais, 30% en français, 5% en italien et espagnol). Le magazine s'est installé dans le triangle formé par les trois grandes métropoles de l'Est américain: Montréal, Toronto, New York. Au lieu de tourner la planète, maintenant on «triangle»: bien différent! Pas les moyens qui manquent. Et alors, pensez: presque quarante avions, une dizaine de trains, au moins six autobus, chaque jour quittent Montréal pour Toronto et en reviennent. Sans compter les autoroutes de toute sorte! Pour New York et de New York on «triangle» à peu près au même rythme. C'est un triangle extraordinaire, métis, achalandé mais que personne ne semble voir, dont personne ne parle, comme s'il était un petit triangle bien ordinaire. Mais voilà ce triangle nous l'aimons déjà. Parce qu'il nous permet de sortir du cercle national, parce qu'il y a dedans une américanité inédite, plus vraie et excitante que les identités nationales officielles, parce qu'il est plein de vie, d'échanges, de mondes, de langues et d'idées.

Le bouillonnant courant d'événements politiques, culturels, économiques sera appréhendé à travers une intervention journalistique ou, à l'esprit critique, s'associera l'humour. Des enquêtes, reportages, interviews, commentaires sur la vie des trois cités selon une approche comparative inédite. Ainsi émergeront des choses différentes, parfois semblables, toujours particulières que nous confronterons, que nous mettrons en contact.

Dans ce numéro vous lirez deux contributions extraordinaires s'inscrivant dans la direction politique que nous suivons dans le Triangle. Il s'agit des articles de Régis Debray et d'André Gorz. Ce dernier pour en finir avec les mensonges de l'économisme («créer» des postes de travail, le «luxe» insoutenable de la santé publique, de l'éducation, etc); le premier pour assener un beau coup à l'«art», dernière religion, activité ambiguë, trafiquée et, pour des raisons plus ou moins obscures, toujours surestimée en ces derniers, disons... quatre cents ans. Lisez, promenez-vous sur nos trois waterfronts. Puis abonnez-vous, soutenez *Vice Versa* et sentez-vous libres de nous écrire.

Bonne lecture et bon voyage.

## Perché Vice Versa triangolare?

Una nuova rivista dopo dodici anni! Veramente *Vice Versa* ha sempre trasgredito frontiere: culturali e linguistiche. Anche psicologiche, suggerendo un'identità aperta, ibrida. Dunque nessuna vera sorpresa. Solo che, dopo aver pensato per tanto tempo globalmente ora *Vice Versa* agisce localmente! Così si è scelta un territorio modificando l'equilibrio linguistico (65% dei testi sono in inglese, 30% in francese, 5% in italiano e spagnolo). La rivista si è trovata così in un triangolo formato dalle tre grandi metropoli dell'Est americano: Montréal, Toronto, New York. Invece di girare il mondo, ora triangoliamo: è ben diverso! E non mancano i mezzi. Pensate circa quaranta aerei, una decina di treni e almeno sei autobus ogni giorno vanno da Montréal a Toronto e ritorno. Senza contare le highways di ogni tipo! Per New York e da New York si triangola più o meno allo stesso ritmo. Si tratta di un triangolo straordinario, meticcio, frequentatissimo, ma che nessuno sembra vedere, di cui nessuno parla, come fosse un triangolino qualsiasi. A noi invece piace. Perché ci permette di uscire dal circolo nazionale; perché c'è dentro un'americanità inedita, più vera e eccitante delle identità nazionali ufficiali; perché è un triangolo pieno di vita, di scambi, di gente, di lingue, di idee. L'imponente flusso di avvenimenti politici, culturali, economici verrà affrontato in modo giornalistico e, accanto allo spirito critico, ci sarà a volte dello humour. Inchieste, reportage, interviste, commenti sulla vita nelle tre città secondo un'ottica comparativa inedita. Allora, verranno fuori cose diverse, a volte simili, sempre particolari, da confrontare, da mettere in contatto.

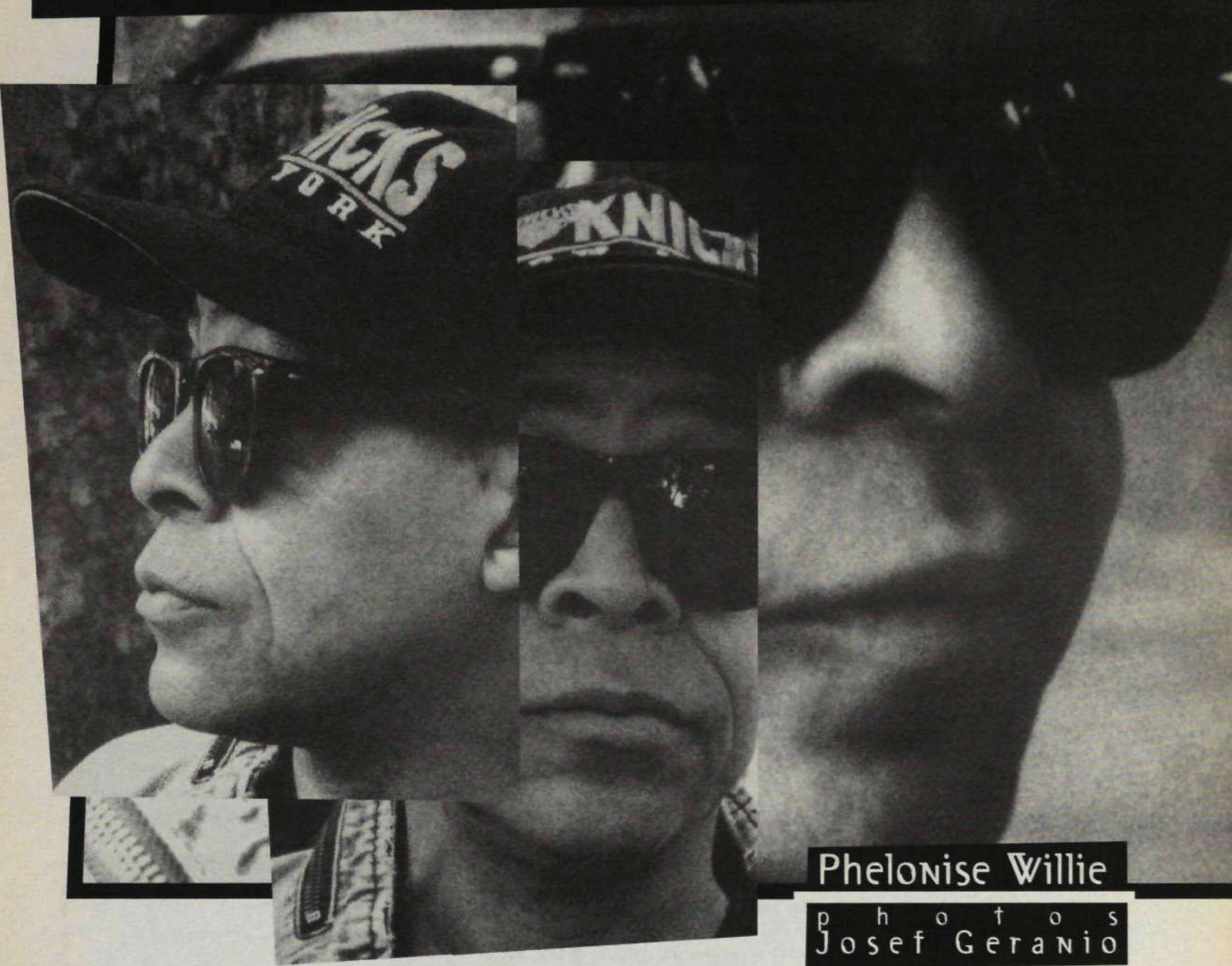
In questo numero, due straordinari contributi nella direzione politica che seguiremo nel Triangolo, sono gli articoli di Régis Debray e di André Gorz. Quest'ultimo per aiutarci a farla finita con le menzogne economicistiche («creare» posti di lavoro, il «lusso» ora eccessivo dell'assistenza medica, della scuola, etc.); il primo per dare un colpo all'«arte», ultima religione, attività ambigua, trafficata e, per più o meno oscure ragioni, sempre sopravvalutata in questi ultimi, diciamo... quattrocento anni.

Leggete, passeggiate sui tre fronti del porto. Poi abbonatevi, sostenete *Vice Versa* e scriveteci liberamente.

Buona lettura e buon viaggio.



# Who's Who in Black America and Homeless?



Phelonise Willie

photos  
Josef Geranio

**H**is name is Charles Wright. The Post Office has just forwarded him the proofs of his bio for the newest edition of *Who's Who Among Black Americans*. It was delivered to the shelter where he lives this morning. He's astonished but it's not the first time he's made the list, it's just the first time he's been homeless.

Back in 1963, when his first novel *The Messenger* was published and hardcovers were selling for \$3.98, he was a promising young writer. Now they cost \$24.98 and Charles is sixty-two and going blind. In 1949, when he was seventeen and the subways were still a nickel, he met James Jones in a writers colony. James introduced him to Norman Mailer who wanted to read Charles' unpublished novel *No Regrets* but only on the condition that it wasn't Charles' only copy. Norman didn't want to be responsible for losing it. So Charles xeroxed it and kept the original. Then Charles felt safe because

Norman had a duplicate, and Norman felt secure since Charles still had the original, until both of them lost the only two copies in existence. Charles laughs as he tells this story with good natured shrug. It might have been some of his best writing, but easy come easy go. Writing and money have come and gone as easily as his fifteen minutes of fame. Now his nerves are bad and he complains his predicament and the people in the shelters are so boring he has writer's block. But once life was full of splendid coevals. He met Kay Boyle in the lobby of the Metropolitan Museum of Art when he was still a messenger. She was charmed someone so young had recognized her. "You must be a writer," she said, "how else could you know this face."

Before he and Mailer lost *No Regrets* he had shown it to Ferrar Straus and Giroux. Roger Strauss didn't want to publish it but he



wanted to meet the young man who wrote it. "Why don't you write about what you do. You must have seen a lot..." That was on a Thursday. Charles wrote thirty pages over the weekend, delivered them on Monday and before the end of the week had a contract to publish his first novel, *The Messenger*.

The critics loved *The Messenger* and its author. Charles took the residuals and flew to Tangiers to live, where he met Paul Bowles and stayed until he ran out of funds. Sitting in the sidewalk cafes he often befriended the local whores and thieves and gave them advice. He would tell the poor young gigolos what to put in the letters they wrote their middle class tourist lovers. "No, no", he would say, "if you want that expensive watch you can't say it that way". They repaid him with streetwise affection. He was the only foreigner who could wander down the waterfront through its deserted alleys smashed drunk at three o'clock in the morning with total impunity. No one touched him. But after all, it was the sixties and Tangiers.

By the time he got back to New York he was broke. He holed up in a little hotel and wrote *The Wig*, his second novel, in twenty-nine sweet alcoholic days. He was hoping for a little more fame and money. He believed *The Wig* a far better book than *The Messenger*. He met James Baldwin after Baldwin wrote the blurb that appeared on the cover of *The Wig*. Baldwin thought the book daring and honest, but the critics decimated *The Wig*. It was a radical black protest novel before its time had come. Richard Wright had written *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison had written *The Invisible Man* but comparatively, although these were protest novels, they were respectful and traditional in form.

*The Wig* was irreverent. It assaulted both Whites and Blacks. As a tragic surreal tale of a desperate black man's futile attempt to enter the all American dream by straightening his kinky hair, it was too far on the vanguard of those militant black novels that would soon decorate the coffee tables of the radically white and chic in the next decade. The White "liberalism" of the Sixties didn't become trendy until the Seventies. When *The Wig* was published in 1966, the mainstream had not yet hit upon the idea of literary flagellation as a means of expiating its collective guilt. Charles was confused.

Langston Hughes had written him a couple of letters after

reading *The Messenger*, but Charles had carelessly neglected to answer. He only met Langston after *The Wig* was published. Langston spoke to him gently. He could see Charles had been damaged by the critics' barbs. Langston gave him a little fatherly advice. "If what you want is for them to love you again, just write another nice little book like *The Messenger*."



White folks don't want to know any black person feels and thinks intensely enough to write a book like *The Wig*, Langston told him.

Eventually, the critics who destroyed *The Wig* begrudgingly conceded that, at the very least, Charles Wright had become the undisputed father of black black satire. But by then fate had changed its course for Charles Wright. The promising young writer was not so young and trusting anymore. The only promises he decided to keep were his own angry ones. His weekly column in the Village Voice, *Wright's World*, grew even more nakedly irreverent than *The Wig*. He filled it with raw uncensored escapades of the underbelly of society he knew so well. He was still bearing the message declining to edit its brutality for the sake of politeness.

Today, his vision of America remains unadorned. Luck has not been his lady. Like so many writers of his generation Charles is an alcoholic and suffers from depression. Two excellent reasons to engage in self-pity, even without his nicotine jones, glaucoma, ulcers and severe Lupus. But he is as unsentimental about life as he is about pain. His black black humor is still startling and amusing. You would never guess talking to him that he is homeless and on the verge of going blind. He's charismatic, pragmatic steel. He's down to two

cigarettes a day "just to read the New York Times with" and still holding on to "the wagon". It's a roller coaster but he's been dry since October when he entered the seedy little shelter where he now resides. The shelter is supposed to be finding him an apartment but so far all it's offered is 'single room occupancy' uptown in Harlem or downtown near Avenue D and the East River, better known to the locals as Junkieville.

Charles is resisting leaving a shelter for an SRO. In order to write again he needs the privacy and solitude of his own place. "The East Village is home" he sighs. "I've lived here ever since I arrived from St. Louis. Even when I was washing dishes in the Catskills I hiked back on my days off. Even when I was sleeping in those Bowery fleabags they were always lower East side fleas" he laughs. He figures if he's going to have to walk those mean streets one day with a cane or a seeing eye dog as the doctors keep predicting, he wants to be able to 'see' them. He's got NoHo( East Manhattan from Fourteen Street to Houston Street) memorized. He'd rather have a tiny studio in Noho than a state of the art loft in Soho or the Bronx. He's a veteran, a senior citizen, disabled, in "Who's Somebody in Black America", but he can't find a decent apartment he can afford. Forget decent, he can't find any cheap apartment.

But Charles is sanguine. Like the title of his third book, he finds darkness and homelessness *Absolutely Nothing to get Alarmed About*. He's writing poetry on Prozac, biding his time, confident his Guardian Angel is about to appear any moment. All he wants, he says, is a little pad, a big old fashioned mechanical typewriter and peace and quiet. The shelters are even noisier than SROs. He doesn't sleep nights. If it wasn't for his vision and physical problems he'd probably hit the streets.

I quote the statistics to him. According to the Coalition for the Homeless, as of May 1995, there are approximately 24,000 people living in shelters, 9000 of which are children, and another 25,000 people living in the streets. I ask why he thinks he's going to luck upon what thousands of other homeless in New York must be hoping for in vain. He flashes that ageless teenage grin and whispers, "Well then, what the heck, maybe I've got a premonition. I'm always on the vanguard of something. I was the father of black black humor and what other homeless guy do you know listed in 'Who's Who...?'"

He sees the look on my face and laughs. "I'm not worried about getting a pad something will turn up. Its the stuff around the bend worrying me. My Socialized Security if I go blind". "You mean your checks?" I ask. "No, my soul. Look" he whispers, "Maybe it's the detox, but someday I feel chipper. And I been dreaming stuff lately, that's been coming true. Like imagining my vision's getting better. It's scary. But hey, as a friend of mine, who risked his life crossing the New Jersey turnpike on foot last week and lost it, as ole Al use to say, I'm a tough little son-of-a-bitch. So now, if I could survive an April 17? Are you kidding me? I can survive anything." "What happened April 17th?" "Here. Read the poem I wrote. That was the day they told me I was also going blind in my good eye." 🌸🌸

## APRIL 17

April bequeathed  
The most terrible gift  
Except for death  
Damn you  
So take the promising skies, soft air  
Some brownstone's magnificent magnolia  
Night will never be the same anymore  
Whether  
Moon-sotted or plagued by rain  
Viewed by this solitary strange

PHOLONISE WILLIE IS A WRITER AND POET. SHE IS THE EDITOR OF VICE VERSA IN NEW YORK.



# The RIVER and the CITY:

## BUILDING A NEW LANDSCAPE

Gavin Affleck

To announce the meeting of representatives of more than a dozen disciplines in Quebec City in the spring of 1995 for les Etats généraux du paysage québécois, the conference's organizing committee produced an elegant three colour brochure with imagined landscapes rendered to suggest vintage etchings and flowing calligraphic script. It appeared that the Etats généraux was a call to assembly for the Knights of the Round Table and all that was missing were some trumpets and flags.

Such romanticizations of the landscape are not a new phenomenon. The natural world was first portrayed as an escape from the brutality of the Industrial Revolution and if the twentieth century conception of the landscape has had any focus, it remained rooted in this nineteenth century inheritance. The romantic approach never quite eclipsed the reductionism it set out to criticize: by framing the landscape as a sacred object it only succeeded in isolating man and nature, city and country. An idealized retreat distinct from the realities of urban life, the natural world remained separated from the world inhabited by man. Most of the significant landscape art of our times has reflected this division. The broad appeal of the paintings of the Group of Seven, for example, can be attributed in large measure to the work's pleasant associations with the rest and relaxation of vacation-time [1]. Combined with this heritage has been a fundamental confusion between environment and landscape. While the former as a physical reality should be distinguished from the latter as a cultural practice of modification, such a distinction is rarely made. The twentieth century's attitude to the landscape has generally been one of



Montréal's Vieux-Port  
[photo: Terry Lalos]





**Montréal's  
Vieux-Port**  
[photos:  
Terry Lalos]

devaluation and mystification [2].

But there is hope on the horizon. As the industrial world becomes increasingly submerged in an information-based society, we are witnessing a new type of place-making. To best understand this change, let us consider landscape as the mediating presence between the natural and the artificial. The romantic process of mediation was sentimental and nostalgic: nature was good and man was bad and never the twain shall meet. In the new landscapes, it is the manner of mediation itself which is changing. Considering built and natural environments as part of a larger continuum, places are being made that embrace the landscape pragmatically in a spirit of reconciliation between environment and man. Landscape becomes "the sum total of all things and their past configurations" [3]: a living record of history inscribed in nature. Combining vestiges of industry with the varying scales of nature and the particularities of local geography and history, the revitalization of urban waterfronts throughout North America and Europe are among the most compelling examples of these new landscapes. These projects use architecture as a type of in-situ installation to reveal the existing landscape of ageing commercial ports. Abandoned railways, storage sheds and obsolete marine equipment are treated as landscape elements in the same manner as vegetation, topography or water features. Such conversions of declining industrial areas to recreational uses are the most recent example of a fascination with nature-appreciation as a leisure activity of the urban dweller. In an ironic twist of history, the industrial infrastructure that fueled a return to nature more than a century ago is being reappropriated as visual animation for recreational landscapes - an unlikely mutation from mechanical to visual power.

In Montréal, the recent completion of the first phase of the Vieux-Port redevelopment has breathed new life into a declining waterfront and reconnected the city with the Saint Lawrence River. Montréal had little choice in the early 1980s than to begin to debate strategies for the reuse of its historic port area. The conversion of shipping to container cargo and the rerouting of marine traffic occasioned by the opening of the Saint Lawrence Seaway in the 1950s resulted in the construction of new container terminals down river that effectively rendered the Vieux-Port obsolete. Left behind was a strip of land some three kilometers long separating the tourist district of Old Montréal from the river. While narrow, this strip was richly articulated as a built landscape: towering embankments in stone and concrete

structured a dramatic relationship to the water; railways and their bridges and sidings criss-crossed the embankments and piers. The powerfully simple forms of industrial architecture including steel frame storage sheds and massive cylindrical grain elevators rose above the embankments as silhouettes against the river.

Designed by a consortium including architects Cardinal-Hardy, Peter Rose and Jodoin, Lamarre, Pratte and landscape architects Parent-Latreille, Pluram and Peter Walker, the Vieux-Port is the recipient of three of the profession's highest honours: a Prix d'Excellence from the Order of Architects of Quebec, a Progressive Architecture Award of Excellence and a Governor General's Award. The plan restores the morphology of the twentieth century port by reopening the entry to the Lachine Canal (closed in 1964) and the Bonsecours Basin (backfilled in 1973). Superimposed on this restored landscape is a network of pedestrian promenades, bicycle paths, park furniture, and vegetation. The contrast between the fine grain of this new recreational infrastructure and the embankments, ships and grain elevators still present on the site stimulates activity and creates a memorable sequence of experiences. Complementing this dynamic are a series of archaeological events including the exposed foundations of loading crane towers and a garden of ruins made up of the rusting vestiges of mechanical devices. The reappropriation of abandoned structures as the visual foci of a leisure landscape is further heightened by the layers of decay left exposed on embankment edges, grain elevators and storage shed walls. Weathered limestone and concrete and accumulated grime and rust create surfaces as inherently natural as those of a bucolic landscape.

The commitment of the designers to creating a new type of landscape is evident in the skill with which the various landscape layers, from the historic to the contemporary, are collaged together. The effect is generally seamless and the message communicated is one of continuity through time. In place of the pseudo-historical approach common to many revitalization schemes, the Vieux-Port treats buildings as spaces of transition related to movement patterns across the site. Conceived as complements to a larger landscape vision rather than self-referential objects, new pavillions and landscaping are expressive of current technology and methods of construction.

