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The CEAC was banned in Canada

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As the futurists were in fascist Italy, as the bauhaus was in Nazi Germany, as the constructivists were in the Soviet Union

the CEAC was banned in Canada

by Dot Tuer

Amerigo Marras lecturing at the Free International University at Documents 6, Kasel, September 1977. His topic, as written on the blackboard, is "The Activities of Our Centre." Joseph Beuys is visible to the left. Photo: CEAC Collection, [www.ceac.ca/Archives](#).

The title copy is from an advertisement placed by CEAC in the Ontario Association of Art Galleries, Magazine, Winter 1978/79

EPILOGUE

We wanted to be famous, glamorous and rich. That is to say we wanted to be artists and we knew that if we were famous and glamorous we could say we were artists and we would be. We never felt we had to produce great art to be great artists. We knew great art did not bring glamour and fame. We knew we had to keep a foot in the door of art and we were conscious of the importance of berets and paint brushes.

— General Idea, "Glamour"¹

What perpetuates the reactionary mystification of the role of the artist is the 'world of scarcity' and the 'incapacity to survive' in a capitalist society. The artist defends the privilege and the entrenchment he/she holds in a capitalist society. Also symptomatic, even and not less so among the vanguard, alternative and co-op artists groups, is the sense of hopelessness for social change, as these same groups mimic those repressive methods of economical capitalization adopted by the art world.

— Amerigo Marras, "On Organization"²

It would seem that the construction of a local art history in Toronto is slim in substance and big on self-promotion. Under the aegis of General Idea, parody and the simulation of media referents became the means in Toronto to an 'historicised' discourse. In 1975, General Idea announced that "in order to be glamorous we had to become plagiarists, intellectual parasites. We moved in on history and occupied images, emptying them of meaning, reducing them to shells. We then filled these shells with glamour, the creampuff innocence of idiots, the naughty silence of sharkfins slicing oily waters."³ This project, which takes the challenge of New York's cultural monopoly in the 1970's and divests it of its social, economic and political ramifications through a mocking mirror that inverts its semiotic, is a part of our inherited history. Thus ten years later, Philip Monk can conclude that we suffer from "a lack of history, and so we repeat one from elsewhere, or from Western history, but without the grounding of history or context."⁴ This configuration in Toronto is in itself a history. But it is a history which evokes a dominant ideology as 'the' ideology; a history whose subjective mythology gives rise to fiction. Paradoxically, it proposes a rupture in the cultural monolith as closure. For it leaves myself, and others who are producing in the 1980's, with General Idea's 'shell' as material without a materialist base for a context. Yet at the same time we are, as writers and artists, involved in an extensive state-run bureaucracy. Our intellectual and aesthetic 'autonomy' comes from our economic and social positions within state-funded arts centres and journals. The production of work and the dissemination of critical and historical discourse also is dependent upon government support. Given the existence of this clearly materialist base for an art practice, and one which has little relation to General Idea's capitalist, media-saturated paradigm, it seems improbable that we suffer from a 'lack of history'. Perhaps, instead, we suffer from a lack of articulated histories, any history which is not constructed from within the narrow confines of an 'art' discourse, within the confines of state-funded documentation and promotion. Perhaps it is not the history we lack, but an acknowledgment and interest in art practices and art politics which stray too far from the cultural mandate of the status-quo.

PROLOGUE

It is December... January... February... 1986. The journey to York University is numbing, the subway pulling out of its subterranean passage to reveal an endless landscape of highrises and urban townhouses. Queen Street seems both psychologically and topographically distant. Looking through the windows of the crowded bus, I wonder if the landscape seemed as barren ten years ago; at that time York University was expanding as an institution that would offer a radical alternative to the University of Toronto's wasp enclave of the status-quo. From the bus I walk each day through a simulated 'mall,' through a labyrinth of staircases to the Archives, in search of a 'lost history.' Entering the Archives is like approaching a military bunker, requesting entrance to a sterile tomb. The door is locked at all times, there is a hushed brittle feel to the atmosphere. And it is here, tossed into boxes, that I uncover the documents of an artists' run centre in Toronto which existed as an exhibition space from 1974 to 1976, and as a multi-media centre from 1976 to 1978. Dedicated to "a continuous collective experiment in living and in sociological infiltrations with practical demonstrations,"⁵ the Kensington Arts Association located at 4 Kensington Avenue grew

into CEAC, The Centre for Experimental Art and Communication, where a building at 15 Duncan Street housed a library and archives, a video production studio, a performance space, a film theatre and a punk music venue. From October 1975 when KAA sponsored a "Women in Society Festival" to CEAC's lecture series in April/May 1978 entitled "Five Polemics to the Notion of Anthropology," the activity of this organization was phenomenal. The Centre produced catalogues, nine issues of *Art Communication Edition* (A.C.E.), three issues of *STRIKE* magazine, and sponsored conferences, international tours, workshops, performances, installation art, film and video screenings, and music events. During 1976 and 1977, there was literally an event sponsored by CEAC or housed by CEAC every night of the week. Ten years later, another generation later, it is only by talking to individual artists involved with CEAC that I learn of its existence two years after moving to Toronto. And it is only by archival research that I am able to discover in a fragmented and hieroglyphic form, the extent of the activities and texts which seem to have vanished without reference from a Toronto art community's history.

But after emerging from the Archive bunker, a necrophiliac piecing together the remnants of activity from documents, have I uncovered a history? There are only fragments which remain: photographs, lists, letters, files, posters, clippings, catalogues, books. From these I have gleaned, not a history, but impressions; impressions of a Toronto arts centre whose philosophy, politics, ideals, seem very foreign to the city's current infatuations. Or are they? Lorraine Lesson and Peter Dunn's *Docklands Project* is described in a document sent to CEAC. In 1986, it re-appears at A Space in its poster form. The foreign, not Canadian artists who performed at CEAC re-appear in Art Metropole's "Performance by Artists" and "Video by Artists" documentation. The analysis by Amerigo Marras in *STRIKE* magazine of artists' run centres, artists' relationship to the state and his call for a guaranteed minimum income for artists, echoes a similar demand by the Artist's Union ten years later. Just as Philip Monk can argue continuity as lack of history, I find within these archival documents evidence of a of a very specific local history — a history linked to artists' political and social ideals and practices that were realized/unrealized/subverted by a very local context: the relation of production to a state-funded cultural bureaucracy and to political ideals. For, in researching CEAC, I had the impression that I was excavating only one layer of an alternative perspective, a perspective which sought to situate art as a marginal and social practice. The early years of A Space, *The Body Politic*, *Centrefold*, are also part of this perspective. And, although it is beyond the scope of this article to trace the interconnections and divergences, I invite the reader to bring his/her knowledge of Toronto's history to bear upon my descriptions, impressions, and speculations of CEAC. History as personal memory, as collective amnesia, as constructed ideology, as sexual politics, as fiction, as myth, as self-preservation, as rumour, as fact, as eternal return: take your pick. Each of you has his/her context and position from which to find in this text a continuity, an aberration, a lack. For it is not my intention to present you with an authoritative re-construction, nor a definitive history of CEAC. Rather, in presenting, briefly, some of their activities and theories which can be re-constituted from written and visual documentation, I wish to encourage speculation; speculation about the nature of art, of ideology, of cultural practice, national identity and local context.

PROGRAMME NOTES FOR A TRAGIC-COMIC OPERA IN THREE ACTS.

OVERTURE

In 1970, Suber Corley, Amerigo Marras and Jerald Moldenhauer formed an "Art and Communication" group and founded *The Body Politic*, which became the voice of the gay movement in Toronto. Out of these first initiatives, described by Marras as "clearly negativist and neo-marxist in ideology,"⁶ grew a loose organization of individuals who were interested in challenging capitalism's "specialization of roles and its homophobic sexism,"⁷ and who based their activities at 4 Kensington Avenue. By 1973, *The Body Politic*, Glad Day Bookstore, and Toronto Gay Action were operating their activities at this address. In 1973, however, Amerigo Marras and Suber Corley became interested in formulating a relation between art and social practice, incorporating as the Kensington Arts Association. Their subsequent activities and the evolution of their theoretical