The presence of the river should not be underestimated in the ultimate success of the Vieux-Port as a landscape experiment. As opposed to city-center revitalization schemes lacking in significant natural features, the Vieux-



Port is blessed with a waterway of continental scale that ties the project to a larger conception of territory. Not only does the river create a unique sense of space: through ebb and flow it imposes as well its own sense of time. As a zone of mediation between the dominion of man (the city) and the dominion of nature (the river), the success of the Vieux-Port as a humane environment hinges on a sensitive negotiation of this transition.

As opposed to waterfront revitalizations in other Canadian cities, programming of activities in the Vieux-Port insures that the recreational vocation of the project remains its primary focus. Toronto's Harbourfront is dominated by condominium, hotel and office towers while Vancouver's Granville Island redevelopment is organized around a shopping arcade and retail area. The Vieux-Port is a more fundamentally public space: commercial activity is limited to recreational or leisure services such as a small-craft marina and Imax theater, both of which are woven into the fabric of existing storage sheds and piers.

As with any intervention of this scale, the Vieux-Port is not without missed opportunities. Beyond the restoration of embankments and piers, the plan's essential working space is the strip of vegetation contained by the urban wall of de la Commune Street to the north and the water's edge to the south. The results of an earlier phase of construction, the rustic pavillion, neo-Victorian street furniture and picturesque pond found in this area are disappointing. These nostalgic elements are at odds with the linearity of the land parcel they inhabit and create an unfortunate break in an otherwise seamless landscape. Somewhat frustrating as well was the decision to locate a granite promenade on the southern flank of de la Commune when the location of such a broad horizontal surface on the opposite side of the street would have created an opportunity for sidewalk cafés and given a boost to often abandoned storefronts.

The cultural sophistication of the Vieux-Port plan is good news for both Montréalers in general and the design professions in particular but assigning credit for a visionary approach to place-making would not be true to the happenstance of the situation. For all the willful good intentions of the socially engaged, new cultural expressions are as often as not thrust upon a reluctant populace by larger forces. As our cities transform from centers of labour and industry to centers of service and leisure our conception of landscape is shifting as well. The hybrid landscapes of the post-industrial city are an inevitability, not a vision, and the real challenge lies in our ability to understand the particularities and potential of each site and each situation as they arise. 🌿

N O T E S

1. A remark attributed to Group of Seven contemporary David Milne in Andrighetti, Rick, "Facing the Land: Landscape Design in Canada", *The Canadian Architect*, vol. 39, no. 8, August 1994, p.15
2. Wilson, Alexander, *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1991), p. 14
3. Gregotti, Vittorio, *Le Territoire de l'architecture* (Paris: L'Esquerre, 1982), p.28

**GAVIN AFFLECK** IS AN ARCHITECT AND PAINTER BASED IN MONTREAL. A MAJOR FOCUS OF HIS WORK IN BOTH DISCIPLINES IS THE INTEGRATION OF CONTEMPORARY FORM WITH THE LANDSCAPE.



## EYE ON THE RIVER ECOWATCH CENTRE ON THE ST. LAWRENCE

A new project which highlights the complexity and fragility of ecosystems is a welcome public service in an age of "cocooning", myopic greed, and the exaltation of short-term gain as well as private interests.

The Biosphere of Montréal, recently inaugurated as a water conservation awareness and ecowatch centre, constitutes a link with a different era of utopian vision and budding global ecological concerns. The great geodesic sphere on St Helen's island, a light and graceful framework composed of a myriad of steel tubes, was crafted for Expo '67. It was intended in the generous vision of its creator, the American engineer and inventor Buckminster Fuller, as an exhibition space to underscore the limits of natural resources on "spaceship Earth". In its time the dome merely became the US national pavillion at Expo 67. But, luckily still standing, the peculiar three-quarter sphere now houses an elegant, "high-tech", Bauhaus-style inspired addition; well-integrated within the original structure, the addition serves as home to the ecowatch centre. The Biosphere is primarily an educational institution, with activities and exhibits oriented toward outings for school groups and families.

The concept is beautifully and imaginatively realized giving the visitor a sense of the majesty and complexity of the St. Lawrence river with its wetlands and ecosystems. The natural setting of the Biosphere, on the green St Helen island, adds its own meaning to the centre's ecological message. Here, although altered by man's works, nature displays a characteristic Canadian grandeur. The activities of the Biosphere staff will not directly improve water quality or the state of flora and fauna of the St Lawrence. Although no research is carried out by the centre, there is scientific work of environmental value going on at various other research centres around Montréal, in connection with the universities and Environment Canada. Michel Provencher, the director of active observation for the Biosphere, talks about a new type of community involvement that the new institution claims to pioneer. He quote the best-

selling author, astronomer and environmental guru Hubert Reeves: "We don't have one environmental problem, but a host of small ones." The concept reminds one of the ecological movement catch phrase: «Think globally, act locally». In line with such precepts, the centre gathers observations made by concerned ornithologists, fishermen and students with respect to the health of flora, fish and bird habitat along the St Lawrence. Data collected in the framework of what the centre calls "environmental action networks" may eventually offer scientists an increased base for environmental action. Eleven such projects are currently under way. Harm Sloterdijk, an Environment Canada scientist specializing in ecotoxicology, is affiliated with the ecowatch centre. He has shown some senior high-school students from Varennes, Québec how to harvest; brown bull-head, yellow perch, pike and pumpkin seed sunfish, as well as how to measure them and describe their pathology (or how healthy they are) and subsequently to convey that information to the centre data bank. Environmental concern among students in Québec seems quite high according to some polls.

It appears that one of the most effective ways to woo high-school drop-outs to work, is by getting them involved in environmental projects.

In the near future, the ecocentre will also offer nature walks and bird watching tours. The Biosphere project, jointly realized by Environment Canada and the City of Montréal, is part of a wider plan to open up the city towards its river. The rehabilitation of the Old Port, making the waterfront available for recreation, belongs to the same vision which, in part, motivated the ecowatch centre recreation.

In the centre, the visitor can try out a variety of multi-media screens and displays illustrating the importance of water conservation and the effects of pollution. A number of aquariums and plant displays illustrate the river habitat while the data centre gathers information on all aspects of river ecology. 🌿

Andrew Seleanu



# QUAI 4.4.

[EXTRAIT]

Serge Bruneau

Je n'avais plus rien à foutre de cette couleur qui ne venait pas. Cette couleur qui faisait tache plutôt que de faire image. Qui glissait sur la toile au lieu de l'imprégner, d'en pénétrer la fibre. C'était la fin du monde dans la poitrine qui s'épuise à quérir son air. Juillet. Depuis des heures éternelles je m'acharnais comme un condamné à mort sur un tableau qui commençait drôlement à me nouer les nerfs. Trop de couleurs qui tombaient à plat sur cette large toile où j'avais espéré me noyer le temps bref de la trace qui marque l'espace. Les dents serrées, je condamnais la nuit, le temps, l'époque... Une telle misère ne peut débouler que de l'extérieur. L'extérieur, il était morne.

Un bon demi-litre de piquette me dravait les veines et ça n'arrangeait rien à l'ennui. On ne théorise pas longtemps sur le sens des choses dans ces moments-là. On accuse le coup. On plonge ses pinceaux dans le bocal d'eau et on se frotte les orbites pour les alléger du sang qui les injecte. Bref, on vise la sortie et on fout le camp en espérant que la peinture ne nous en voudra pas trop. Dans ces moments-là, je lui fixe un rendez-vous pour l'an deux mille quarante et je pars la tête en paix.

L'air qui entraît par les fenêtres de la bagnole me faisait déjà du bien. J'en prenais de grandes bouffées pour m'éclaircir la tête et m'autoriser à mettre le moteur en marche. Je me laissais secouer un temps par le "vroum" particulier de ma vieille Honda. Mon Bordeaux entre les cuisses, je me sentais comme un ange tenté par l'enfer. J'aurais bien aimé me chauffer au four les ardentes en ce soir de canicule. La défonce à l'ordre du jour.

Portée par une sorte d'écho, l'odeur saline du bord de mer rôdait en plein Montréal. Au beau milieu des néons qui grimaient tant bien que mal les façades, y' avait ce relent qui se faufilait au milieu des badauds qui ne s'apercevaient de rien. La mer pour moi tout seul.

J'emplissais mes naseaux avec ce

sentiment de l'élue qui en profite quand ça passe.

J'allais à l'est de l'est. Là où l'odeur s'amplifiait sans rien retenir du parfum anachronique qu'elle promenait au-dessus des voies asphaltées. Je laissais mon nez jouir de cette surprise. Le fleuve à deux pas d'où je roulais...

Je trichais avec le passé. Je trichais comme on triche toujours quand il s'agit de traverser les temps difficiles. Et le Saint-Laurent s'y prêtait. Je pensais au fleuve et j'exigeais soudain mon dû. Rien à voir avec ce Saint-Laurent civilisé, cet affluent policé sous la main de politiques verdoyantes qui réglementent les berges. J'avais envie du fleuve qu'on oublie dans le planning administratif du tourisme clinquant. Je réclamaï le fleuve entouré du gris des silos à grains où les rats venaient se gaver. Avec des quais imbibés des suées propres aux misères et des marins souriants sous le soleil dominical des années cinquante. Ce soleil-là, il flattait si bien le décor qu'on avait sous les yeux une lumière souple et crue qui parvenait si bien à arrondir les angles. C'était ce coin du port qui venait courtiser mon museau de soûlard aux abois.

Tout le Saint-Laurent juste pour moi. Toute cette masse d'eau qui m'avait enseigné l'espace. Large et avec des contours qui échappent à l'oeil. Incommensurable. Une longue frange d'eau où se mirait le béton d'en face avec ses milliers de fenêtres lumineuses. C'était à cet endroit que j'avais appris l'ampleur du monde. Sur ce quai même, enfant, je compris qu'on venait de partout et qu'à partir de là, on pouvait gagner le reste du monde. L'espace bien au-delà du regard et l'imagination en quatrième vitesse.

Deux navires se tenaient cois aux abords de l'appontement. Les mastodontes au repos ressemblaient à des monstres minés par la fatigue. Salis, rouillés, avec des pavillons lavasses qui ne rimaient plus à rien dans la nuit absorbante. La tristesse des bateaux

continuait de me chavirer. J'ai poussé mes pas vers la grisaille des hangars pour jeter un oeil sur le fleuve qui s'offrait avec en prime une lune qui venait s'y fracasser.

Un murmure venant de l'aval m'agaçait et je décuplais mes efforts pour l'expédier à l'autre bout de ma conscience. Je toisais le Saint-Laurent avec l'intuition que je n'avais rien à dégainer. Y'avait plus rien au monde que le fleuve, ce murmure et ma caboche enflammée. Le murmure, comme une rumeur d'urgence, s'approchait de plus en plus jusqu'à devenir un chuchotement glissé vers mon tympan.

JE COULE DE SOURCE DEPUIS PLUS LOIN QUE LÀ-BAS

DEPUIS AU DELÀ DE L'ÉRIÉ QUI M'ENRICHIT L'EMBOUCHURE

ET M'INCITE À POUSSER MA MASSE FLUIDE

RICHE EN INTRIGUES.

DANS MA COURSE J'ATTRAPE LES RÊVES DE RIVERAINS

QUI SE DONNENT LA PEINE DE FOURNIR DU LEST AU REGARD.

JE LES TRAÎNE JUSQU'AUX MARÉES SALÉES ET LES

ÉROTISE D'UN BALANT LICENCIEUX.

Le vent s'inventait sur ma crinière chamboulée. Le coeur à marée haute, je m'empiffrais d'un maximum d'air. La tristesse en mille miettes et le vin à la rescousse... Ça devait marcher.

CE QUI SE TRAME SUR LE PLANCHER DES VACHES

NE ME CONCERNE QUE TRÈS INDIRECTEMENT.

ÇA GUEULE, ÇA MORD, ET ÇA NE FAIT PAS TROP DE VAGUE

SOUS LE SOUFFLE RÂLEUX DES MÉCONTENTES.

JE M'ÉTIRE SUR MES MILLE KILOMÈTRES

ET JE MOUILLE VOS BERGES DE VAGUELETTES QUI LES

FONT FRÉMIR. C'EST MON CLIN D'OEIL À MOI.



# brave NEW waves

PHOTOS: DOMENICO D'ALESSANDRO

Alfred Holden

Sometime in May of this year one of the world's longest streetcar lines came into being. Not an inch of track was laid: all it took was the flip of a switch. The Toronto Transit Commission began running through-streetcars on existing lines, snaking 23 kilometres across Toronto, almost linking two sprawling suburbs: Scarborough and Mississauga, that bracket the more traditionally urban city.

Directly across from where the no. 501 car turns at the eastern end of its line is a water purification plant built during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Ironically, the low cost of labour and materials meant no expense was spared on the project. Besides using sand and chemicals to make the murky waters of Lake Ontario potable, the R. C. Harris filtration plant makes a powerful architectural statement: its mausoleum-like Art Deco buildings climb in steps onto a high bluff with sweeping views of the lake.

There is no such urban theatre at the 501 car's western loop at Long Branch. The name, like a counterpart waterfront community on New Jersey's Atlantic shore, reflects history,

geography, and technology: here's the farthest point where the rails reached, way back when. Today, suburbs have engulfed Long Branch, and transit riders who persevere to the end at first find suburban nothingness. At the loop, hopeful people wait to go back: in Toronto tracks in the street and wires overhead connect to life down the line.

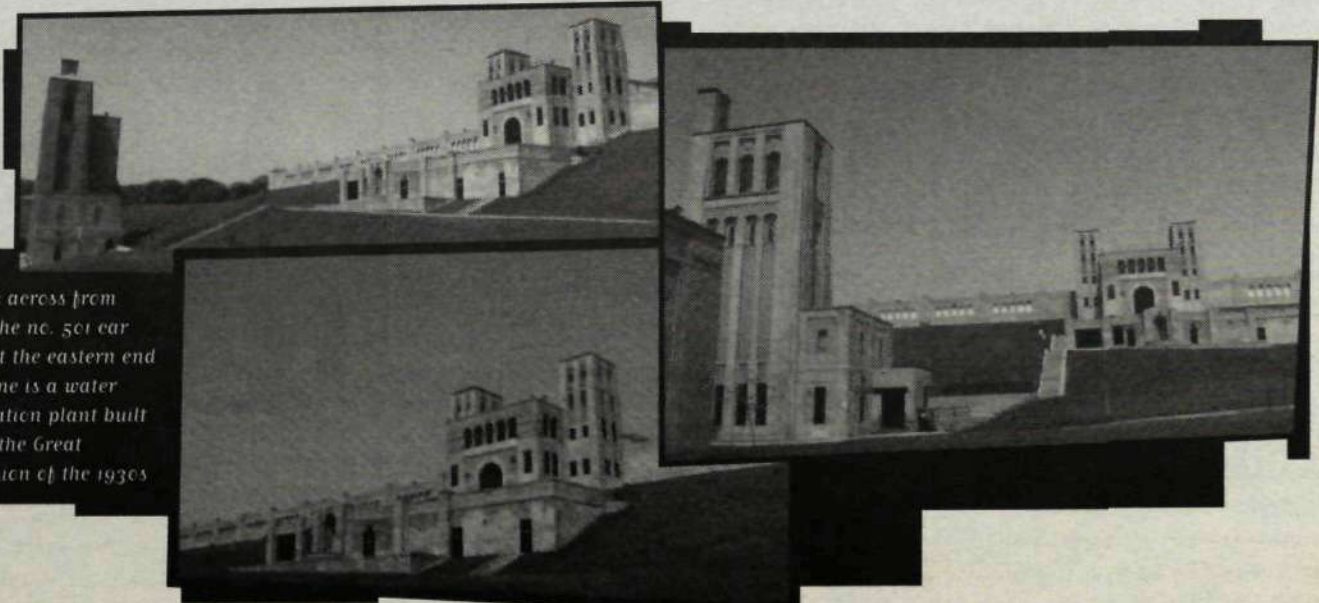
What these opposite ends to Toronto's old-fashioned transit system do have in common is that they are both within a few hundred feet of Lake Ontario. The Queen St./Long Branch streetcar runs parallel to the lake, never more than a mile from it. Those willing to walk can see much of Toronto's waterfront by transit. At the Long Branch stop you can already smell the lake (the scent is surprisingly fresh); walk across the street and you see the surf; in a minute you kick sand on the beach at Marie Curtis park.

Indeed, one of the surprising things about the Toronto waterfront is its accessibility. But this is something that has yet to be discovered and is still relatively unknown. The Long Branch neighbourhood, which grew around the transit terminus, appears to be a

privileged waterfront enclave; its wealthiest live at the lake, their waterfronts private. Yet a closer look reveals that the right-of-way for every north-south street extends to the water; these spaces remain undeveloped, a little wild, and public. The practice is the legacy of early Ontario surveyors who usually reserved such access for the Crown; the tradition was practised when Long Branch was developed this century.

Riding back toward the city, the streetcar doesn't hug the shoreline; Toronto's car lines spawned dense commercial districts and Lakeshore Blvd. is one of these, though threadbare compared to the others. Between street and lake are neighbourhoods showing different generations valued proximity to Lake Ontario. You pass an abandoned psychiatric hospital, modest post-war housing, aging modernist apartments, and grotesque waterfront condominiums executed in baroque and nautical styles.

And finally where downtown Toronto's Oz-like skyline comes into view is motel row. With names like "Cruise Motel" or "Rainbow Motel," they date from the 1930s to the 1950s. Some have been associated with sin and mangled



Directly across from where the no. 501 car turns at the eastern end of its line is a water purification plant built during the Great Depression of the 1930s



bodies. Bad feng shui, perhaps: created for people in automobiles, these motels were located on a streetcar line. They were once right on the lake; surely business suffered when fill landlocked them behind a new waterfront park. Then again, maybe it didn't.

Toronto, you gather by now, is a city of many waterfronts, whose beauty lie in beholders' eyes. This is true of an appalling harbour district southeast of downtown (and best reached by bike). Here the skeletons of Toronto's great lakes shipping heyday are found: rusting lake freighters like Canada Steamship Lines' Saguenay; a decrepit tank farm; the seldom-used ship canal and turning basin; heaps of incoming coal; a drawbridge whose huge concrete counterweights hang threateningly in mid-air. Amid the desolation, incongruous signs of life: the Cherry Restaurant ("fast take-out service"); a Knob Hill Farms supermarket whose littered parking lot has an unusual view of Toronto's skyline over the harbour.

Where Cherry St. meets the lake is a modest municipal beach, with views across a bay to a relatively new addition to the city's lake front, the Leslie St. "spit," a narrow point of land that extends kilometres out into Lake Ontario. Not easy to get to (locals bike it on weekends), the spit does have a public transit connection: it was created from fill dug up when Toronto's Bloor-Danforth subway was built in the 1960s. After it was dumped wildlife unexpectedly claimed the man-made waste, transforming it into a refuge.

Whether art is found on the Toronto waterfront is debatable. Lakeshore Blvd. itself, from the city core to the Humber River where the motels are found, comes close. Not really the same street that takes you by transit to Long Branch, here it is a late expression of the American-based "City Beautiful" movement, which early this century sought to make cities more substantial and park-like. Originally a grand waterfront boulevard lined with trees, Lakeshore Blvd. has suffered many indignities — Dutch elm disease claimed its green roof in the 1960s; to prevent pedestrian slaughter chain-link fences wall it off from Toronto's historic Canadian National Exhibition Grounds and Ontario Place, a futuristic waterfront activity park. But there are things to see here: rowers practising in the enclosure between breakwater and beach; a stylish bathing pavilion from the 1920s; a monument to the opening of the lake front Queen Elizabeth Way, once a parkway and now a dangerous expressway.

And there is something that is unquestionably an artistic gesture: a new suspension bridge over the mouth of the Humber river, exclusively for strollers and cyclists. Its 100-metre deck



Where downtown Toronto's Oz-like skyline comes into view is motel row. With names like "Cruise Motel" or "Rainbow Motel," they date from the 1930s to the 1950s



is hung from thin cables fastened to two soaring tubes of white steel formed into an arch. Strong, public, and sculptural, it is inexplicable in the nasty '90s.

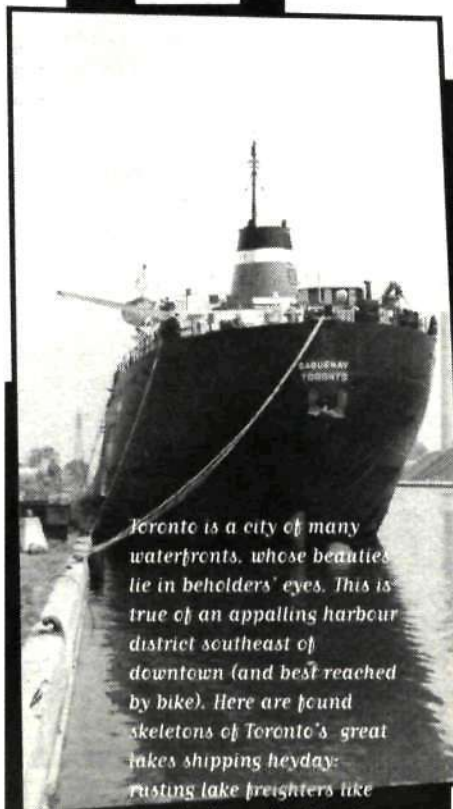
Queen's Quay, the portion of the city waterfront that has not been neglected — that has no rusting ships or doubtful motels — is Toronto's worst maritime tragedy. Yet Harbourfront is where most tourists go in search of the lake. Skyscraping condominiums form a canyon near water's edge. There are streetcars; a short-line links the strip to the Toronto's nearby transportation hub, Union Station. But the atmosphere is like Edge City; money has been made, but no sense of place created. Federal largess funded arts and cultural events in renovated buildings that drew a critical mass of visitors. The question now that Ottawa has cut funding is how the ersatz neighbourhood will now fare.