platform were informed by a specifically political exploration of artistic practices, while Jearld Moldenhauer concentrated on the issues of the gay liberation movement. And, from the opening of a gallery space in September of 1973, the Kensington Arts Association became identified with the writings and programmes which Amerigo Marras presented at this space. Envisioned as an environmental structure which would facilitate and exhibit non-commercial and de-mystified approaches to art and language, the KAA quickly became implicated with the theoretical intrigue of an art world which was establishing a currency of non-objects through philosophical manifestos. This dialectic, between exhibition of a diverse art production and attempts to articulate a theory which could account for its practice, became one of the structures which informed the history of CEAC's rise and fall within Canada's state-sponsored art centres.

AN INTERVENTION FROM THE AUDIENCE

"You promised us a history of CEAC. And we may not know much, but we have heard that they were machine-gun toting terrorists, lurking behind every art ghetto corner to knee-cap innocent fresh-faced bureaucrats. We've also heard rumours. Didn't Amerigo abscond to New York with thousands of dollars worth of video equipment? We want to know the 'real' history of CEAC. DIDN'T THEY SUPPORT THE RED BRIGADES!"

If this is the history that fascinates you, turn in your programme notes to the "Finale." It's all there in black and white, documented in detail. But before you turn the page, consider your relation to General Idea's "shell" of history. For, in Toronto's collective memory and common currency, that is all that remains of CEAC's years of exhibition, workshops, and publications. It still makes for great rumours, provides a little notoriety... and effectively dismisses a local history. When CEAC went down in flames of recrimination and government



Fashion 'n' Burn: event at Crash 'n' Burn; 1977. Photo: CEAC Collection, York University Archives.

shuffling, the art's community ran scared... supporting by default, by silence, a state-manipulated version of the past. The events CEAC sponsored and the theories which they evolved provides a context and a position for the ideas and development of groups which followed. The events surrounding their demise, not nearly as sordid or interesting as rumour would have it, provide a smokescreen which reduces the issues of art and politics to a media one-liner.