Escape from this disappointment is available at Harbour Castle Hotel, where Metro ferries dock and \$3 buys a round trip to a truly extraordinary waterfront, Toronto Island, a group of connected islets in the harbour. Much of it is parkland, but at one end ramshackle summer cottages were turned into year-round homes and a thriving, car-free community. This occurred much against the wishes of the Metropolitan government, whose motherhood vision to turn the entire island into parkland would also empty it of people.

If you walk up Bay St. from the ferry to Toronto's financial district, and catch the 501 car going east, you arrive at the Beaches. This too is an old cottage colony, long since winterized. But the Beaches still live by, for, and chiefly because of Lake Ontario. On a 2-kilometre boardwalk pure-bred dogs, expensive sneakers, and beautiful people with large mortgages on small homes are on parade. Sailing and swimming after work, sand in hall carpets, and walks to the neighbouring

Harris filtration plant come with the territory. It seems almost too chic. But on Queen St. the streetcar and hydro-electric wires overhead remind — like they did at Long Branch — that this is still Toronto, a gritty, flat city on a flat lake. Others have aspired to much more on their waterfronts, and some have done more. But they have not achieved as much. The strength of Toronto is its mishmash and diversity, and the city's messy, cluttered, varied waterfront is part of the equation. It is never grand, only occasionally beautiful. But like the city itself, it works. 🍁🍁

**ALFRED HOLDEN** IS A JOURNALIST LIVING IN TORONTO.



Toronto is a city of many waterfronts, whose beauties lie in beholders' eyes. This is true of an appalling harbour district southeast of downtown (and best reached by bike). Here are found skeletons of Toronto's great lakes shipping heyday: rusting lake freighters like Canada Steamship Lines' Saguenay



# TORONTO:

## Hard Passage from Disaster to Harmony

Text and Photos:  
**Domenico D'Alessandro**

Interview with **Suzanne Barrett**, director of  
Environmental Studies  
with the Waterfront Regeneration Trust



With the rise of industrialism many waterfronts were simply treated as convenient transportation routes and discharge outlets. A wall of warehouses and factories met the water while on the other side wide ribbons of steel and asphalt separated the residential neighbourhoods from the production centres - the mythological symbolic ties broken, the ecological partnership unraveled. Toronto, along with countless other cities, has suffered such a fate. However, with the change in the economy the waterfront is being rediscovered. Unused railway lines are dismantled, the towering expressways redesigned and a new generation of green spaces occupy the landfills. Toronto never emerged as a megalopolis and was thus spared some of the problems associated with an immense concentration of people. Still a large city, it has managed to preserve most of its ravines and watercourses, although not all in a healthy state. It is these green remnants that have given vigor and hope to the restoration projects now taking place. What distinguishes the Toronto approach to waterfront regeneration is this link to the larger watershed areas, which in turn have led to a holistic understanding of bioregional relationships away from the city-centric mentality that prevailed for a long period of time. With the guidance of a few visionaries the regeneration movement may turn out to be one of the region's more successful ventures. The combined efforts of The Crombie Commission (waterfront) and The John Sewell

Commission (regional greenway strategy) along with the vigil of various local task forces have developed a regional outlook that, if not politically corrupted, may produce substantial noteworthy changes in future developments.

The disastrous overdevelopment of Toronto's central waterfront has provided a lesson which has taught us that private enterprise acting in collusion with nearsighted politicians cannot be trusted to provide the quality of environment we have come to cherish. Economic issues of the day must be weighed against other integral values and may no longer be seen as the sole guiding principles. Many problems still plague the regeneration process. Without taking merit away from the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, which has done much needed work and is still one of the best working models for a comprehensive approach, a basic problem of inadequacy among the professions when dealing with ecological issues still remain. The overempowerment of the planning and architectural professions in the design process especially when dealing with environmental and public art issues has created a definite bias of problem solving which belies the claim of ecosystem approach made by Trust. There is a great need for people who are able to think and act in a holistic fashion. Efforts must be devoted to producing sensitive multidimensional professionals and not simply competent but unidimensional ones. It is unfortunate that most educational institutions fall short in this

task, a new generation of holistic learning must begin.

To discuss such complex problems we met Suzanne Barrett who is director of Environmental Studies with the Waterfront Regeneration Trust.

**V.V.:** Toronto is undergoing a substantial change in its waterfront development strategy. How did this awareness of the city as a natural phenomena, taking into consideration the bioregional connections come about?

**S.B.:** It came about through the work of the Crombie Commission on the Toronto Waterfront, which was in existence from 1988 to 1992. The commission was set up initially to look at some issues of particular federal interest, the Toronto harbour, the Island airport, Harbourfront - but the mandate also included a request that Mr. Crombie look at the environmental health of the Waterfront. Of course as we started to look at the environmental issues of the waterfront we realized we can't do this without understanding the watershed. The second interim report from the Crombie Commission was called *Watershed*, to reflect that understanding. There is change happening in the kinds of economic activities traditionally associated with waterfronts. We also looked at some of the social changes that are occurring, obviously associated with economic issues, unemployment. Other changes in the social fabric in terms of the increasing multicultural diversity in the population, the aging population, the



fact that people have different working hours, and so people have different leisure time. The fact that people want more recreational opportunities, are more interested in fitness and health, so they are looking for a cheap recreational place close to home. When you look at these factors, you see relationships between people and the waterfront in a different kind of a way. Another aspect of all of this was to look at the reasons we weren't making effective decisions on the waterfront, and that is when Mr. Crombie used the phrase *jurisdiction gridlock*. On one hand we needed to think about our environment, economy and the community in an integrative way, which is what we mean by an ecosystem approach, and on the other hand we have jurisdictions that are set to do exactly the opposite, to treat everything separately. So we came to the realization that if we were to take an ecosystem approach we need to change the way that we make decisions, and that led us into thinking about a roundtable approach.

**V.V.:** *The political aspect is interesting, attempting to change the views of municipalities to think not only about their particular jurisdictions. There are a number of local task forces such as the Don River Task Force or the Humber River Task Force. What is the Waterfront Regeneration Trust's relation with them? Is it an amiable relationship?*

**S.B.:** Oh yes, in fact we are members of both those task forces. I think the relationship has gone two ways, in that some of the work the Crombie Commission did was influential in helping those emerging task forces to go about in the work that they were doing. And looking at it the other way around, we learned a lot from the work that they have been doing, in particular the Don River Task Force has done a good deal of interesting work. We see that as the way to go in dealing with environmental issues of the waterfront, to take a watershed approach. To have those types of task forces in operation is very healthy and very useful.

#### **Pedagogy, not authority**

**V.V.:** *How much of an influence do you have on development that occurs in environmentally sensitive regions such as the headlands?*

**S.B.:** We don't have any power of authority. Our mandate, outlined in *Lake Ontario Greenway Strategy*, and as set out in legislation *Bill 1, 1992*, is to facilitate the establishment of trail associated greenway and open spaces along the waterfront, to advise the province, to consult with the public, to coordinate. Those are all activities that rely on the powers of existing agencies. We are here to act as a facilitator and a catalyst and to help the existing agencies, the private sector and the

community groups work together. We work more by influence, by providing assistance and advice, than we do by telling people what to do.

**V.V.:** *In what ways are you active in educating the public?*

**S.B.:** Through the work that we are already doing, I think that we already made some headway in reaching people through the work that the Crombie Commission did. Obviously through our publications we are helping people. *The Lake Ontario Greenways Strategy* is directed towards the protection and restoration, and both the recreational and economic uses, of the waterfront from Burlington Bay to the Trent River. It is presented in such a way that it is accessible for people to read and understand it. This kind of report can be used by environmental groups, by consultants, by developers as they try to figure out what to do with Bill 163, as well the municipalities and other agencies. *A Guidebook to the Waterfront*

**■ able to contribute to this endeavour?**

**S.B.:** Yes, there is quite a bit of interest. You are aware that the *Regeneration* report is being used as a textbook by many institutions and we expect that the same will happen with the *Lake Ontario Greenway Strategy*. We are not doing as much in that field as we would like to because we simply don't have the staff, but we are planning to do more if we can.

**V.V.:** *Regarding the shoreline regeneration plan as presented in the Regeneration report, does the Trust feel there is enough competency in tackling such a problem as preserving the natural shifting of the shoreline? And has there been progress in coordinating a collaborative effort between the various municipalities and other authorities?*

**S.B.:** Yes, what is happening is the first integrated shoreline management plan that is being done on the north shore of Lake Ontario. It is being coordinated by the Conservation Authority, the Trust is

**You do as much as you can  
for the environment but  
you bear in mind at the  
same time the economic  
and community realities**



*Trail* is the second publication we are launching at this time. As people spend more time on the waterfront we know that they are going to become more concerned about the environmental problems that they see. This book also provides information about the cultural and natural heritage of the waterfront, so it will raise overall awareness, raise understanding and get people thinking about what they do out there and the affect it will have on others.

**V.V.:** *Are you also in contact with educational institutions such as universities and other schools that would be*

not doing that. In fact the *Regeneration* report may be a bit misleading for it says that there should be a shoreline management plan for the whole north shore, but it doesn't say who should do it. We have concluded that what we need to do is a number of shoreline management plans. The whole shoreline is too big, so you do it in manageable chunks, that makes sense from a coastal process point of view.

**V.V.:** *One of the problems I see in the projects being proposed thus far is perhaps a problem of semantics. There is much talk about ecosystem regeneration yet there is*



very little evidence of ecosystem structures in them, the green spaces are still basically parks. I'm wondering if there are studies going on in defining "ecosystem".

**S.B.:** What type of projects have you seen?

**V.V.:** One of the projects, for example, is the Garrison Commons, where they speak about ecosystem linkages. However when we look at the proposed master plan it is basically a Beaux-Art approach to development. They are using native plants, but native plants used in an horticultural manner is not truly an ecosystem. I wonder how much study has gone into the defining of this ecosystem, the land areas needed for true ecological connections to be made.

**S.B.:** I think you have to do the appropriate thing in the appropriate place. We also have to think about how you define an ecosystem, because the way we define an ecosystem is air, land, water, and we include people, and the interaction among them. Taking this definition, any human activity is as much part of the ecosystem as things usually thought of as the green environmental things. We don't define the ecosystem approach as meaning that everything has to be a natural habitat system. We define it as meaning that what you have to do is have an integrative understanding of how the air, the land and the water and the pollutants are interacting so an ecosystem can be a sewage treatment plant, this building is an ecosystem. So you have to not get hung up on that. The important thing is the approach that we take to it, which is the integrative approach, trying to understand how things work. The fact that *Garrison Commons* may appear to have more manicured space than functional environmental systems doesn't mean that you are not taking an ecosystem approach. On the other hand you also want to make sure that one of the aspects of the ecosystem approach is to make sure that you pay more attention to the environmental functions, to the wildlife

habitats as well as the human systems, so you will be looking to see how many of those objectives you can meet in any given place and how you can integrate the natural systems with the human ones.

**V.V.:** Does the Trust have plans or recommend the buy out of private land to put in the public domain?

**S.B.:** If one had money it would be wonderful, there are all kinds of places one could acquire for public benefit or for wildlife habitat. However there is not much money for that, but to the extent that it is possible, yes, more waterfront should be in public hands. You know there has been some concern raised that perhaps there is going to be expropriation of private lands for the waterfront trail. That's not going to happen. But where the municipality or the conservation authority has an opportunity to acquire some land or to make some arrangements during the development, then that's when we should get more public land.

**V.V.:** Where do you see the major obstacles to a smooth journey?

**S.B.:** I think, probably, the biggest obstacle is money. The other obstacles are usually jurisdictional ones or political ones, generally disagreeing on the future. What we found since the work of the Commission and the work of the Trust has been increasingly more agreement about how to do things. So we are seeing a lot of advances and people sharing similar values for the waterfront than in the past. That is very encouraging, but there are still places where people don't agree on how things should be.

**V.V.:** Which are the major issues of contention?

**S.B.:** I guess where people don't want to be disturbed. A quiet neighbourhood, or quite farmland if you are looking further east. People don't want more visitors. On the one hand you may have a commercial center that is trying to attract more visitors, on the

other hand you have residents of quiet communities who don't want to have a trail going through their neighbourhood.

**V.V.:** Do you envision a day when perhaps the whole Great Lakes Region would be regenerated?

**S.B.:** Yes, it could happen. I am forever hopeful, I think that there is a lot of progress going on. I think that on the whole people are a lot more careful. We have already seen progress in regards to the Great Lakes if we have the political will and enough money. It's not only the money, a lot of it is attitudes, it is doing things differently and recognizing that sometimes you can make money by making things better.

**V.V.:** How does an organization such as the Waterfront Trust keep from becoming too bureaucratic and losing touch with the outside?

**S.B.:** Stay small. We are a small organization. The people who work here are not bureaucratically inclined. David Crombie has attracted people who don't think in an administrative way. They think about getting the job done. We don't have time to get bureaucratic, we have too much to do. Thanks to David Crombie we keep setting ourselves very practical goals, and very demanding goals, so we work to try to achieve those. We don't have an organized structure here, it is a very fluid structure within the organization.

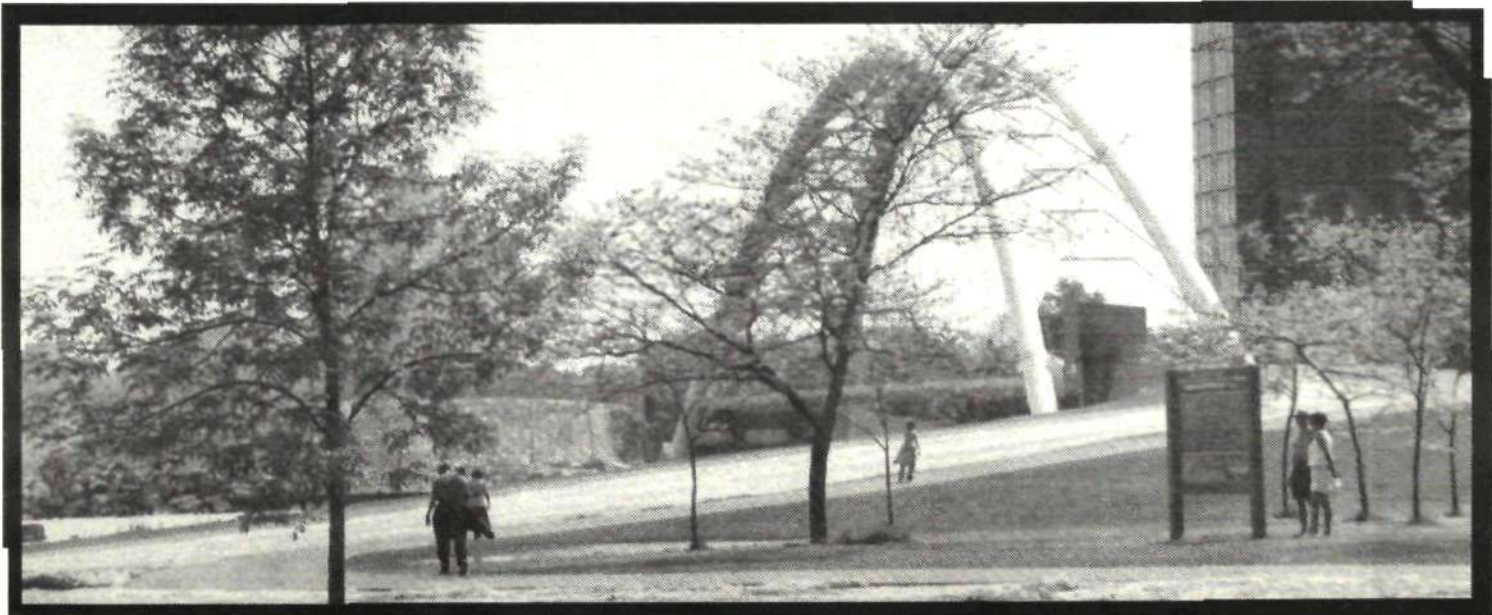
**What profit is more profitable?**

**V.V.:** What do you see as your greatest strength and what is your greatest weakness?

**S.B.:** I think on the strength side is the ability to bring people together. To work collectively on things. Often you have a difficult problem to tackle and a number of agencies that need to work on it and perhaps a private sector or a community group involvement.

Certainly no one group can solve the problem. There is also no one group that

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# NEW YORK WATERFRONT Concrete Overcoat

Carole Ashley

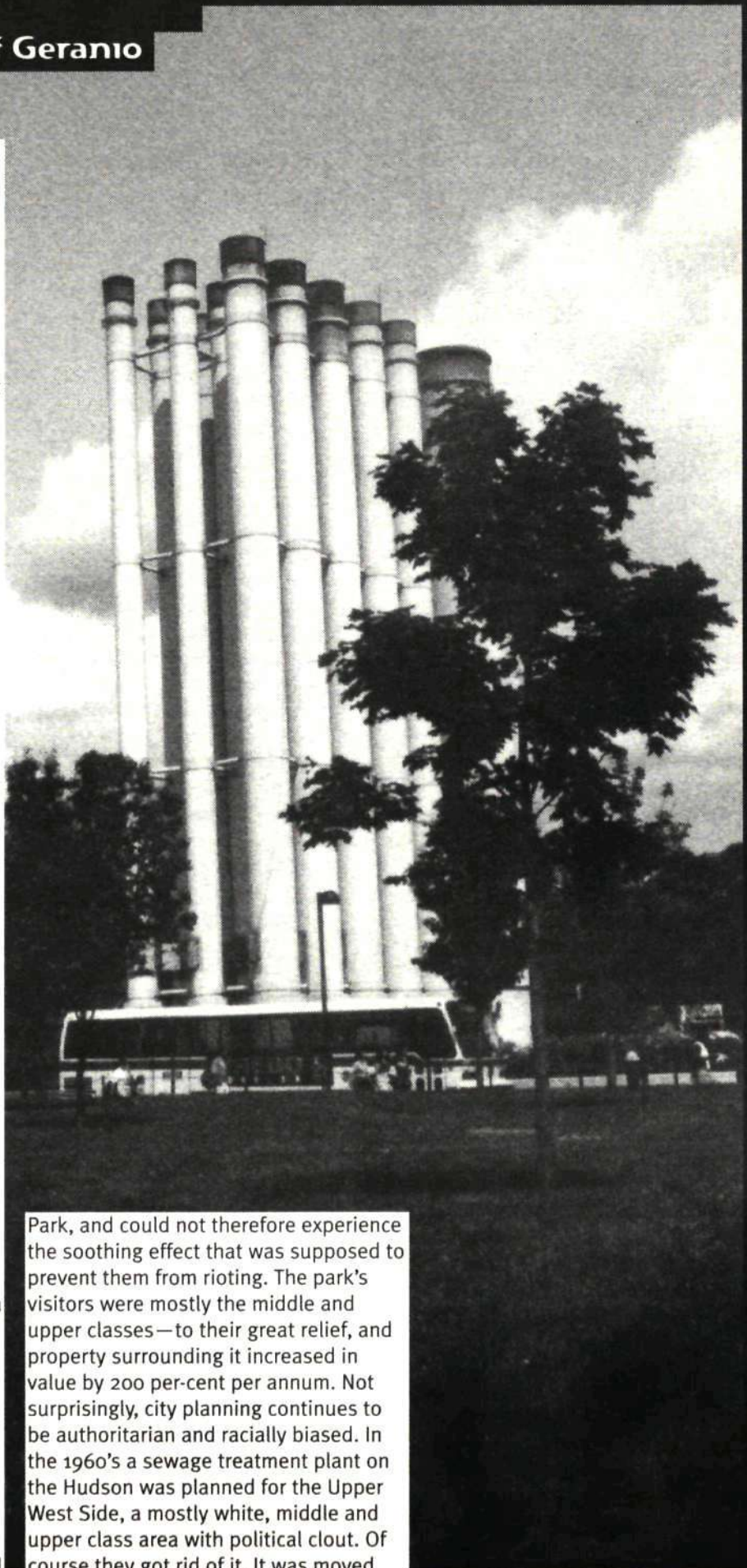
photos Josef Geranio

Manhattan is like a walled city, surrounded by a gigantic moat, almost encircled by concrete and steel, broken only at the northern end by a fragment of the vegetation and rock that once covered the island. There is no waterfront. The West Side Improvement of the 1930's was the beginning of the end. Instead of having parkland extend down to the water, the highway was built at the edge, providing a barrier of noise and fumes between park and river. To pacify West Side residents the old Riverside Park was enlarged and expensively landscaped—until the point where it enters Harlem. From 125th to 145th Streets the railroad tracks were left uncovered, and to reach the narrow strip of park, residents of the area had to walk down an endless flight of steps, over the tracks, under the viaduct, and once there found few facilities and no peace. It was never improved.