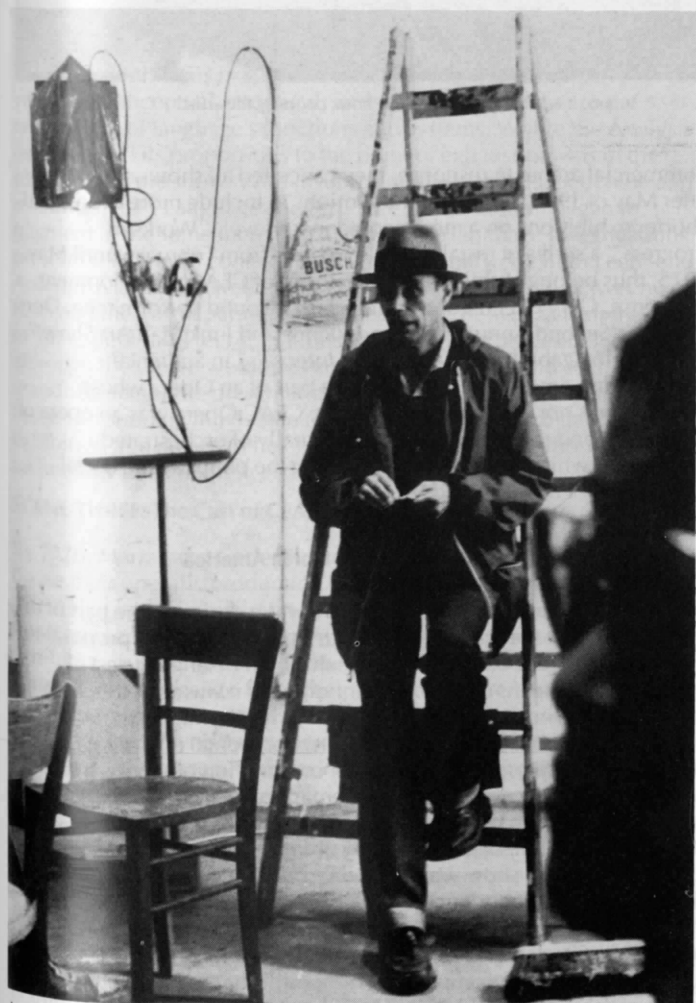
THE LEADING ROLES

Karl Marx, with ensuing revisionist squabbles, plays a large behind the scenes role. Adorno, Marcuse, R.D. Laing, Ivan Illich, Marshal McLuhan also feature in the formulation of the plot. The theoretical work of the Italian *Autonomia* movement and the writings of Toni Negri contribute to the operatic finale. Guest stars include Joseph Kosuth, Yona Friedman, and Joseph Beuys. Guest spokespersons of movements include Hervé Fischer of the "Collectif d'Art Sociologique" (France), Jan Swidzinski of the contextual art movement (Poland), and Reindeer Werk, behavioural artists from England. Philip Glass and Steve Reich provide an intermittent musical score. Local talent is featured in most of the major scenarios. Amerigo Marras, an emigre from Italy and Sicilian by birth, brings a background in experimental architecture and the ferment of post-war Italian politics to his role as the director of the opera. Suber Corley, a draft dodger, is the manager, bringing to the production an immense amount of administrative expertise. Beth Learn's interest in language art adds a dimension of semiotics and structuralism to the formulation of a social practice. Lily Eng and Peter Dudar of Missing Associates offer a theory and a practice of experimental dance. John Faichney, also an experimental dancer, becomes the librarian and begins to build a large collection of contemporary art documentation, including the encouragement and exhibition of artists' books. Ron Gillespie and the OCA students who formed SHITBANDIT bring an interest in performance, body-art, and behaviourism to the centre stage. Michael Berman announces the return of the ritual, and then becomes a punk singer in The Poles. Bruce Eves, who now is involved with *The Native* in New York City, infuses performance with an interest in a gay aesthetic and sado-masochism. Miss General Idea hangs around the left stage area for much of the action. Ross McLaren introduces a local context for film screenings and programmes a large selection of structuralist and experimental film. Noel Harding involves the video students at OCA in the chorus while the punk venue, Crash 'N Burn adds the excitement of a local musical scene. An improvised production, based on the experiences and collaboration of all the players, the CEAC opera was sponsored by the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, Wintario, and supported by the private donations of individuals.

ACT ONE: THE FORMATIVE YEARS

SCENE ONE: Radical Design

The curtain rises to reveal the opening of Yona Friedman's "Self-Design", October, 1973, at a newly renovated gallery space



Joseph Beuys at Documenta 6, 1977. Photo: CEAC Collection, York University Archives.



Ross McLaren: Stiv Bators of The Dead Boys; still from *Crash 'n' Burn*; 1977; 16mm., b & w film, 27 minutes. Photo: courtesy the artist.

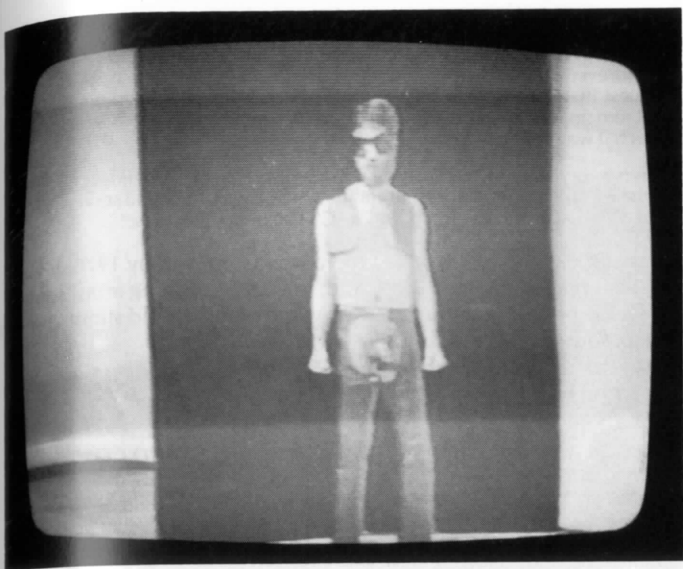
called the Kensington Arts Association. A French architect, Yona Friedman presented a manual which instructed children on the possibilities of conceptualizing an architecture which would directly translate their needs into structure. It was an attempt to alter both the language of architecture and its specialized application. Amerigo Marras identified it as a "political tool" with interventionist possibilities, and situated its importance in the gallery setting as an example of environmental adaptation which was based on self-determination and the existence of multiple, self-directing communities. This stance, suggests Marras, in his "Notes and Statements of Activity, 1977," "rejects the utopistic nuclear (single) mini-society which some thinkers proposed in the 60's. It also rejects the totalitarianism of much left-wing doctrinary approach to society."⁹ Documented in *Supervision #2*, a magazine produced by Blast-Bloom Associates (Amerigo Marras and Angelo Sgabellone), Yona Friedman's perspective also proposed the possibility of translating architectural language into user-friendly computerization, and based much of his analysis on the relations of an architectural imperialism to the conditions of the Third World.

After Yona Friedman's initial exhibition, presented as an infrastructure of language, environment, and technology, (a theme which will recur in the investigative platform of CEAC), there is little information about the gallery's activities during 1974. A letter sent to participants and supporters of the gallery by Corley and Marras in January, 1975, gives some indication of the centre's direction and conflicts in during this year. Quoting from the first written statement produced by KAA on its philosophy, they remind participants that the gallery encourages "the showing of... propositions for non-marketable environments, demountable or temporary objects, illustrated ideas, programmes and manifestos."⁹ Corley and Marras go on to state that these basic objectives had not been supported by the majority of participants, and after Friedman's exhibition, the gallery space had been usurped by artists interested in producing static objects who had utilized the space as a stepping stone to the

commercial arena. In response, they cancelled all shows scheduled after May of 1975, stating their intentions to include more events and shorter exhibitions on a more spontaneous level. "Works in Progress," a series of installations exhibited from February until May, 1975, thus belong to this first uncertain era of CEAC's development. In a sense, Gary Greenwood's *Table Talk*, a sound performance, Don Mabie's "Second Annual Correspondence and Junk Mail Art Show," and Angelo Sgabellone's *Monolithic Intervals*, an audience participation environment piece, are a part of an Opera whose stage-set was not yet developed. For the CEAC Opera was an opera of manifestos and rhetorical stances, eventually of orchestrated exhibitions which persisted in addressing the political and social dimensions of the art world.

SCENE TWO: Language & Structure in North America

The stage set proving inadequate, there was a desire on the part of the cast to re-invent the principles of set-design. Beth Learn's proposal to present a large and comprehensive exhibition of language art suggested the means of this re-invention. And it was with the opening of "Language and Structure in North America," a huge exhibition of wall/book art, poetry, sound pieces, environmental investigations, film, video and performance, that the conjunction of theory and practice which became CEAC's trademark coalesced. Co-ordinated by Beth Learn, who was working at the KAA, and curated by Richard Kostelanetz, an language artist and cultural historian living in the United States, this show was envisioned as a travelling visual and literary manifesto on aspects of language, art, and structuralism. "Exhaustion through catalysis is the impetus by which art constantly re-generates itself,"¹⁰ a quote borrowed from Roland Barthes by Beth Learn in an article accompanying the exhibition, suggests both the scope of the project, and its drain on the resources of a small gallery. Interested in the margins of communication and the "stratigraphic" variance of language as it is mapped through visual, literary, sound



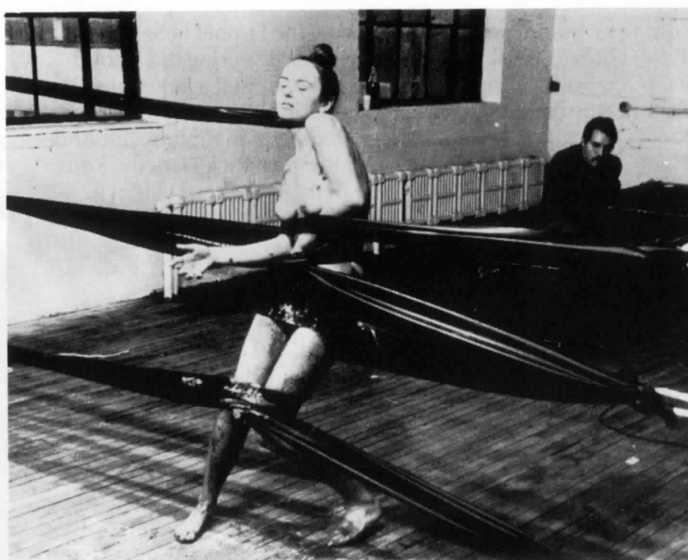
Bruce Eves: still from a video-taped performance at CEAC. Photo: CEAC Collection, York University Archives.