The same relentlessly car-obsessed planning paved the waterfront of the East River and much of Brooklyn and the Bronx. Workers used to cross the rivers on ferries, but when the roads were built, the wharves and docks were demolished, which meant they had to cross the bridges on foot. Until the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Drive was built, people on the Upper East Side could walk to the water's edge. Even wealthy opponents couldn't stop the massive highway system, which eventually encircled the city with the fumes of a million cars.

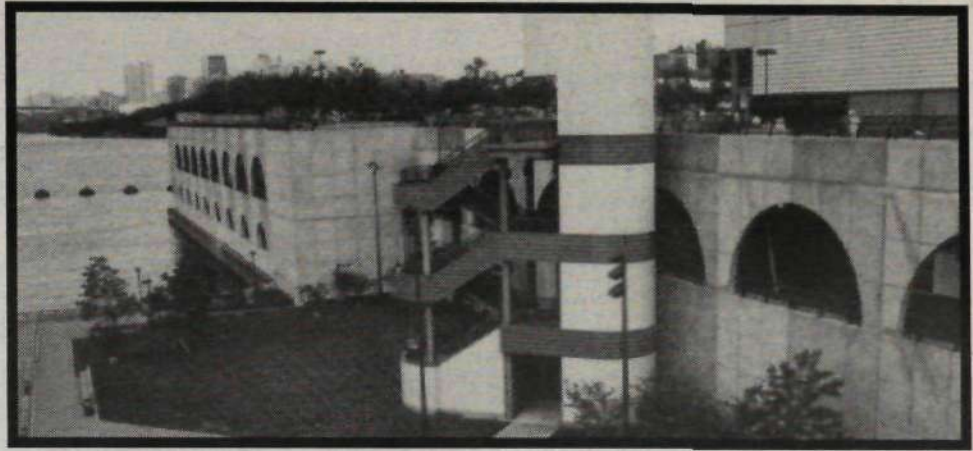
When they needed peace and quiet, the wealthy could leave the city. The poor had, and have, no such option, and in any case wilderness was not considered to have the necessary "civilizing" effect. In the late 1850's work began on Central Park, the prototype of a highly structured environment where nature was "paraphrased." It included roads, in all directions. Olmsted knew that people like to look at the landscape from their carriages, and the roads and bridges of the twentieth century would provide river views for those who could afford cars. Most of the working class of the 1860's did not have the time, energy or money to make the long trip to Central

Park, and could not therefore experience the soothing effect that was supposed to prevent them from rioting. The park's visitors were mostly the middle and upper classes—to their great relief, and property surrounding it increased in value by 200 per-cent per annum. Not surprisingly, city planning continues to be authoritarian and racially biased. In the 1960's a sewage treatment plant on the Hudson was planned for the Upper West Side, a mostly white, middle and upper class area with political clout. Of course they got rid of it. It was moved





uptown to Harlem, to the same stretch of the Hudson neglected by the West Side Improvement. In 1986, forty-nine years after the highway was completed, the plant opened with great fanfare and the terrible stench of hydrogen sulphide, like rotting eggs, or fish. The outraged residents of West Harlem have had to endure this latest environmental racism ever since, with increased incidents of asthma and other health problems. In the same paternalistic vein as the park planners of the nineteenth century, there was a palliative, as compensation the people of West Harlem finally got their "waterfront" park. High on top of the sewage plant is a impressive layout of pools, a rink, gymnasium, track, and playing fields; it stinks intermittently. Neighborhood activists sued the State and won a million dollar settlement. They continue to demand effective monitoring and changes to the plant. From the approach to River Bank State Park, as it is euphemistically called, you can look down on the roaring traffic of the viaduct, and below it the disused railroad tracks that the Improvement plan of the thirties didn't bother to cover. Next to the rusted tracks, separated by the dark, unusable space under the viaduct, is the nearly inaccessible strip of old Riverside Park that many Harlem residents consider too dangerous to visit. Recently, in contrast, the mostly white and middle class residents of



Manhattan's lower West Side won battles against City and corporate interests that produced small areas of park by the river in exchange for commercial development. A new concrete path extends from the Chicago-like Battery Park City along the Hudson to Chelsea, next to the highway, and two or three neighborhood piers will be restored for recreation. A few years ago when New York's infrastructure was as usual crumbling around us, a inspection of the Manhattan bridge found that the homeless men who lived under it had chopped away most of the wooden posts holding it up. The posts had been put there to save money. The homeless had used them for firewood.

The city's docks are mostly gone, leaving their trace in the remaining dilapidated, burned-out piers on the

Hudson. A few cruise ships, and the monstrous carrier Intrepid, deployed off Vietnam, dock midtown. The four ferries, the Brooklyn dock, and the Dickensian prison ships of the late 1980's remind us of how the city once extended out onto the water. When the port began to dwindle in importance, there was an opportunity for the city to restore its riverbanks, for people, not cars, but that was not to be. After the West Side Improvement had destroyed the last waterfront wilderness its planner exclaimed: "...What a waterfront! What an island to buy for \$24!"

CAROLE ASHLEY IS A BRITISH WRITER AND TRANSLATOR WHO LIVES AND PROTESTS IN NEW YORK.

# Water, Land, Air.

## A Critical Exchange.

Reflections of a Florentine Architect in New York

Vittorio Giorgini

Architecture and urbanism, have evolved slowly as have other human disciplines. Very little has been done to redefine them in these post-industrial times except for a few attempts in the first half of our century. But the nature of such "arts" has changed considerably since the classic era. Even if recent and still undivulged, this change is essential since it defines scientific and objective parameters and work methods in opposition to the contemporary artistic narcissism.

These new tendencies derive from the study of the techniques and design of the artificial structures, inspired by some structures we can observe in nature. But this analogy has never been really applied since the dominant

understanding of nature has always been a "creationist one", therefore essentially different from the historical. This fact demonstrates how we are conditioned by our cultural beliefs. Today, we have the newborn bionics and biomorphics with their attention to the structural organization of the systems, and their relations of balance, efficiency and interdependence. In this context, the classical and symbolical concepts of planning are rejected and researchers are about to open new and exciting perspectives, if only the dominant culture, static and self-defensive, will allow them to do so.

We shall refer every criticism and every proposal whatsoever to these parameters which will always be verified

on an experimental basis. Here we can't describe the new approach even if we have to take it into account. Given the complexity of this subject, as we tried to point out, our purpose here is quite general and necessarily generic.

Referring to the waterfront, the line we call shore or coast whatsoever, it is nothing else but the point of extremely complex contacts (exchanges) between three volumes: air, water, land. These volumes are defined by surfaces which we call transitional and which represent, on our planet, areas of supreme importance, because of the complexity of the exchanges taking place within them. Besides the waterfront, everything that is produced by Homo Faber (but not much Sapiens), is not in accord with



these principles of harmony, which are usually violated and ignored.

In the past, little was built on shores. Many of the roads followed the line of water and were little more than paths which didn't damage the ecosystem. Harbours were few and covered a small surface, enough to satisfy the functional needs of exchanges — the transition — between land and water.

Their impact on the environment was minimal and didn't provoke any serious damage. The problems started with the development of the bourgeois economy and its markets and a society rushing greedily for profits, more and more greedy. All the roads, even those parallel to the coast became paved with stones, then with cement and asphalt. They became artificial barriers breaking the existing relationship between land, water and air. Ports expanded also and became city with buildings near the water, where the streets act like dams violently separating urban life from the water. Real estate speculations on the waterfront privatized the shores, they destroyed the environment with tourist facilities ironically conceived to enjoy it. This is a constant and tragic paradox of contemporary society, to which must be added the chaotic industrial development and its heavy pollution impact.

At this point it seems that any critic or proposal becomes a pure utopia and one must ask whether we must be optimistic or pessimistic. Personally, I don't like to conclude that being optimistic means embracing an utopia and that a pessimistic attitude is merely a realistic one; to finally affirm that this society is endlessly losing its values and only keeping its blind egoistic drive.

All human activities, waterfront included, are related to our consciousness and our ability to make things. And even the demographic making is producing new disasters besides many others and, with all due respect to the believers of "Go forth and multiply", its effects upon shores, woods, mountains and so on are disastrous, independent of the quality of the projects. What I think matters in fact, is not just "how" but "how much".

Manhattan is the perfect example of this "how much". There is no such a phenomenon as an urban area facing the water. Any possibility of it is cut off, excluded by a large highway which surrounds the city like a fortified wall. The water is accessible only to cars, which anyway, cannot take advantage of it. And then there is no panorama. The entire road network is contained within the highway ring, with no beginning nor end. It is cut here and there, at random. The shore-line surrounding the city seems to encroach upon the urban

space, but in fact the opposite is true. Then, if some buildings have the luck (good or bad?) to face the water, they are the first — the last — of a series. Eventually, the river, lake or sea will be filled up by earth, in order to build and then the first buildings will lose their privilege.

#### **A political task**

The waterfront is too precious a space to build on.

Mayors, politicians, architects, engineers, tycoons: the Donald Trumps of the past used to build in honor and for the advantage of their society and times.

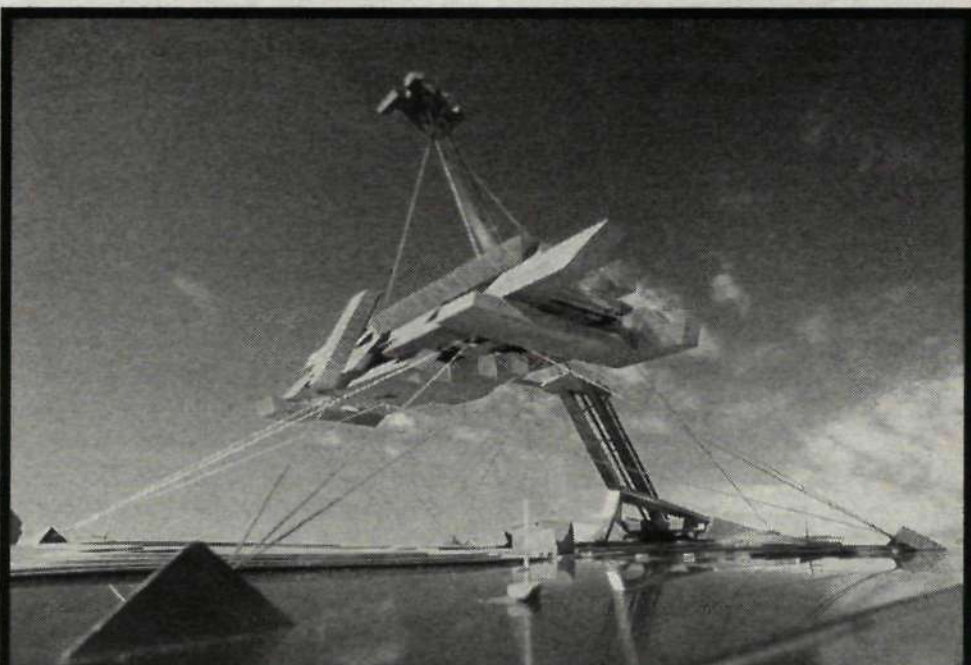
I think that we should build very little on the waterfront and only in a landscaping manner. Not like a city-park, which is contained and imprisoned by roads, but instead by shaping the land, working carefully with nature, and keeping the urban structures as far away as possible.

Here we should broaden our consideration of the concepts of city,

nature, facilities, etc. A difficult discourse, but an urgent one, as the analysis of such concepts may produce new criteria which may eventually open into a political terrain.

And yet it may be too late. Such political task, already seen as utopian, has little chance of being accomplished. This is an incredible and sad paradox of this profit-based society: it still blindly believes in profits unable to see that it is about to destroy itself. ❖❖❖

**VITTORIO GIORGINI** WAS BORN IN 1926 IN FLORENCE WHERE HE COMPLETED HIS EDUCATION AND WORKED AS AN ARCHITECT. IN 1969 HE MOVED TO NEW YORK CITY AND SINCE 1971 HAS BEEN TEACHING ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AT THE PRATT INSTITUTE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE. HIS WORKS HAVE BEEN PRESENTED IN PRESTIGIOUS EXHIBITIONS IN ITALY AND THE US.



#### **River Crane by Vittorio Giorgini**

The River Crane has been conceived as a global center to develop environmental policy through research and education. The project is located on the southern tip of Roosevelt Island in New York. It is suspended over a natural environment and projects into the sky and out over the water. The island's subway and cable car stations are connected by a light rail system to the central node (axis) of the project.

This node acts as a lobby with all the necessary services directing people toward the major parts of the project, a small craft marina, a sport/swim club and bar/restaurant on the ground or up into the building. Six elevators ascend along the mast to the bridge node.

One of these elevators continues to the top where there is an observatory and a multi-media center. The bridge node leads to the space frame which contains offices, laboratories, information centers, lecture rooms, conference halls, exhibition spaces and services.

The supporting system consists of a metal mast on a tripod, which acts as a compressive element, stabilized by a cable network. This cable network also supports the suspended space frame.

Collaborators: Javid Abrahami, Monier Barakat, Jesse Robinson, Ziggy Rubel (computer graphics), Juan Matiz.



# RAMBO COMES HOME

Donald Cuccioletta  
illustration: Daniel Sylvestre



The horror  
that we  
witnessed in

Oklahoma City on April 19th, 1995, though no different from the assassin's bullet in Sarajevo or the pounding shells from the Russian tanks in Grozny, has nevertheless propelled the American people into the so called "new world order", triumphantly heralded with the end of the cold war. Just as we are commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Kent State massacre which brought the Vietnam War home to roost on the front lawns of suburban America, the tragedy that has befallen this tranquil southern city, was the shock therapy which in one macabre gesture exposed the violence that has corroded American society.

Admittedly, we have always been aware of the violent crimes of society. The rapes, the murders, the gang warfare have been all too well documented and chronicled in our local and national newspapers and the sensationalist, hungry electronic media. Yet this type of violence has been rationalized and compartmentalized by the sociological investigations on poverty, ghetto life and the perennial buggaboo of drugs. Unfortunately this type of violence, with domestic spousal violence as a recent addition to the list, has become part of everyday life. We have become immune to it. We have become comfortably numb to it. But April 19th, 1995 was different. This could not be explained. This could surely not have happened here. This was middle-America. This was the heartland. This was where people read the bible regularly, went to church on Sunday, still tipped their hats in the street and listen religiously to country music which beats to the heart of America. This type of terror, this repugnant deed of violence could not have its roots in the American grain. This must surely be the work of an Un-American and instantaneously we pounced, as a wounded mountain lion, on a foreign invader trespassing on hallowed ground.

But America should wake up to its own history and culture. Violence is a product of the folk culture upon which much of the collective memory of being an American has its generic roots. The symbolic and mythological hero who stands out as an individual, to fight against all odds, no matter the cause: is this not the American way? The self-styled vigilante, whether it be a Wyatt Earp, a Lone

Ranger, a Jesse James or even the comic book hero Batman, leaves us with the symbolic image, that social, political and religious grievances are better served by the quick action of the superhero. For many in America who believe in this "us against them" symbolic relationship, the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma was the work of a person or persons who stood up for what they believed in and what was menacing their concept of America. Is this not the definition of the superhero which has emerged and prospered within American folk and popular culture?

The individual as the equalizer, the "have gun will travel" mentality personified in the Hollywoodien character of Rambo, the modern gunslinger, defender of American ideals against the enemy, whether it be some fictitious country that has strayed away from American policy or the need to remake the Vietnam war in order to come out the victor, fulfills this folkloric and popular need for a superhero who will make things right. Unfortunately, we have forgotten that all superheroes operate according to their own set of values and tend to impose their concepts on society not necessarily for the common good, but generally to satisfy their own interests which are more often than not in contradiction with a civil and a democratic society.

Oklahoma City has hopefully given America a slap in the face; a wake up call. Rambo is not overseas. Rambo is no longer fighting the evil communists. Rambo has his own set of values and has changed target. Rambo is no longer in the desert or in the rice fields, but is in the corn fields of middle-America. Time has come to deactivate him and heaven forbid let us not replace him by Robocop.

DONALD CUCCIOLETTA TEACHES AMERICAN HISTORY AT UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL AND IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF VICE VERSA.



andré gorz

# BEYOND the SALARIED SOCIETY



André Gorz is certainly the purist Marxist thinker in Europe and the most imaginative. His restless critical spirit is as suspicious of the proletariat as of the State for the betterment of the human condition. His sparkling insights give birth to debates of a higher order.

Main works :

*Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1995 (1991)

*Métamorphoses du travail: quête du sens*, Galilée, 1988

*Adieux au prolétariat: au-delà du socialisme*, Seuil 1981

*Écologie et politique* (André Gorz, Michel Bosquet), Seuil 1978

The capitalist sphere of production uses a smaller volume of work to produce a growing quantity of wealth. It has no use for a growing portion of the work force *no matter how qualified*.

The information revolution and globalization of exchange are in the process of giving birth to a new kind of society where traditionally secure, full-time jobs are simply going to disappear.

Unemployment generated by technological mutations puts added pressure on the ties to salary. Firms are retaining a shrinking core of those with permanent salaries (10% of the total work force of the 500 largest American enterprises) while the balance is drawn from an increasing pool of part-time workers, employed periodically, paid out in partial salaries or at the point of departure. The result being a 30% drop in mass salaries paid out by private American businesses in 1993.

Regardless of the level of education, most regularly employed workers will soon become nomads working periodically for different companies and practising assorted skills.

A salary-based society where each has a stable, full-time job, and your best hours are invested in the company has been superseded by events. Today, time spent at work occupies 14% of a man's waking hours and only 8% of a woman's. In 20 years, work will not account for more than 40,000 hours of a lifetime which comes to an average of 1000 hours a year, says Jacques Delors, who cites the above figures in his latest book, and adds: "one's life will be organized around a new standard: part-time work."

Although being work-employed has ceased to be the principal source of identity, social standing or acceptance, non-paid activities have yet to fill that bill. We are disenchanted with work yet are drawn to stability. *This economy belongs to us the citizens* but securities, rights and powers are still provided only through employment.

Politically, the task ahead is two-fold:

-Time, freed from work (already an imposing factor) should instead become society's most productive period, the development of self, the creation of meaning. Time on an individual and social level should be reclaimed for developing self-determined, self-generated activities. Employment itself is never appreciated, only the goods produced are valued. But work, self-determined and self-initiated have values that go beyond profitability, return or self-justification. Cultural, artistic, educational, environmental and so forth - all these non-paid activities - should be recognized for their value to society through a statute and under certain conditions, enjoy rights and powers allowing an income for this citizens' economy.

-The enormous time-savings should be redistributed into society so that more can work less and better and still receive their share of the wealth society produces.

## SOCIAL REDISTRIBUTION OF WORK

The savings in time actually harm society by splitting it in two: an over-worked sector hampered by growing changes versus a mass of marginalized, excluded and de-valued people. So that one and all can contribute to society's basic economic production and receive proportionate powers, *a policy of work redistribution through a reduction of work hours is imperative*. Such a policy is fundamentally distinct from partial measures currently recommended. For example, when the 100,000 salaried employees of Volkswagen accept work-hour reductions and pay to prevent 30,000 layoffs it's a "sharing" that spreads out a reduced volume of work and resources on a given number of people. This sharing does not go to the root of the problem. Volkswagen should reduce its size by half within 4 or 5 years. The question of reducing work hours and salaries as an alternative to layoffs will still have to be answered. *Measures taken solely at the company level cannot have a lasting solution on economic problems caused by technological changes*.

Redistribution of work must see itself as an over-all policy (affecting the entire population) geared to a long-term goal of *continuous redistribution* of work, which despite a shrinking work force, avoids unemployment by progressively shortening the work hours.

With the redistribution plan, income should not *in principle* decrease due to work hours. In fact, when a lesser volume of work is sufficient to produce the same volume of wealth, nothing, at least from the point-of-view of macro-economics, prohibits each from receiving for less work, part of the wealth produced.

Loss of income becomes necessary only to reduce an already existing unemployment. The global volume of work should be spread out over a much larger number of people by massive and quick reductions of work-hours that result in employment increases greater than the growth volume of available wealth.

Once unemployment is reduced the work time-period can continue to be shortened so long as available productivity increases without revenue having to fall all that much.

Minor cut-backs of one hour per week does not allow for changes in organizing work, the manner of working and living. Easily matched by increases in individual events and inferior to productivity growth from



technological changes, it alone cannot create employment.

An effective policy for redistributing work shows the following profile: The work-period is reduced periodically (every 3 or 4 years, for example) in significant stages.

The usual work-period should be reduced within the context of a legal frame-work and inter-professional agreement because everyone, no matter how qualified will come face to face with unemployment in the future.

The kick-off time for shortening the work-period should be in 3 to 4 years from now to allow for:

**IMPACT STUDIES** to predict foreseeable needs that the spill-over from a reduced work-period will have on each sector: administration, public service, occupations and professions as a whole.

**PROFESSIONAL RETRAINING** or **PLACEMENT** into jobs that will have to be filled.

Negotiating collective agreements with all levels of business particularly in regards to work re-organization, time to access equipment, more flexible scheduling, a productivity contract, growth of work force, qualifications and salaries.

Preparation for the reduction of work-time impacts the society at all levels, changes all aspects of negotiation, reevaluates trade unions and sparks democratic debate concerning what's at stake.

Work-period reduction takes on more than one form. The 4-day week of 32 or 33 hours applies only to full-time, salaried employees. The majority of new jobs that will have to be filled in the future will be short-term or periodic with varying schedules and very short hours.

#### THE RE-APPROPRIATION OF TIME

To be meaningful, time freed from work must allow individuals to take charge on a personal and collective level. *The policy to redistribute freed*

**A salary-based  
society where each  
has a stable, full-time  
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the company has  
been superseded by  
events**

*time is precisely to help foster the growth of autonomy. As greater blocks of time become available, consumption of personal and collective services should drop off to make room for the growth of self-production.*

It is here the solution to the impasses of the Swedish model.

It consists in developing by urban and technological solutions mutual aid associations and service exchange coops in building units and equipment, in localities. The public service sector takes on the role of helper: in the form of subsidies that fit the citizens' needs, by providing continuity, co-ordination and supporting the self-organized social activities and by bringing together volunteers for tasks requiring special expertise.

*The goal is that each person's actions flourish and spill out over three levels: 1) the macro-social - where professional services are exchanged, 2) the micro-social - where your own productivity and experience are socially relevant in assisting all to take charge of their destiny, their environment. Finally, on the private level which is where you yourself grow, where your uniqueness is valued and for artistic endeavours.*

#### A CULTURAL MUTATION

We will have gone beyond the salaried society, and with it -capitalism

- when the bonds of voluntary social cooperation and self-organized exchanges of non-market goods hits the heart of capitalist production: work-employment, work-goods.

Going beyond capitalism is inherently stamped in the technico-economic mutations that are taking place. But this won't build a post-economic, post-capitalist society unless it goes through an *equally drastic cultural and political revolution*: meaning, if the "social actors" seize hold of what is still only a change and place themselves as leaders and instigators of this liberation.

#### OF WHAT IS A NATURALLY OCCURRING EVENT, PRETENDING TO BE THE LEADERS OF ETC.

Cultural evolution is already reducing the value of work and concern over social and professional success and is giving emphasis to personal accomplishment, producing bonds of social membership, and no longer trying to fit social and professional identity into pre-ordained slots.

But this cultural evolution has yet to be expressed in social and political discourse. Still missing is a mediation between individuals who aspire to their own lives, choices, lifestyles and the social recognition of the legitimacy and value of this longing. Missing too is a social statute which confers on those activities which exist not for profit or social favour but that society and the public regard as work and as such should be paid. ❧❧❧

*[translated from French by René Akstinas]*

*First published in Transversales Science/Culture. no.32. March/April 1995*

#### THE CHANGING AMERICAN WORKFORCE

percentage of the population involved in each occupation

	1900	1950	1990
FARMING	48.0%	11.0%	2.9%
MANUFACTURING	19.0%	33.7%	16.6%
SERVICE	9.0%	11.8%	26.8%
TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATIONS, PUBLIC UTILITIES	8.0%	8.9%	5.3%
RETAIL TRADE	0.5%	14.9%	17.8%
WHOLESALE TRADE	0.5%	5.8%	5.6%
GOVERNMENT	7.0%	13.3%	17.2%
CONSTRUCTION	8.0%	5.2%	4.1%
MINING	4.0%	2.0%	0.6%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	2.0%	4.2%	6.1%

from *Utne Reader* no. 69, May-June 95  
source: *Minneapolis Star Tribune*





# SENTIERS INDIENS

## CAUGHNAWAGA: AUX SOURCES DU CANADA FRANÇAIS

Jean  
Morisset

à MarySol et FaraNuelle

Tous les ans, comme mes ancêtres voyageurs de la grande tribu des Gens-Libres, je pars en déroute vers les Pays d'en-Haut jusqu'en Russie, en Caraïbe ou au Paraguay. Non sans avoir tenté d'offrir, auparavant, un baiser aux bourgeons de Tekakwitha, à la Mission Saint-François Xavier de Caughnawaga ou à la gloire de Kateri, morte en humeur de sainteté ou en odeur d'altérité, c'est selon. S'agit-il d'une sainte ou d'une victime, d'une traîtresse à sa patrie ou d'une maîtresse qui se refuse, ou tout cela à la fois? Comment savoir? La quête de l'identité, en pays de Canada, n'est pas une opération récente.

Je suis loin d'être le premier à être tombé amoureux de Kateri. Leonard Cohen y avait laissé, avant moi, quelques neurones au point d'y avoir consacré, au milieu des années 1960, le roman *Beautiful Losers* où il avait prévu le scénario Québec (Latin America of the North, Louizianisation [il] and the like) tel qu'il se déroule jusqu'à maintenant, à une exception près: Oka. Oka, la crise qui a balayé le Québec en 1990 dont on n'a pas fini de cuver l'aftermath. En fait, la Nord-Amérique entière tente, avant ou après la lettre, de digérer la crise d'Oka depuis l'arrivée même de Cartier/Caboto et des Pèlerins de la Fleur-de-Mai sur les rives orientales de la Grande-Isle. L'Isle-de-la-Tortue, comme le proclament si bien les Iroquois. Quelle chance inouïe, en effet, de pouvoir accomplir dans un même lieu, à une demi-heure à peine du Vieux-Montréal - et ce n'est pas là un hasard -, un quintuple voyage! Se rendre, d'un seul empan, à la fois chez les Jésuites et chez les Mohawks, aux USA, en Amérique britannique loyaliste et au French Québec le plus authentique. Et tout cela, sous l'escorte attentive de chevaliers de paix nommés précisément «peace keepers», circulant dans des bagnoles chromées rouges et blanches

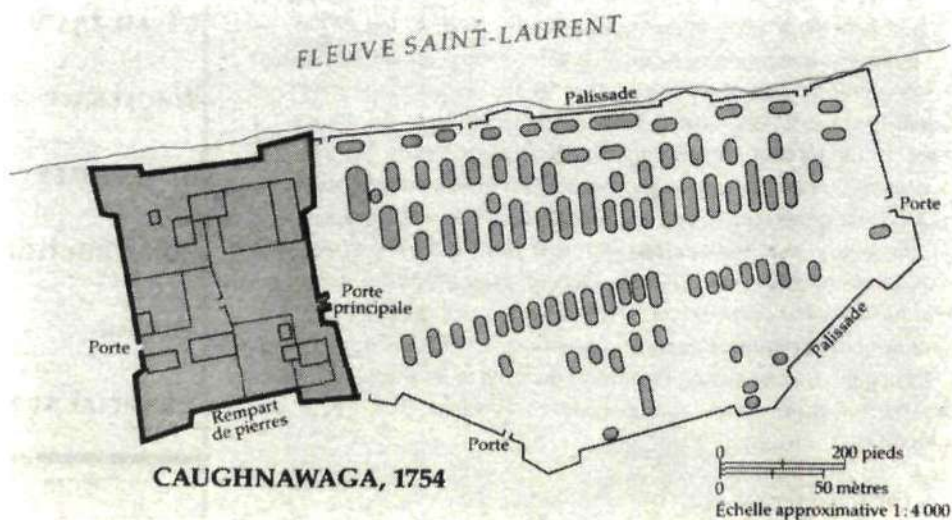
qui reposent l'œil du bleu de la Sécurité du Québec, omniprésent ailleurs.

S'adosser au fleuve, ou à ce qui en reste, le long de la voie maritime, pour adopter cet angle de vision en diagonale entre le XVIII<sup>e</sup> et le XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles, c'est voir apparaître alors l'un des plus beaux joyaux architecturaux de l'Amérique coloniale. Le complexe sanctuaire/église/musée de la «Sainte Sauvagesse de Caughnawaga», pour rester dans le style de l'époque, est l'un des mariages spatiaux les plus distinctifs, à l'échelle boréale du continent. Pour en retrouver l'équivalent, il faut aller au Mexique ou aux Antilles.

Je parcourais récemment quelques textes de Philippe-Aubert de Gaspé écrits au siècle dernier - quand on s'appelle «de Gaspé», on a du Micmac dans l'aile, c'est le moins qu'on puisse dire. Eh bien, tout au long de leurs échancrures et de leurs baies, de Belle-Chasse à Cacouna et partout ailleurs, les rives du Saint-Laurent des «Anciens Canadiens» sont dotées de

wigwams et de campements autochtones. Mais où est donc allé se réfugier tout ce monde qu'on réaperçoit très bien, par ailleurs, dans à peu près tous les tableaux de Cornélius Krieghoff? Les yeux de l'Europe n'ont jamais opéré, vis-à-vis du Canada, la même censure que ceux de la classe intellectuelle.

N'est-ce pas exactement cela le «French Quebec»? Un pays dans un peuple dans un pays dans une cartographie où tout a été masqué par couches successives d'architectures et de déforestations, de mises en agriculture et de mise en demeure de l'âme, où l'invocation de la brunante rappelle légendes et présences aussitôt effacées par le vent de l'histoire officielle. Se promener dans Caughnawaga/Kahnawake, c'est retrouver une espèce de French Canada joyeusement frelaté ayant été conservé malgré lui par la présence Mohawk et la langue anglaise. Ainsi, Caughnawaga/Kahnawake a beau nous être présenté comme une réserve indienne, elle





constitue l'un des villages «canadiens français» les plus représentatifs qui soient en Amérique. Rarement signale-t-on une telle évidence. Ce sont les Mohawks qui conservent, à leur façon, le patrimoine franco mieux que les Francos eux-mêmes ne le font dans les agglomérations circumvoisines, telle Châteauguay, qui s'apparentent beaucoup plus à la banlieue de Kansas City, de fait.

De plus, puisque la «réserve», en raison de son statut, a réussi à échapper partiellement aux urbanistes et aux normes réductrices présidant à l'organisation de l'espace, la communauté iroquoise de Sault Saint-Louis incarne un espace unique. L'on y trouve de tout comme nulle part ailleurs: maisons canadiennes, bungalows, shaks, mansions, racks-à-poutines ou stands-à-patates frites; maisons longues, tee-pee, clubs de golf, aréna-jou-de-crosse, légion canadienne et bientôt, casino, etc. On y trouve également deux ou trois bannières et les rues ne se rencontrent pas toujours à angles droits comme dans le reste de la Western Wasp-America.

Comment exprimer la chose à plus vaste échelle? Plus que New York, Boston et toute autre conurbation de la Côte atlantique, Montréal est la seule ville de l'«Amérique anglo» où on trouve, en cette veille de l'an 2000, trois réserves inscrites dans l'axe même d'une histoire devenue géographique, celle du Saint-Laurent, soit Akwesasne, Kanasatake et Kahawake. Ce n'est certes pas un hasard. C'est ici que se trouve le talon d'Achille, pour ne pas dire le talon du mocassin de Kondiaronk. Ici s'est fait la guerre; ici a été conclue la paix; ici s'est joué, plus que partout ailleurs le destin de la Nord-Amérique. Montréal est à la fois une ville franco, un carrefour autochtone et un lieu flottant au centre et au-dessus de plusieurs Amériques, par la grâce iroquoise.

#### Mais, qui sont donc alors les Iroquois?

Qu'ont-ils été et que sont-ils, ces gens qui se nomment justement Del'Isle, BeauVais, LaHache ou MonTour, et encore, McComber, GoodLeaf, Stacey, Jacob's ou Diabo (lequel nom ne vient pas de Diabolo mais du français d'Ailleboust) et qui cachent dans leur sac à malice un troisième nom pour les intimes ou les dieux, Ho-Wee-So-Kon, Dey-Ouen-Doque, etc. Si ce n'est pas là du Canadien-Français Écossais-Autochtones, Sangs-Mélés-Limeys, sans parler des Irlandais, Abénaquis et autres qui sont passés à marée haute et qu'on a embarqué dans la réserve, au passage, qu'on me dise de quoi retourner la géographie des Alléghany, des corridors appalachiens et des rivières qui les traversent.

Cette confédération de nations dont se sont inspirés les pères fondateurs de l'Union états-unienne et dont les noms ont migré avec les langues - Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas, Tuscaroras en anglais; Agniers, Onneiwouts, Onontagués, Goyogouins, Tsonnontouans,

en français. Sauf que les appellations en français sont beaucoup plus près phonétiquement de l'iroquien original, mais les principaux intéressés, emportés par la loyauté britannique et le melting pot subséquent, l'ont souvent oublié. Mais qui donc se souvient de tout cela, sinon la terre? Et que peut raconter la terre sans passer à son tour par les rivières qui la trament?

Dès qu'on se prend à observer, sur une carte de la Nord-Amérique, le domaine algonquin d'origine, un empire gigantesque émerge pour s'étendre des Carolines/Virginies jusqu'au Mississippi et au-delà, vers les contreforts de la toundra. Bref, un vaste océan territorial sur lequel navigue une flotte de quelques rares vaisseaux nommés justement Iroquois. Aux Niña, Pinta et Santa Maria de Colomb, pré-existaient Hurons, Iroquois et tous les autres.

Venus, en fait, de l'actuel Mexique, les Iroquois flottaient sur la mer territoriale algonquienne et constituaient des îlots minoritaires dont la survie reposait sur ce qu'il convient d'appeler l'art de guériller. La guérilla, d'une part et l'art de griller leurs ennemis à petit feu, d'autre part, pour maintenir le bouillon bien chaud, pourrait-on dire. Si on examine la répartition géographique des «tribus» iroquoises, à l'arrivée des Dos-Blancs, on se rend vite compte qu'ils se situaient souvent sur des élévations montueuses ou montagneuses, plus élevées que les sites algonquiens. Entourés de tribus à l'intérieur desquelles ils avaient réussi à se frayer un chemin et un destin, les Iroquois affirmaient habiter le toit de la carapace, au faite de la tortue géographique.

En parcourant Caughnawaga, on est amené à penser que si les Iroquois ont réussi à se maintenir sur le monticule de la survie,

c'est en jouant constamment de leur position-tampon. Provoquant constamment l'affrontement de leurs ennemis, ils en arrivaient à se ménager ainsi un espace intermédiaire. Qu'en est-il aujourd'hui? La crise d'Oka s'avère une application *ad hoc* d'une telle stratégie: opposer Francos et Anglois pour maintenir à flots des îles risquant l'engloutissement permanent.

En même temps qu'il s'est imposé à l'univers entier, l'anglais est devenu, à toutes fins pratiques, la langue de la confédération iroquoise, et donc, de l'identité autochtone en Nord-Amérique. Mais quelque chose d'autre demeure à la double entrée de la porte de l'Est et de la porte du Nord: ce qu'on appelle maintenant le Québec, lequel est issu, en fait d'Hochelaga ou Montréal (et de la lointaine banlieue de Stadaconé, bien sûr).

Avec les réserves autochtones, Montréal (et son vaste hinterland) demeure, en Nord-Amérique, la seule véritable grande poche de résistance linguistique interne et s'avère donc l'un des seuls espaces «autochtonisés» aux XVII-XXIème siècles, continuant de résister. Maintenant que la légitimité même de la résistance passe aussi par l'anglais, sans parler de la spiritualité et des rites de la maison-longue, qu'en est-il de la promesse qu'est toujours venue incarner Montréal, entre New York/USA et la Grande Iroquoise?

Ainsi, un pèlerinage à Caughnawaga - à tous les Caughnawagas -

s'impose-t-il de toute urgence pour sortir de toutes les réserves et des prisons imposées par l'Empire et que certains en sont venus à considérer comme leur liberté. Liberté enfermée.

Pour retrouver enfin l'esprit de l'Eau, l'esprit du fleuve Saint-Laurent, c'est-à-dire de la Grande Rivière de Canada.

«J'ai fui ce pays jusqu'à sa source  
et je t'ai rencontrée  
entre les deux cuisses de ton tee-pee  
où je t'ai suivie jusqu'à la vie» ❖❖❖



La  
venerable  
Kateri Tekakwitha  
(portrait: Joseph A. Izzi)

#### note

[1] Je déteste ce parallèle réductionniste. La Louisiane vaut bien le Québec et vice versa.

JEAN MORISSET EST GÉOGRAPHE. IL ENSEIGNE À L'UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL.



# GUIDETTES

## BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

### CRONICA



JOSÉ LEANDRO URBINA

**H**emos venido a parar a un barrio de mujeres feas. Tonia eligió este apartamento porque había espacio suficiente para meter su piano y el sillón en que le gusta echarse a reposar después de comida. La dueña del edificio, Teresita, una filipina casada con italiano, le pidió ver una foto de su marido que estaba empaquetando libros en Ottawa, sólo por curiosidad. Me encontró buenmozo y dijo que podíamos firmar contrato cuando quisiéramos, que el apartamento era nuestro.

El tipo del supermercado latino se reía cuando, semanas después, yo le contaba extrañado que Teresita había pedido ver mi foto. "Era para ver si era negro", movía la cabeza descreído. No podía entender que fuéramos tan estúpidos, que no supieramos que los morenos mandan a las gringas adelante a buscar "apartamento" y después que está todo firmado se aparecen ellos, y que en este barrio no los quiere nadie porque como todo el mundo sabe donde hay moreno hay trouble. Lo miro riendo con su boca gruesa y su pelo crespo y mientras recojo las bolsas le acepto que todavía tenemos mucho que aprender, que esto no es Canadá es Nu Yorky.

La vecina del piso cuarto bajó el mismo día de la mudanza para averiguar si teníamos hijos y ofrecer sus servicios de niñera. Ella estaba casada con Tony, hermano del marido de Teresita y la conocía todo el barrio. Cuando le abrí la puerta me quedé paralizado como por cinco segundos. Ella se dio cuenta y se arregló el pelo. Era pequeña, aún montada sobre sus tacos muy altos, vestía una falda corta y ajustada, un sweater de cachemira rosado y su pelo teñido rubio se elevaba hacia el cielo totalmente endurecido por el hair spray. Me pasó la mano y noté sus uñas espectaculares, largas y rojas. "Hola mister", lanzó con voz chillona tratando de mirar hacia el interior. Le dije mi nombre y en ese momento apareció Tonia a mis espaldas. Ella miró por sobre mi hombro sonriendo y dijo: "Bueno, creo que esto es un asunto de mujeres. Mejor hablo con ella". Fue una desilusión enterarse de que no teníamos hijos, pero antes de marcharse dejó una tarjeta de la peluquería donde trabajaba con su madre, a dos cuadras, la conocía todo el barrio.

El viejo italiano que vino a instalar la alfombra también era conocido de todos y no tenía ningún apuro. Yo tenía una cita con un amigo en Manhattan y no quería dejarlo solo en el apartamento. "Vaya tranquilo", decía él. "Deje la llave y yo se la dejo con su vecina". Miraba de frente, a los ojos. "Ahora si quiere verme trabajar, ningún problema". "Tengo que ir a Manhattan" le dije tratando de no mostrarme muy nervioso. "A Manhattan", exclamó con asco. "¿Quien quiere ir a Manhattan? Yo he vivido aquí por treinta años y he ido dos veces a Manhattan, todo para darle el gusto a la cretina de mi mujer. Ese lugar huele a mierda, cuesta caro y está lleno de locos, putas, maricones, asesinos, drogadictos, y degenerados. Ese es un lugar para los americanos, no para usted. Manhattan". "Tengo que conseguir trabajo", me disculpe. "Consigalo aquí en Red Hook, donde la gente es buena y los hombres son hombres y las mujeres son mujeres. En Manhattan

uno ni siquiera puede estar seguro de si la camarera que le trae café a la mesa y le pone las tetas en la cara es mujer o no".

Las de aquí son mujeres de verdad, con sus peinados pasados de moda y sus uñas postizas y lo tratan a uno de honey. Las chiquitas salen en las tardes a la calle y se reúnen alrededor de una radio a bailar moviendo las caderas y los pechos. Los hombres también son de verdad, casi todos hacen pesas e impera el culto de la virgen. La mayoría viene de Bari y si bien muchos han estado aquí más de un par de generaciones, siempre hay quien acaba de llegar y quien está a punto de irse.

Mi amigo me pregunta divertido, mientras tomamos un expreso en el corazón de Soho, si sé donde nos hemos ido a meter. Le digo que supongo. Hace una semana hubo un incidente racial donde un grupo de jóvenes italoamericanos mataron a un joven negro de un par de balazos después de haberlo golpeado con bates de beisbol. En el café de Manhattan la gente se refiere a mis vecinos como *basura blanca*. También los llaman los guidos y a las mujeres las guidettes. A ellos les importa poco, parece. Ellas siguen yendo a la peluquería y a la manicura, y siguen usando faldas ajustadas y pantalones ajustados de poliester y tacones altos. La gordura es parte de la hermosura genética. También la necesidad de socializar. Se reúnen y conversan frente a la panadería, la carnicería, los almacenes y mientras tanto saludan a todo el mundo de lado a lado de la calle con ese insoportable tonito chillón hi honey, y gritan a sus hijos que corretean frente a los jardines delanteros de las casas y se bajan de la acera sin mirar a ningún lado. Hablan alternativamente de hombres y de dinero. Los hombres en el café hablan de comida y de fútbol.

Pasó mi vecina con una mujer grande, el doble de su estatura y el triple de su peso. Comenzó a contarme que Maria era la hija del viejo que vivía en el piso tercero: don Cosmo. La mujer me saludó con una inclinación de cabeza y un gesto de las cejas pleno de sentido dramático. Me preguntaron si había visto en el edificio una mulata loca que venía del sector hispano, al otro lado de Smith. Decían que andaba rondando el sector buscando plata para drogas. Se había metido al apartamento del viejo, le había dado una buena chupada y se había llevado parte del dinero de su pensión. El viejo quería casarse con ella. "No me diga". "Si le digo". "Y con lo viejo que es, que ya ni le funciona, pero los hombres son así, hasta el día que se mueren se siguen haciendo ilusiones", lloraba la hija. "Yo no lo puedo tener en mi casa, tengo mi familia y dos niñas adolescentes". "Que viejo más sucio", decía mi vecina. "Es un hombre no más", decía la otra. Por fin les conté que si había visto a la mujer, una mulata flaca con las manos y los pies grandes. "Esa misma". Había estado tocando el timbre del apartamento de Cosmo y cuando me vió salir se metió al edificio diciendo que venía a visitar al viejito que la había llamado porque no se sentía bien. Le dije que iba a avisarle a la vecina y ella se me pegó al cuerpo carinito y tu vives solo aquí mi amor. "Con mi esposa". "Pero ahora estás solito y yo te





photos:  
Josef Geranio

puedo dar algo que ninguna mujer te ha dado si tu me ayudas con un poquito de dinero para medicamento mira que tengo un hijito enfelmo". Le dije que iba a llamar a la vecina y me dió un empujón y salió corriendo mientras me rociaba con insultos.

El yerno vino a verme y me pidió que si veía a la perra esa en el edificio, que por favor les avisara. Trabajaba como soldador en el puerto y quería construirle una jaula de fierro a Cosmo alrededor de la cama y la cocinilla para que no pudiera salir hasta que ellos llegaran en la tarde para sacarlo a pasear. Teresita, la dueña se opuso al proyecto. Quería que se llevaran al viejo y renovar el apartamento y subir el alquiler. Pero entre Guidos las cosas no se arreglan así. Cómo van a echar al pobre viejo a la calle. Mejor lo vigilamos entre todos.

En la pizzería Da Vinci hay un inmenso televisor. Aquí vengo por las mañanas a tomar capuccino. Las dos primeras veces me miraron de reojo. "How are you my friend", dijo el dueño y puso chocolate en la espuma de mi café. A la tercera vez me preguntó donde vivía. Le dije: "Ah, en el edificio de la coreana", certificó con un tonillo raro. "Filipina", "Da lo mismo", hizo un gesto con el hombro. "El marido es italiano", aventuré. No dijo nada por unos minutos, limpiaba el plástico del mesón con un trapo húmedo. Cuando fui a pagar me detuvo. "Café de bienvenida al barrio", declaró serio. Le di las gracias y él me preguntó de inmediato de donde venía yo. "De Canada", contesté. "Sí, pero usted no es canadiense". "No, de origen soy de la América del Sur". "De Buenos Aires". "De Chile". "Bueno", dijo inspeccionándome. "En realidad parece italiano" "No me diga", le sonrei. "Sí, de los del sur", dijo serio.

En tres semanas ya tenía algunos conocidos entre los parroquianos del Da Vinci y había comenzado el campeonato mundial de fútbol. Una tarde en que jugaban los franceses me fui a cortar el pelo y después pasé a tomar un café y a mirar el partido. Mientras intercambiábamos saludos me di cuenta que me miraban con cierta simpatía. El hijo del dueño se atrevió cuando me ponía un expresso al frente. "Con ese corte de pelo se parece un poco a Tony Benetti", dijo con una sonrisa. Los otros aprobaron. "Buen corte de pelo". "Chito es un maestro con las tijeras".

Miro hacia afuera, por la calle pasan las guidettes. Viajan en grupos, se acercan a la ventana y buscan entre los rostros vueltos hacia el televisor. Reina la calma en el interior sombreado y fresco. Italia juega mañana. Esta noche voy a una fiesta en Mannhattan, voy a ducharme y a comer algo. Tonia pasará a recogerme alrededor de las ocho. Terminé mi café. Gol de los franceses. Gooooool. Suben las voces. Aplausos y golpes en las mesas. Vuelan los comentarios y las risas. En ese momento alguien grita afuera y hay un silencio súbito. Tony, Tony, Franky. Uñas y nudillos llamando con urgencia desde la ventana, las frentes de las mujeres apretadas contra el vidrio. "Carlo, la puta se estaba robando una radio". "Le pegó a Maria". Mientras siguen los gritos, rápido, rápido, y los rostros de los hombres se

endurecen, salen algunos bates de béisbol desde atrás del mesón y los más jóvenes corren

furiosos blandiéndolos hacia el final de la calle. Pasa un auto de la policía con la sirena apagada. De los negocios de alrededor también han salido jóvenes armados con bates. Las mujeres gritan, saltan e indican con sus uñas largas hacia el lugar del incidente, mi edificio. Pido un vaso de agua y sigo mirando el partido con los viejos que no se han movido de sus sillas y no parecen ni alarmados ni conscientes de lo que pasa afuera. Quince minutos más tarde una ambulancia cruza frente a la ventana. Los jóvenes comienzan a entrar de vuelta comentando excitados, escupiendo amenazas con sus voces roncadas, y poniendo los bates detrás del mostrador. Uno los limpia con el trapo húmedo.

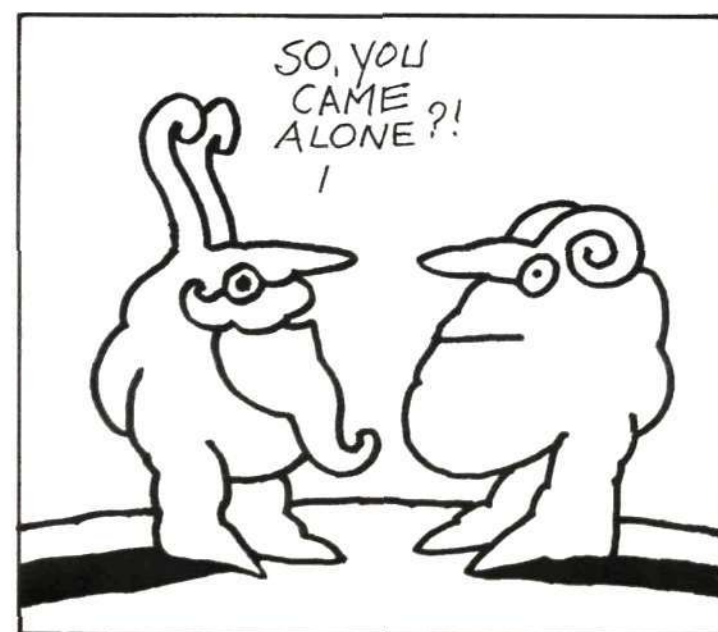
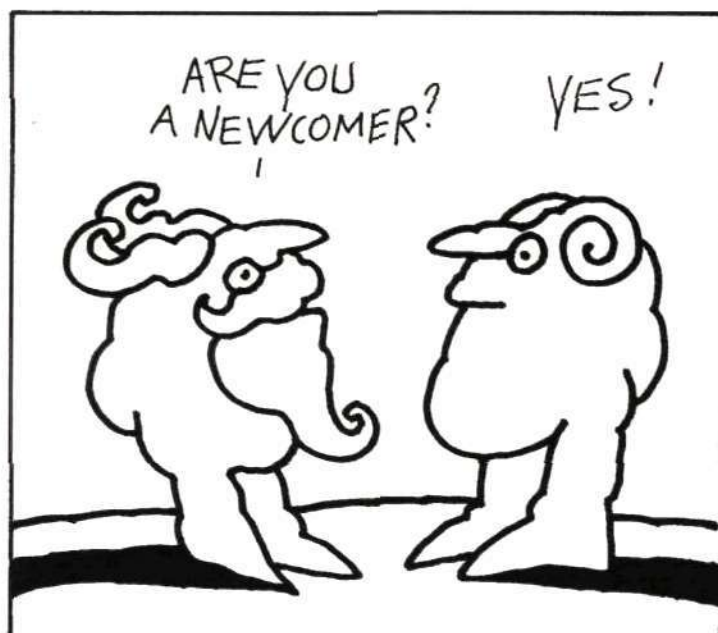
En la acera, frente al edificio, mi vecina lava el pavimento con una manguera de alta presión. Me mira venir y se le encienden los ojos. "Lindo corte de pelo". Dos o tres mujeres salen del edificio acompañando a la hija de Cosmo y hablando fuerte. "Esa no vuelve más por aquí". "Esa no sabe más del hospital", se ríe otra. Yo las miro friamente, tengo el sabor amargo del café en la boca. "Era necesario ensañarse tanto con esa pobre infeliz", pregunto. "Casi le volaron la cabeza". Se ponen serias. En medio segundo he pasado de vecino a total extraño. "Mire mister", dice una con el pelo elevado en un moño. "Aquí funciona la ley italiana. Eso lo saben todos. En este barrio el que busca encuentra, por eso usted puede caminar por la calle sin miedo y puede dormir en paz por la noche, por eso usted vive aquí y no al otro lado". Me miran fijo esperando una respuesta. "Tiene toda la razón", le digo y ellas sonríen. Un grupo de niñas baila en la calle con Carol King cantando *com'n baby do the locomotion*.

Había terminado de ponerme el traje azul cuando entró Tonia. Venía de la peluquería. Al verme lanzo una carcajada. "Eh", gritó. "Te pareces a Tony Benetti". Yo no podía reaccionar. Verla parada frente a mí con el pelo levantado en una espiral petrificada por el spray. Ella se dio cuenta de mi estupor. "Te gustan mis uñas", me dijo moviéndolas ante mis ojos como un abanico. "Dios mío, que nos está pasando". "Necesito una chaqueta", se dirigió al closet. "Vamos a llegar tarde", le digo imitando el acento de Brooklyn. "OK, mister Guido, lista", ríe ella y se cuelga de mi brazo.

**JOSÉ LEANDRO URBINA** NACIÓ EN SANTIAGO DE CHILE EN 1949. DESPUÉS DEL GOLPE DE ESTADO DE 1973 ABANDONÓ EL PAÍS Y HA VIVIDO EN ARGENTINA, CANADÁ Y LOS E. E. U. U. HA PUBLICADO EL LIBRO DE CUENTOS *LAS MALAS JUNTAS* Y LA NOVELA *COBRO REVERTIDO*, PREMIO A LA MEJOR NOVELA DE 1992 DEL CONSEJO NACIONAL DEL LIBRO DE CHILE, AMBOS CON LA EDITORIAL PLANETA. VIVE EN OTTAWA Y ENSEÑA EN LA UNIVERSIDAD DE CARLETON.



# VITTORINO





I have been to Greece and Mexico, so how could I love the homage to Cartier, that marble piece of angels and lions, that reigns in the heart of Jeanne-Mance Park in Montreal? Still. Still... It's a Sunday in May, in between the lions two, three, four, then ten TAM TAM musicians drift in, lining up at the angels' feet, and angrily start to caress their drums as if obeying an ancient sign. People start to gather - moved by a tender, momentary lapse - looking, looking at each other, smiling. Some, those who dare (I am not one of them, unfortunately), take on in waves that sparkling rhythm. It immediately becomes a dance, a frenzy, sweat. All of a sudden young men, young girls with painted faces of every race and colour pop up everywhere; but also, men and women not so young anymore, and a couple of flower children with white beards: everyone is invited (long live freedom). The movement swells up, it transforms itself by celebrating itself: it's a joyous hymn, sung with arms outstretched to the sky. Above, the sun radiates, beating down, drugging us: so, this miraculous drum dance is an explosive thank you to its power, to the miracle that winter (so intensely here just a month ago) suddenly vanished, already a washed-up memory. Here, right here, was it ever cold? Will it be cold again? It seems impossible: anyway, no one wants to think about it now. Now there is life, love: people sensing the beat, swaying, and nearby, in increasing circles, with a simple smile, with a straightforward desire to embrace, to laugh. There is, in this place, the multicoloured strength of Central Park, or, of the African warmth, but also a Neapolitan Holland. Everyone is beautiful, the less beautiful, the old, the physically handicapped, the fat. Even Cartier seems more alive, somewhat more pleasant, almost Greek or Mexican. And I find out that right behind, with the mountain as a backdrop, the trees are green and lilac. I find out, enraptured - several hours have already passed.

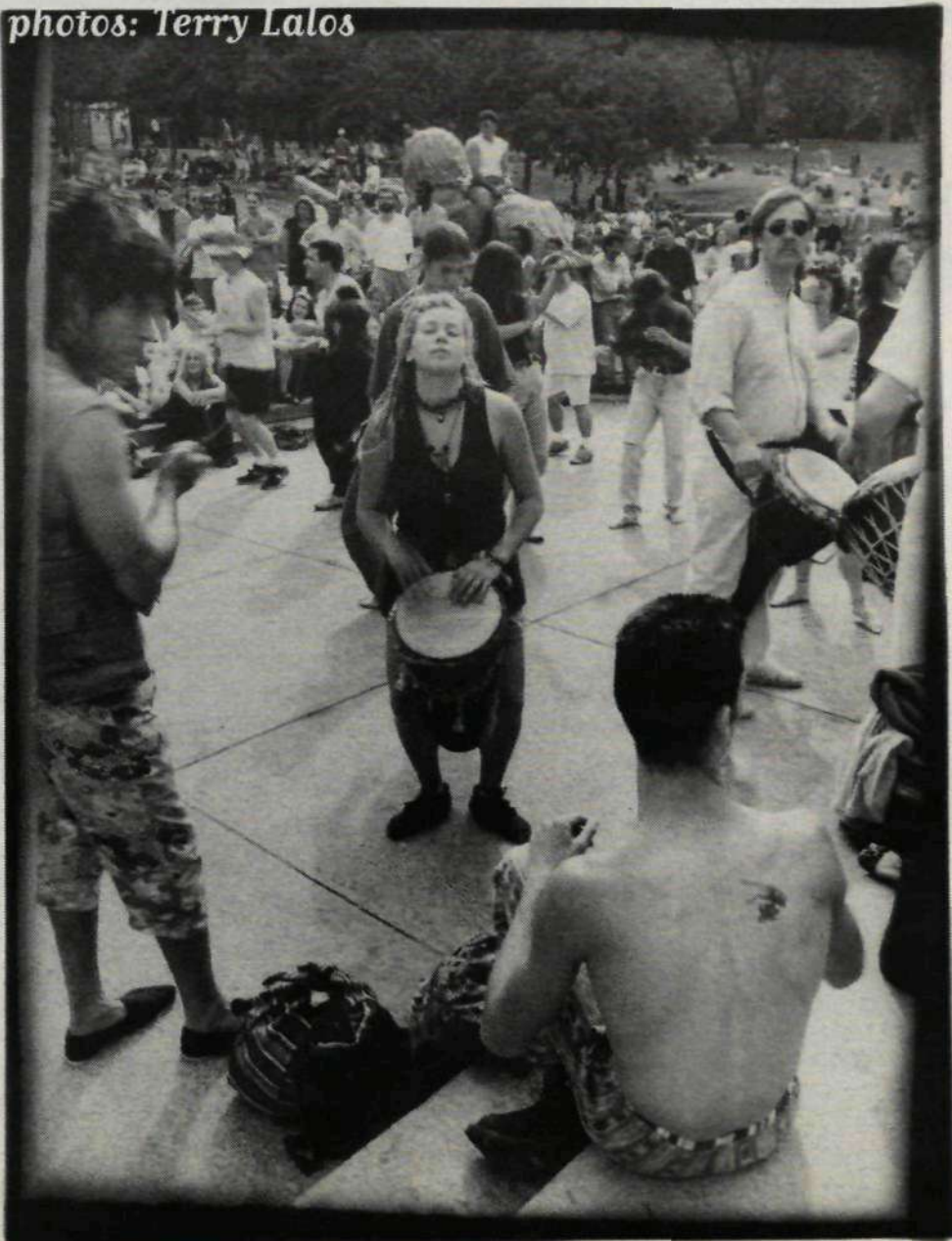
An incredible Sunday, I think. No, it is not one Sunday. They tell me it happens every Sunday, starting with the first warm air. Since when? It's been many, many years. Then - I'm told - the ville de Montréal has taken over the popular 'spontaneity'. Even the police came along, and who, though smiling, continue their beat: no wine or drugs (at least...), licensed ice-cream sellers, and licensed sellers on the street leading to the dance area. Obviously, it could be a sociological study. But, I will not think about it right now. Still immersed in the buoying rhythm of the drums, I think about a girl with an earring in her navel who was dancing like Mozart. If you want to know what the meaning of life is, come to Montreal in the spring, pass by Jeanne-Mance Park. 🌿🌿🌿

## Giuseppe A. Samonà



# TAM

photos: Terry Lalos



GIUSEPPE A. SAMONÀ TEACHES HISTORY OF RELIGIONS AT UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL AND HE IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF VICE VERSA.



# De la main tendue au couteau sous la gorge

B A R U C H  
L E V I N S T E I N



**I**l nous faut une question gagnante. Ce qui importe c'est d'obtenir coûte que coûte non pas un «oui» au référendum mais un «oui» à la question qui sera posée. Saisissez-vous la nuance ? M. Parizeau, premier ministre du Québec, pense que l'accession du Québec à l'indépendance est une bonne chose. M. Lucien Bouchard, chef de l'opposition au Parlement du Canada, estime que c'est une noble cause à défendre. M. Mario Dumont, député unique du parti de l'Action démocratique du Québec, hésite : l'indépendance, oui, mais... Mais quoi donc ?

La majorité de la population du Québec n'est pas favorable à l'indépendance. Ce n'est d'ailleurs pas une majorité qui a permis au Parti Québécois de former le gouvernement actuel mais plus simplement le jeu de l'alternance politique. En effet, dans une saine démocratie, il se révèle judicieux, après deux mandats consécutifs, de changer l'équipe au pouvoir. Il se trouve que l'équipe de rechange compte dans son programme le projet de faire sécession. Mais ce projet doit d'abord recevoir l'assentiment de la majorité de la population. Dans de telles conditions, la majorité des électeurs estiment qu'ils peuvent dormir tranquilles. Tous les sondages démontrent que la majorité de la population du Québec ne veut pas se séparer du Canada. D'ailleurs cette question sera vite réglée, pense-t-on, puisque M. Parizeau a promis un référendum avec une question sans équivoque dans les six mois puis dans les douze mois qui suivront son accession au pouvoir. Bref, il s'agit d'une formalité : en cas de réponse négative, le gouvernement se mettra au travail pour bien gouverner quitte à promettre un référendum dans quinze ans ; en cas de réponse positive (autant tout prévoir), ce sera la fête. Il était entendu que la consultation sur l'indépendance n'empêcherait pas le gouvernement de gouverner : c'était ne pas très bien

comprendre ce que signifiait la promesse d'une autre façon de gouverner.



## UN LÉGER GLISSEMENT SÉMANTIQUE QUI NE CHANGE RIEN

On imaginait sérieusement que l'affaire serait réglée à la Saint-Jean. Il faudra attendre l'automne. Soit. Mais les règles du jeu ont changé. Il ne s'agit plus de consulter la population, il s'agit de gagner. La différence est considérable. Déjà, le gouvernement n'avait pu résister à la tentation de manipuler l'opinion en proposant un exercice de démocratie orientée à ses citoyens qui se sont révélés des écoliers moins dociles que prévu. Les Commissions sur l'avenir du Québec sont restées sourdes aux doléances les plus légitimes : du travail, un meilleur système d'éducation, l'amélioration des soins de santé, les garanties sur la sécurité du territoire. En revanche, leurs animateurs ont bien compris qu'une écrasante majorité de citoyens souhaite garder des liens avec le Canada. Cette perspective est évidemment incompatible avec l'indépendance. A moins de ressortir la bonne vieille formule de la souveraineté-association. Un peu usé ce modèle. Qu'à cela ne tienne : on va le rajeunir. Ce n'est qu'une affaire de mots.

Quels sont les vocables à la mode ? Quels sont les mots fourre-tout ? On a bien eu la Société distincte mais ça n'a pas marché. Les dictionnaires fourmillent de substantifs. Eh bien, MM. Parizeau, Bouchard et Dumont n'ont pas eu à chercher très loin. Ils ont conclu une entente qui font d'eux des partenaires. Et justement ce qu'ils comptent proposer au gouvernement du Canada, ainsi qu'aux provinces canadiennes c'est un partenariat. Voilà : le maître-mot c'est Partenariat. Il se prête à toutes les combinaisons possibles, à toutes les combines aussi. Il est équivoque à souhait et surtout logique. C'est bien connu, les adversaires d'hier sont les partenaires de



demain. La politique de la main tendue que prône M. Bernard Landry, ministre des affaires internationales, repose sur une logique incontestable: une fois l'indépendance acquise, le gouvernement du Canada devra négocier des accords dans tous les domaines s'il entend défendre les intérêts des Canadiens.



#### D'UNE LOGIQUE À L'AUTRE

À cette logique, MM. Parizeau, Bouchard et Dumont en opposent une autre: celle du couteau sous la gorge. Il s'agit de forcer le gouvernement canadien à entériner un traité qui reconnaîtrait au Québec un caractère souverain conditionnel à la ratification de clauses concernant principalement l'union douanière, la libre circulation des marchandises, des personnes, des capitaux, des services, la politique monétaire, la mobilité de la main-d'œuvre, la citoyenneté. S'ajoutent encore une douzaine d'autres modalités. L'opération serait assimilable à une nouvelle ronde constitutionnelle si elle ne prévoyait à terme l'instauration d'un Conseil du Partenariat formé à part égale de ministres des deux états, d'une Assemblée parlementaire formée d'une part de députés canadiens et, d'autre part, de députés québécois non pas élus mais nommés, une forme originale de bicamérisme; et d'un tribunal pour trancher les litiges. Le tout devra être conclu en moins d'un an à défaut de quoi l'Assemblée nationale aura la capacité de proclamer unilatéralement la souveraineté pure et dure. Alors, on se trouvera dans la situation de la main tendue chère à M. Landry. Ce Qu'il Fallait Démontrer.

Ce projet rappelle à s'y méprendre celui formulé par Daniel Johnson père sous le titre : Égalité ou indépendance. Il prônait l'instauration d'un Canada binational. C'était en mars 1965. Il a formé le gouvernement l'année suivante. Il s'est bien gardé alors de réaliser son projet.

Décidément de virage en virage, on finit par revenir loin en arrière.



#### LES SENSATIONS D'UN ÉTAT SOUVERAIN

Reste la question à formuler. Il faudra qu'elle ait la forme d'une offre que l'on ne puisse pas refuser. Il s'agit de concocter quelque chose de logique, quelque chose que le bon sens ne refusera pas. Quelque chose à quoi souscrira tout esprit épris d'idéal de liberté, en somme tout esprit qui se réclamerait du libéralisme. Et justement, il s'en trouve un bon nombre chez les partisans du Parti libéral et davantage encore au sein de la population.

À l'esprit rationnel, pragmatique et pratique de la question, il conviendra d'ajouter une touche sentimentale; plus qu'une touche d'ailleurs: une épaisse couche. Dans cette optique, il y aurait les questions du genre *Voulez-vous vivre heureux?* (en petits caractères serait imprimée la fin de la phrase: *dans un pays qui serait vraiment le vôtre*). Il y aurait encore *Souhaitez-vous connaître les extraordinaires sensations de bien-être mental et physique d'un état... souverain?* Il est facile de répondre «Oui» à de telles questions. Facile de rassembler une quasi-unanimité autour de telles perspectives. Mais au moins une question restera en suspens: quelle part de ce *Oui* massif s'accapareront respectivement MM. Parizeau, Bouchard et Dumont? Les partenaires d'aujourd'hui seront-ils les adversaires de demain? À une telle question, il est tentant de répondre: *Oui*. 🍷🍷

BARUCH LEVINSTEIN EST THÉOLOGIE, PHILOSOPHE ET DIAMANTAIRE. IL VIT ENTRE AMSTERDAM, NEW YORK ET MONTRÉAL.

## A GLANCE AT TIMETABLES

THESE SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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(Dorval to Pearson)

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6:15 (Ex.Sat.Sun.) 7:30 (Sat.Sun.)  
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# The Myth of Art

Régis Debray

Translated by Eric Rauth

## I. HISTORY'S SPIRAL WITHOUT END

A curious thing how defenders of the Republic  
are so reactionary when they speak about art.

Edouard Manet, 1867

*Art is not an invariant of the human condition but a latter-day notion of the modern West, and nothing guarantees its permanence. This mythical abstraction has drawn its legitimacy from a "history of Art" no less mythological, in which utopian linear time finds a last refuge. Observing the cycles of creation in the plastic arts, over the long term, would lead one instead to replace the messianic idea of evolution of forms with that of "revolution"—namely, the line with the spiral.*

### A Label's Luster

Between ourselves and the pictures and artifacts we behold stands the screen of the word "art." This catchword, mechanically repeated, has time and again been a stumbling block. The enticement of its single syllable obstinately resists all elucidation of the variants of *l'image*, a term that in French can mean many genres of visual representation. "Art" dresses up an artifact as nature, instant as essence, and a folklore as the universal. The summary rhetoric of art, a seductive lie, is present in too many places to be avoided. We will be content here with seeing it put precisely in its place.

Those who preach for the sake of art unfold for us a pageantry of metamorphoses and resurrections like so many avatars of some transhistorical substance. This latter is like a noun that somehow arrived late. The most recent well-known attendant of its cult, paradoxically also doing it a disservice, himself recognized this in the end: "Nor is the timeless eternal" (Malraux).

We had been asked to believe that Art is an invariant, a region of being or district of the soul, fillable with crafted images here and there, as one went along. It was as if the passing and variegated flow of visual images, produced over a period of 30,000 years, was believed to make available in the course of centuries an ideal unity of structure consisting of common properties that defined a certain class of objects—of which each epoch would come along and merely actualize such and such a trait or segment. This amounted to fusing



the law of the latecomer with the survival of the fittest into our "modern art" that draws its justification only out of itself. The arrogance of this second nature is that of the local become global and a universal arbiter; that of only one brief segment putting itself forward as the whole or end of history, and, short of understanding what eludes it, pretending to discover itself at the origin of all visible representations crafted by the human hand and gathered together later by our zeal. Whereas in reality the order is reversed: each age of the image has its distinctive type of art.

Add to this an ethnocentric naïvete: the claim that "the museum delivers art from its extra-artistic functions." As if "art" had had to

*Add to this an ethnocentric naïvete: the claim that "the museum delivers art from its extra-artistic functions." As if "art" had had to bide its time, long-suffering out of the limelight for entire centuries, until being restored to itself, a self-sufficient and self-engendered totality unjustly denatured, alienated, perverted by non-indigenous and illegitimate interests*

bide its time, long-suffering out of the limelight for entire centuries, until being restored to itself, a self-sufficient and self-engendered totality unjustly denatured, alienated, perverted by non-indigenous and illegitimate interests. Would it not fit with the reality of the actual metamorphoses to turn the proposition around, to "the museum has relieved sacred images of their cultural functions"? Beauty made on purpose, what we call art—this has been the business, during the long history of the West, of a mere four or five centuries. A short parenthesis.

Our twentieth century has been characterized by the undermining of

aesthetic norms inherited from the preceding one: the rifts between popular and elite art, kitsch and avant-garde, etc. It has carried out, in Harold Rosenberg's phrase, the "de-definition" of art. All manner of incongruities, exoticisms or throw-aways that our predecessors preferred to leave linger curbside have been recycled and stuffed together in the same bag. There subsists a dogmatism hidden beneath this hyper-empiricism, a latent authoritarianism under this visual anarchism, namely the idea of the bag. I have in our day the right to



claim it will accomodate everything and anything—flask of artist's urine, wine bottle-carrier, hair dryer, empty picture frame, knotted string, the chair up against a wall with photograph of said chair by its side. But I still do not have the right to heave the bag into the trash can.

That "everything is art" is accepted;

but not yet that art is nothing—but an effective illusion. Of what definite use is this magical name, a riddle pleaded as evidence, a too familiar bestrangement? It serves to conceal the real breaks in cabling between civilizations as between the different moments of our own civilization, under a uniform beauxartistic layer. Art is a portmanteau, palimpsest word, in which each period is unperturbed when, to impose on the others its own beliefs, it erases those of its precursors.

Lucrative falsehoods: "General history of painting" or "Encyclopedia of universal art." A grandiloquent falsehood: "Invariably coated with history but always identical with itself from Sumer to the school of Paris, the creative act sustains throughout the centuries a reconquest as old as man" (Malraux). A useful falsehood, including all the way up to the lovers of truth: the Louvre Museum.

In whose name do we factor together artifactual populations as heterogeneous as the steatopygous Venus figurines of prehistoric times, Athena Parthenos, donors' Virgins, the Lady of Auxerre and the Demoiselles d'Avignon? In the name of the Image? The word simply does not have the same meaning, the same affects do not invest the "image" when one is at Paris in 1995, Rome in 1792 or again Rome in 1350 (with a million worshipers pouring through the city to gaze on a miracle-working image of Christ). We are not speaking about the same imagistic chemistry because the dynamics of beholding are no longer the same. To claim to have isolated an idea of the image would be yet one more *image*-inary idea. There is no invariant "imago" underneath the visible's infinite blossomings, for it is diversity's nature to be essential, as it is invariability's to be speculative.

Observing as Gombrich does in his preface to *History of Art* that there is no art but only artists is to fob off the problem: since what period have there been artists, and why? "Art is everything that men have pronounced it such?" And what exactly was there in the absence of the proper noun become so ubiquitous, before the transition from artist's stall to *studiolo* to Academy? It is not the artist who has made art, it is the notion of art that has made of the artisan an artist. And this notion only emerged in all its majesty with the Florentine Quattrocento, in that period that stretches from painters' conquest of their corporate autonomy (1378) to the funerary apotheosis of Michelangelo portrayed by Vasari (1564)...

## II.A DESPERATE RELIGION

### The Gay Capital

Art was born in the fifteenth century in the urban centers of the economy/world-onto-itself of that

But I still do not have the right to heave the bag into the trash can. That "everything is art" is accepted; but not yet that art is nothing—but an effective illusion

time: Venice, Florence, Bruges, Amsterdam. Our own era of the visual corresponds to the supremacy of finance capital (money for money) over industrial capital (money against merchandise). The premonitory symptoms of this changeover go back to the start of the century, at least if we are to

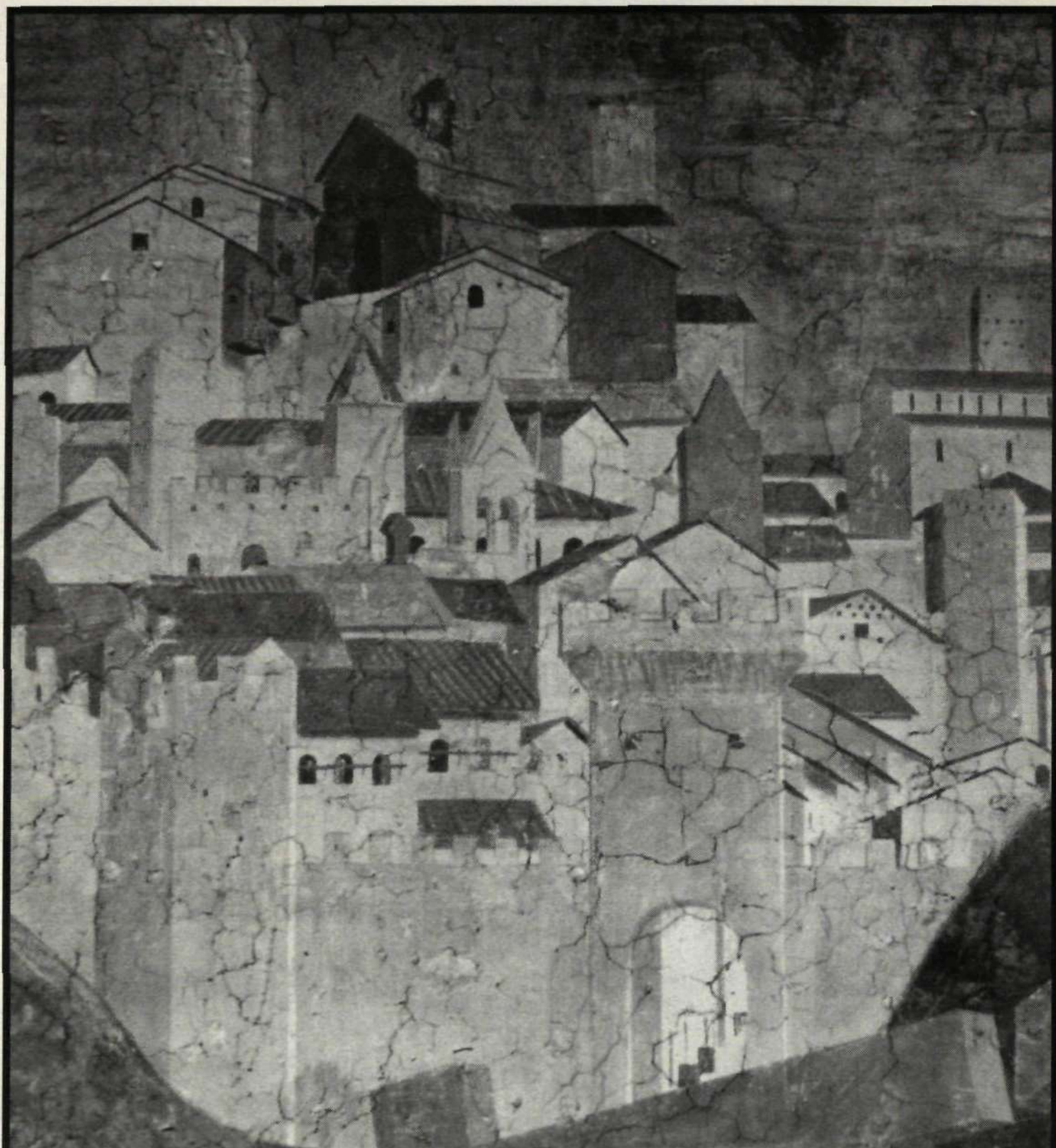
consider the first abstract canvas to be Kandinsky's *Watercolor*, which dates from 1910. Jean-Joseph Goux has pointed out the conjunction between plastic art's *coup de force* and these two other striking historical developments: the shift from gold coinage to printed money no longer convertible, and the shift from a nomenclatural language (for which a thing equals a word) to a language-system (in which a word's value is relative to its difference from other words) [1].

Through its power of presentation, the Idol (in the logosphere) put the viewer in the presence of, in contact with, Being and its divine truth, ever self-identical and closed upon itself—whence the stability of styles in this first age. Throughout three thousand years, from the Ancient Empire to the Ptolemies, the images produced by Egyptian carvers and painters remain approximately similar. By its power of representation, "art" made us gladly settle for a second-rank appearance, but the secondary degree of appearance was wagered against or secured by a primary degree (the capitalized real of God, Nature, or Man). Just as printed paper money was guaranteed by gold ingots. And the *gold* of the real was not inconsiderately given to just any imitator of appearances—hence the cares that were taken to ensure apprenticeship and mastery of the *métier*. Its power of simulation certified in turn the paper money of the visual as its own guarantor. Cash in hand no longer needed to be metallic. Thus its



Benozzo Gozzoli, *The Magi's Procession* (detail), Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence





Piero della Francesca, *The Verification of the True Cross* (detail), San Francesco, Arezzo

frenzy of circulation, its anxiousness of attestation by exchange. Today's "quasi-object"—a monetary sign whose assigned value is decisive—is motorized by things like confidence, chic, cheek, with the art criticism they fuel always on the verge of its bottom dropping out like the crash of '29 (though now highly improbable thanks to the interests at stake—museums, private collections, storeroom surplus, galleries, families, mafias, etc.). This mad rush ahead, like that of capital if you will, is a series of teeterings toward a disaster that manages to be averted at the last second.

The subsidence of images to the level of simple signs has kept tempo with the transformation of the *advertisement* (playing up the qualities of the object) into *p.r.* (flattering the desires of a subject). The rise of publicity has accompanied the reshuffling of priorities, within the *mediatic* order, from information to communication (or from the bit of news to the message); within the *political* order, from the State to civil society, the Party to the network, the collective to the individual; within the *economic* order, from a production-based society to a service-based society; within the order of *leisure*, from a

culture oriented toward (cautionary or edifying) public announcement (school, book, newspaper) to one centered around entertainment; and within the *psychic* order, from the predominance of the reality principle to that of the pleasure principle. All of this opens onto a new order, complete and coherent.

Once desire has supplanted need, and the commodity reached its "aesthetic stage," those who are creative and those who create fuse. Art and *p.r.* comprise the same struggle. In the one case, the work's promotion *becomes* the work, art is the performance of its publicity. In the other, merchandise becomes a mirror of dreams to catch the optical glutton's attention. Transforming products of consumption into *objets d'art*, *p.r.* is the official art of our after-art. Not by government decree but by social necessity. It is "official" because functional (and the functional is always a thing of beauty). A *liturgy of the commodity*, *p.r.* is most certainly our sacred art, the art of the sacred of our own time. And hence it is the most *alive*: the art that attracts the others to its orbit, the *Zeitgeist's* sponsor. In the *logosphere*, the *Idol* answered the appeal addressed to it of men



struggling to survive; Art responded to a will to take possession of the world; the Visual intercedes when competition for image, for the way things have to look to draw the most attention, has replaced the other two. That is, when people no longer have either physical hunger or fear.

Economically speaking, the movies depend on television, which in turn depends on p.r. It is logical that the advertising image should impose its law on its forebears who are now living off it. In 1920, commercial publicity was tuned into by the avant-garde; in 1980 it was the avant-garde that was absorbed by publicity [2]. Delaunay used to play with p.r., but Warhol, who had in fact worked for an advertising agency, was backed by and a card played by p.r., staged by it. It had

become in the meantime the central mediator. Hence its power to induce receptiveness and itself be tuned in, and its canonical status. In its position as an element of commonality, it took financial responsibility not only for the works themselves after the assets and the art market itself, but the production of political images and even the organizing of collective symbolic ritualizations (the Bicentennial of

the French Revolution, and the "Rights of Man" resounding and represented everywhere).

If everything and anything has become "art" today (packaging, mode of display, cartoons and carival exhibition, styles of handwriting and calligraphy, graphic design, the photocopy, hairstyle, perfumery, cooking, etc.), and if "everyone is an artist" (Beuys), is not the very stylistic register itself

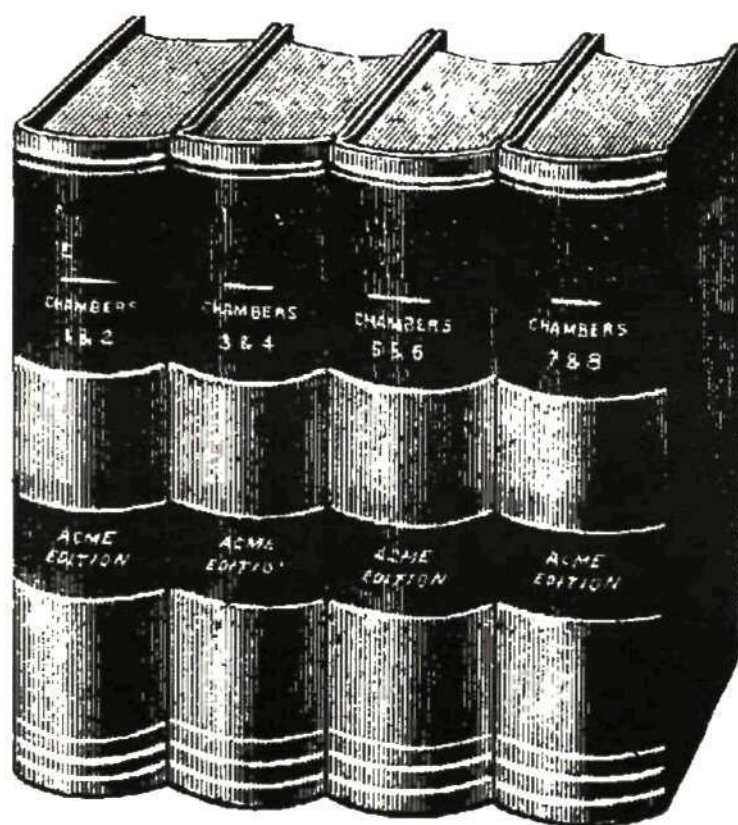
*Do you in fact know anyone who might not be an artist? And is there anything left which has not had a museum devoted to it (corkscrews? eyeglasses? types of coffee?)? Our temple of images turns out to be the entire City itself*



Giorgione, *Moses's Trial* (detail). Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



exhausted? It no longer designates any more than one judgment of quality among others. "It's art," say we unreflectively, in place of "it's good, I like it." But this *nothing is not just anything*. It has the festive color of joy and the dream. A weak definition perhaps, but an unprecedented expansion. The one permitting the other. Do you in fact know anyone who might not be an artist? And is there anything left which has not had a museum devoted to it (corkscrews? eyeglasses? types of coffee?)? Our temple of images turns out to be the entire City itself. The former god of Beauty, long ago so inaccessible or rare, is from now on to be seen nesting behind all social activities, and makes a niche for our benefit at every street corner. What could possibly make him jealous—this mischievous fetish whose rituals and hallmark cover the whole planet? At the "Art and Advertising" exhibition held by the Pompidou Center in 1991, the entering visitor was confronted with a sign that read: "Use your money to make an art work fast." This "making" consisted of feeding a one-Franc note or personal check to a laser photocopier of a



noteworthy "artist," and the bill or check came back to you with a number guaranteeing that the piece was unique. The automatic serialization of one-of-a-kindness; this de-dramatization would not have disappointed Duchamp. "Do you want to play with môa?" this rather loutish God-dollar wants to know, accosting us. The jolly fellow will be present everywhere there is ambiance. And why not? It is enough to be in agreement about the force and influence of the words, whatever the value of the things.

In an affluent society, goods make themselves attractive less and less to our *needs* through their distinctive utility and more and more to *desire* through their social prestige. Pictures, sculpture, and other images thrown on the market do not avoid the rule. They leave behind their previous individual use value—delectation, admiration, promise of a change of scene—and their concrete singularity as works only to melt into liquidities, as monetary *sings* of status, *trademarks* indicating wealth. In the art object of the visual era, a cynical celebration in which *looking* has rather little part, it's the object that counts least. It floats without weighing anything. It confers distinction without distinguishing itself. And proves its worth by its price. This susceptibility of the work to transformation into a monetary sign inscribes it as a highly sought after but interchangeable and endless chain of transactions, a circuit of stock market *coups* and takeover bids [3]. It can be cashed in like one check for another, and it was Marcel Duchamp who already put into circulation, like works of art, bad checks and casino I.O.U.'s with his signature on them. It is as if the great Weekly Advertiser and Stock Market Report had had the

presentiment that the Gold Exchange Standard would be replaced by the World Art Exchange—with art taking over for gold in the new international monetary system [4]. Duchamp was in a way the guarantor of the commercialization effects.

#### Pontifex Maximus

Nothing new: art gravitates to money (as yesterday's artists went to New York, and soon Tokyo), and money to the sacred. There is no contradiction between an explosion in prices at Sotheby's and the multiplication of Councils, hagiographies and encyclicals on the final meaning of white square against white background. Or between high priests and auction appraisers. The business of art cults converts to the artful cult of business. "Speculation" like "values," let us not forget, are words used in two senses: temporal and spiritual.

In fall 1991, the city of Venice (as is only fitting) held a "World Arts Summit" under the aegis of the World Economic Forum headquartered in Switzerland (better known as the "Davos group"). The elite of international business finally resolved to itself to take up its aesthetic responsibilities, envisioning the "creation of a global spirit of unity across the inevitable diversity of cultures." "Art," one reads further in the *Manifesto for a Global Society* (composed in English, since in the visual era of media communications Italy has to speak American), "is the language of culture, the one form of creative expression that allows us to communicate and to build read worldwide bridges." Entrusted with the highest values, art collectors and visual artists make it their vocation to restore the bridges that have broken down between individuals and cultures—so say these businessmen who are not ones to choose their words carelessly under such circumstances. Building bridges is in its original sense "to pontificate" [from *pontifex*, "bridge-maker"], a sacred function in all times. The Sovereign Pontif of this world, its Great Communicator and Communicant—might he no longer be the Pope but the Artist? It is already recognized that the spiritual government of future United Europe falls to the Vatican. Our Venitians have looked farther than to Rome: they are offering the planet a common language, Beauty, the supreme hyphenation and hyper-nation of divided civilizations. ❖❖❖

Excerpts from *Vie et morts de l'image*, by Régis Debray,  
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#### N O T E S

- [1] Jean-Joseph Goux, "Les monnayeurs de la peinture," *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, hors-série [special issue], March 1989.
- [2] *Art et Pub*, Catalogue de l'exposition au Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1990.
- [3] The German publication *Kapital*, edited in Cologne, provides an annual classification of the hundred greatest artists (forty Americans, twenty-four Germans, four Frenchmen in 1992) for readers looking how to invest and what to put their money on.
- [4] This is Philippe Simonnot's thesis in *Doll'Art*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990.

RÉGIS DEBRAY IS THE CELEBRATED FRENCH COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA PHILOSOPHER WHOSE *MEDIOLOGIST'S MANIFESTOS* WILL APPEAR IN ENGLISH IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1996.

ERIC RAUTH IS WORKING ON A STUDY OF VERNE AND CONRAD, *LIVING IN THE FLICKER*.



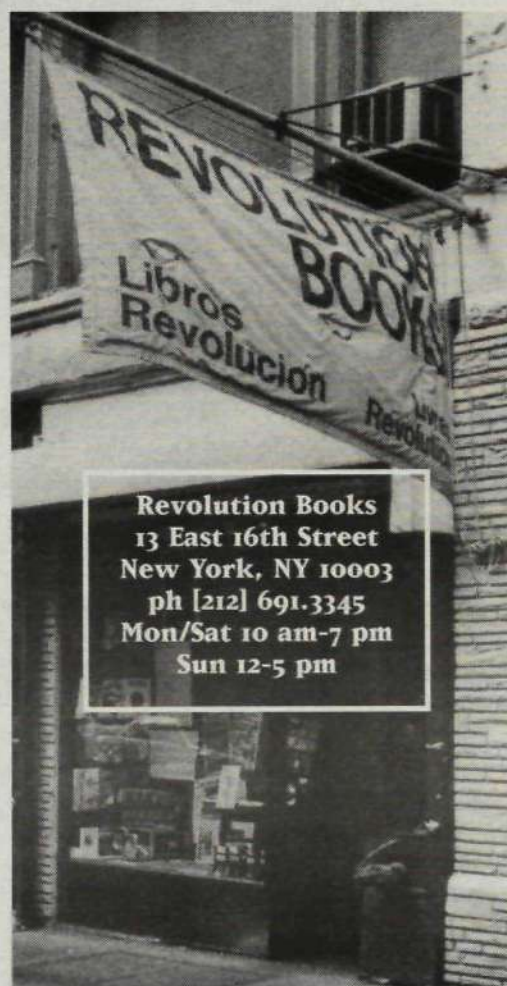
# REVOLUTION BOOKS

MARCO CHIRONI  
photos: Josef Geranio

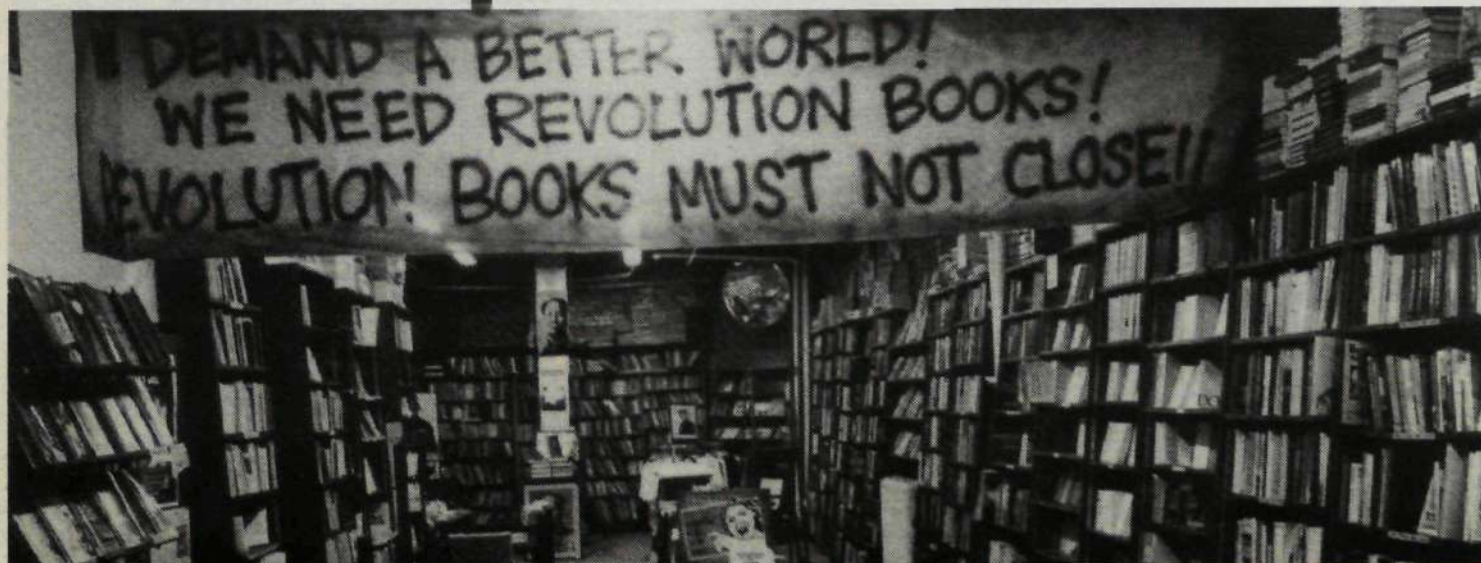
Maos, Stalin and Che Guevara peep like ghosts from behind a small window of Revolution Books in Greenwich Village and seem saddened by the thought that they might disappear once more, this time from a bookstore, only to be engulfed by one of those new restaurants on Union Square. Revolution Books is the only remaining bookstore in New York for lovers and scholars of political and ideological revolution. It is a spot where one can still feel the downtown atmosphere of the twenties when debates and rallies between leftist political factions once took place and where one can still find 6,000 books by liberal, communist and anarchist authors. Revolution Books risks disappearing under the forces of consumerism, a metaphor for the fall of the communist bloc. "The original monthly rent of \$3,000 has almost doubled since 1984", declares Joan Hirsch, manager and the only salaried clerk who runs the store with six volunteers: "1800 square feet in the middle of a neighborhood which has become very trendy represent a gold mine for the owners. The offers from the nearby restaurants which want to expand at any cost have reached an eight to ten thousand dollar range per month, our efforts to survive will soon become useless. "The monthly expenses have reached \$25,000 while the revenues have been slowly decreasing, only 65 titles amongst 6,000 available, have sold more than 50 copies last year. "The choice however still remains excellent", says Hirsch, "we have works by authors from around the world and prices vary between \$250 for a set of 13 volumes of Stalin's complete writings to a dollar for the *The True*

*Story of the Columbus Invasion*, a pamphlet on the discovery of America as seen by the natives". There are books in Chinese, Turkish, Arabic, and French. There is even a comic metaphor for children on war by a certain Doctor Seuss; *The Butter Battle Book* tells the story of two populations, separated by a wall, and at war because they can't agree on the proper way to spread butter on bread. "Perhaps a little publicity would help our situation, but we don't have any money", declares Miss Hirsch, "We would like people to know that we are not the last survivors of an extremist faction, an extinguished species. The range of our potential clients is a great deal broader than what it seems; there are thousands of persons in the city who are trying to understand and interpret what is happening in the world through our books." 🍄🍄🍄

MARCO CHIRONI IS AN ITALIAN JOURNALIST PRESENTLY LIVING IN NEW YORK.



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LE PIED DE NEZ DE L'IRRÉDUCTIBLE. DE L'INTARISSABLE.  
JE COULE DEPUIS TOUJOURS ET POUR TOUJOURS.  
JE SUIS UNE HISTOIRE QUI VOUS ENLACE ET VOUS ENVASE.  
LE TEMPS, C'EST VOTRE PROBLÈME À VOUS. C'EST CE TIC  
TAC QUI VOUS TRAÎNE DANS LES VEINES ET QUI VOUS TRACE  
L'ÉPIDERME DE SILLONS MILLE FOIS MAUDITS

ICI, LE PRÉSENT N'EXISTE PAS. LE TEMPS DE DIRE LE MOT  
MA SURFACE FRISSONNE EN DES MILLARDS  
D'ENDROITS, MODIFIE LE PLAN ET ÉMIETTE LE SENS DU TERME.

Le souffle court, je fermais les yeux pour stopper le vent  
d'hérésie qui allait m'emporter. "T'as trop bu, mon vieux," je me  
répétais comme pour expliquer le fatras qui me gonflait le  
cerveau. Les poings serrés, je me sentais prêt pour n'importe  
quelle bataille. Le fleuve est un géant, dis-je en signe de  
reconnaissance. Mon chaos, son calme... Ma crise en suspens et  
son lent parcours qui pouvait soudain casser le gueule aux plus  
robustes cargos.

VOUS NE SAVEZ RIEN DE CE QUI SE JOUE ENTRE VOS RIVES.  
DE MOI, VOUS NE POSSÉDEZ QU'UNE CONNAISSANCE  
SOMMAIRE.

UNE HISTOIRE DE SURFACE TOUJOURS UN PEU FIGÉE DANS  
LE CONTEXTE D'UNE GÉOGRAPHIE DU MOMENT.

UNE VAGUE IDÉE DE CE QUE MON VENTRE RECÈLE DE  
BIJOUX, DE MORTS ET D'HISTOIRES INACHEVÉES.

D'HISTOIRES QUI ALANGUISSENT LES PÂLES  
CONSCIENCES.

QUI TRESSSENT D'ALGUES DES MORCEAUX DE MISÈRE  
VENUES SE SAOÛLER À MES EAUX QUE JE NE PERDS JAMAIS.

JE BERCE MES CADAVRES TAPIS TOUT AU FOND DE MA VASE  
LES YEUX CREVÉS D'ALEVINS. DES ÂMES EN PEINE QUI ONT  
QUITTÉ LA RIVE POUR LA TRANQUILLITÉ DE MES ONDES.

Un soleil cru comme une lame m'attaquait de plein fouet. Ça  
doit être le soleil du matin, pensais-je, en combattant le frisson  
qui me parcourait le gabarit étendu sur le ciment.

-Allez, lève-toi, ordonna un type.

-Peut-être que c'est un réfugié qui a plongé d'un bateau,  
suggéra une autre voix. Peut-être qu'il ne parle pas la même  
langue que nous autres?

-Non, il vient de plonger. Un suicidé qui a repris espoir à la  
dernière minute. Je suis sûr.

Les deux gars m'aidaient tant bien que mal à me relever. Je  
dégouttais de partout. Les vêtements traversés et les cheveux  
collés au crâne. Au sol, là même où j'étais étendu, une forme  
approximative qui déjà commençait à sécher.

-T'as voulu te tuer? demandait un gars piégé par son  
uniforme de gardien. T'as changé d'idée à la dernière minute?  
C'est ça?

-Je sais même pas nager, baragouinais-je en tentant de  
ramasser mes esprits. Je me suis dégagé un peu brusquement  
de mes samaritains pour retourner à la rue. Le soleil dardait mais  
une brise en balayait l'effet. La journée serait bonne et la couleur  
allait s'y accorder. 🌿🌿🌿

**SERGE BRUNEAU** EST UN ARTISTE-PEINTRE QUI VIT ET TRAVAILLE À  
MONTRÉAL.

can provide the table for everyone to come around. So we often provide that service, we are able to help people see where they have common ground and where their differences are and how to resolve those differences. I think that is our greatest strength in the problem solving arena and the same thing applies to funding approaches. What is our greatest weakness? It is probably spreading ourselves too thin. We are a small agency, we have a large territory and a lot of demands placed on us, it is very easy to take on more than you can do properly. One of the things we worry about is that we can't follow up on things. You may do a project and then in three months you are doing something else and don't have time to go back and make sure that the project worked on before is being implemented properly. People have criticized us about other things as well. Some people criticize us for compromising. For not being green enough or determined enough about environmental protection. You also have the local communities who have a good deal of disturbance and environmental problems from living so close to the quarries. You do as much as you can for the environment but you bear in mind at the same time the economic and community realities. Much as I would like to see wetlands and other sensitive natural environments protected, allowing for their natural processes. The reality is that we live in an urban area where there are demands made on it by people's activities.

**V.V.:** *One last question. It is not an easy one to word succinctly. It is regarding the mythography of a place. We have spoken about the physical aspects and the ecological restoration aspects. You have alluded to it previously in our discussion in acknowledging the multicultural aspects of our community. How do the different projects you have been involved with connect to this understanding of the spirituality of a place to its inhabitants. The mythological connections, a place that is not only a field to play ball on but that fosters an identity of home place.*

**S.B.:** I think there is something spiritual about waterfronts anyway. I think people are drawn to waterfronts, you see that all over the world. There is a magical attraction that people have, whatever the spiritual connection that any particular individual has. It is a place where people go for contemplation or relaxation. So I think here is something inherent in human nature that seeks out waterfronts. I think that is one of the reasons why people are so keen to get waterfront access. The way in which people experience it is so different and we have no idea, how can you understand how individuals are experiencing waterfronts? We don't really know much about the different kinds of places that people like, some people want busy commercial places, others want a manicured park, other people want a beach, others want a wetland. Other people like to experience all those kinds of places. So that is why we have the principle of diversity for the waterfront, recognizing that there are lots of different ways to experience the waterfront. I think what we have to do is assess the existing characteristics of each place and its potential, what was it, what is it, what could it be, take advantage of the inherent qualities, so that we can enhance it, enrich it rather than change it to something else. I would be interested in the study of how people experience different kinds of waterfront places. We haven't done a systematic research. We have done some visual analysis of the waterfront, but it was more based on breaking down the visual attributes of the waterfront. It is very hard to get at intangible things, I don't know how well you can actually study them. So that is why I say work with the place and its inherent qualities and potential and you try to have as much diversity and richness of place as you can. 🌿🌿🌿

**DOMENICO D'ALESSANDRO** IS A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT AND THE  
TORONTO EDITOR OF VICE VERSA.



# Letters

Dear Vice, dear Versa -

your project to establish a transcultural geoSpace, a discursive triangle between Montreal, Toronto and New York is worthwhile Time. Given the condition of this never-ending modernity and given the shape of the world as is, we should be looking forward to a network of triangles, for a new definition of the world as we know it: unmapping virtual space for imaginary numbers.

Ever before I found out about your project, I have been jotting down co-ordinates, reconstituting and encompassing shifting realities, possible societies on rice paper and with lemon ink. Since as is, Here, polarization between the so(self)called founding nations has worked to the detriment of ethnocultural communities, this endeavor is more than even necessity.

In the map notebook of my own device, boundaries & state boundaries, do not coincide with any nation, they cannot simply yet exist. It is an evolutionary **Imapping** device, that starting from a point has, over the years, assumed the shape of a globe, not quite perfect since it is sort of flat at the top/bottom parts. It is possible that this fate awaits your project, so this letter is a forewarning and a welcoming with the same. (...)

For now, I have lined up seven horned sea-shells in a configuration that resembles, from atop the phantasmagorical hill where I live, the constellation of the Nomadic Resident. May it bring you auspices of Argia, Bekla, Cabbalussa, Djunubistan, Emo, Fantippo, Giphantia, Hekla, Icaria, Jansenia, Klopstokia, Laïquhire, Maradagal, Nazar, Orofena, Pauk, Quiquendone, Rukh, Sari, Thekla, Ussula, Vagon, Wathort, Ximeque, Yluana, Zyundal.

yours in viaggio, Heroldo Pereira

Montréal, le 17 mai 1995

Lecteur assidu de *Vice Versa*, je suis toujours impressionné par la subtilité et la pertinence de son contenu. Je me réjouis du nouveau tournant qu'entreprend le magazine où les idées de ses collaborateurs se propageront vers la métropole canadienne et la mégapole américaine.

Je souhaite bonne chance à Lamberto Tassinari et à son équipe!

Robert Montplaisir

Directeur de District- Division canadienne  
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/United Artists

Bonjour,

Abonné à votre journal l'an passé - que je connaissais depuis plusieurs années et qui me semble être une des rares revues "intelligentes" francophones existantes au Québec, du moins parmi celles que je connais; intelligente par sa sensibilité, son engagement (vous affichez clairement vos couleurs, par exemple en ce qui concerne la souveraineté du Québec), son ouverture (trois langues dans une revue, ça ne court

pas les rues, et ça veut dire des choses) et par les idées qui y sont débattues (c'est-à-dire sans vous limiter à vos propres idées, laissant la parole à ceux qui ne pensent pas exactement comme vous).

Je disais donc: abonnée au journal, j'ai eu la surprise de trouver le nouveau numéro de la revue (janv/fevr. 1995) - que je n'ai pas reçu d'ailleurs- sous une nouvelle présentation: papier journal ordinaire, nombre de pages moins conséquent... Première réaction (viscérale!): déception. Ou est passée ma belle revue sur papier glace?... Puis j'ai pensé: tiens, ont-ils des problèmes financiers?... La curiosité aidant (et la fidélité persistant!) j'ai acheté. Ah, là, agréable surprise: seulement 2\$, pour de l'intelligence?... (Quoique je trouvais l'ancien prix tout à fait raisonnable eu égard au contenu et à la présentation). Bon, jusque là, je n'avais pas encore ouvert la revue, pas encore lu, et j'avais peur. Peur qu'une certaine banalisation du discours (qui semble un lieu commun actuellement. Abaissons le niveau, abrutissons le peuple, il nous laissera en paix.) J'avais hâte d'arriver chez moi...

J'ai donc commencé par l'éditorial, non par logique, mais parce qu'il me semblait bien que je trouverais réponse à mes interrogations précisément là, dans cette "Reprise" (ça rime avec surprise!). Et je fus...comblé (que je vous aime!!!). Enfin, des gens qui osent s'affirmer, prendre position, expliquer (tandis que d'autres continuent à nous prendre pour des cons incapables de penser!)

(...) Et vous annoncez vos couleurs en introduction (avis à ceux qui vivent sur les a priori). Tiens, tiens, un journal qui s'engage politiquement sans tomber dans une sauce délayée style B.B.Q.

Ça existe encore? (...) Et pourtant, je ne partage pas toutes vos idées politiques. Par exemple, je suis pour l'indépendance du Québec (ou la souveraineté? On pourrait s'interroger sur le sens de ces deux mots et sur ce qu'ils recouvrent). Mais ce qui me plaît dans la revue, c'est que vous ne me servez pas un discours tout mâché en me disant: voilà, c'est comme ça qu'il faut penser (ce que font la majorité des quotidiens et des revues existants). Vous m'aidez à avancer dans mes réflexions, soit en me donnant des arguments qui viennent renforcer mes opinions, soit en m'ouvrant des horizons ou encore en me faisant accepter certaines choses que je refusais parce qu'alors, je "comprends" pourquoi. Merci pour cela.

Je vais continuer à vous lire -plus que jamais - à vous soutenir- (je ne sais trop comment... en me réabonnant, en parlant de la revue, en la citant) - et vous me donnez le goût de prendre réellement part aux débats actuels. (...)

Bien à vous. Bonne suite. J'ai hâte de lire le prochain numéro.

Brigitte De Souza  
Vanier, Ontario



A GLANCE AT TIMETABLES  
THESE SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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Alexandre Rodtchenko, *La guerre du futur*, 1930. Collage, 51 x 35 cm. Galerie Berinson, Berlin

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