sources, Learn coined the term "contextualism" to describe the deep structure (*a la Chomsky*) of language, technology and the enunciation of structural linguistics. The catalogue, compiled by Kostelanetz, presents an enumeration of artists working with language as an aspect of their production, and the KAA sponsored an exhibition of portable pieces which were available.

Accompanying the touring show was "Language Art," a performance series held in Toronto from November 4 to November 30, 1975. Richard Kostelanetz, Yvonne Rainer, Vito Acconci, Vera Frenkel, the Four Horsemen, Bill Bisset, sound artists, experimental poets, structuralist films, and radical theatre were part of this series. Extremely ambitious in scope, it offered a Toronto community a survey of conceptual, structural, and process approaches to the re-mapping of language's functions and systems. Where the catalysis over-reached its proportions to the point of exhaustion was in the plans to tour the show. With insufficient funds and a lack of time and resources, the "Language and Structure..." exhibition began to fragment at the same incremental rate as the language investigations presented within its context. Conflicts arose between Beth Learn and Amerigo Marras, between Marras and Kostelanetz, and between KAA and the participating artists. As a result, Beth Learn left the KAA in 1976, debts and recriminations ensuing in the process. And, although the Opera would never again attempt to build such a grandiose set for the presentation of an art manifesto, Marras and those surrounding him began to utilize the ideas articulated in this exhibition as a means to link language to the politicization of technology and culture.

SCENE THREE: The Cast of CEAC Assembles

By 1976, Marras and Corley had constructed an elaborate stage set to house their operatic production. The cast, however, had been assembled in a minimalist tradition. With the re-articulation of their non-commercial and investigative goals, and the impact of an exhibition as ambitious as "Language and Structure..." a number of Toronto artists began to focus their activities at the KAA. The conception of a Centre for Experimental Art and Communication came into being with a temporary location at 86 John Street, and a number of diverse mediums found their centre stage through its inception as a multi-media space. "Body Art," a series presented in January of 1976, explored a mapping of the 'body' through the investigation of the body's architecture, transmutation, and social behaviour. It featured Suzy Lake's photographic transformations, Darryl Tonkin's film *Cantilever Tales*, which introduced the aesthetics of black humour and sado-masochism, Peter Dudar and Lily Eng's structural dance performances, Paul Dempsey's video installation, and Ron Gillespie's 'behavioural' performances, collaborations with a group known as SHITBANDIT. To a degree influenced by the Vienna Body School including Hermann Nitsch, this series established a platform of performance art that would



Wendy Knox-Leet: *Ritual With Slings*; 1976; performance at CEAC. Photo: Gar Smith

present an oppositional stance to General Idea's parody and the conceptual or phenomenological investigations prevalent in the United States, proposing instead to redefine the functions of violence, actions, and infrastructures within the political and the sexual dimensions of the social. In April, 1976, another performance series, organized by Bruce Eves, elaborated these themes through a 'look at sado-masochism' entitled "BOUND, BENT, AND DETERMINED." Included in this series were Wendy Knox-Leet, Ron Gillespie, Heather MacDonald, Darryl Tonkin, Blast-Bloom, Bruce Eves, Andy Fabo, and Paul Dempsey.

Parallel with burgeoning performance series which featured local artists, many graduating from OCA in the wake of Roy Ascott's experimental directorship and the ensuing shake-up, was an articulated interest by CEAC in the video and film mediums. Amerigo Marras' interest in new technology had been influenced by his studies with McLuhan, and his political ideas formed while attending an international video encounter held in Buenos Aires. It was here that Marras met the CAYC group, a collective of thirteen video artists working out of Argentina who called for the gallery system to be replaced by a system of workshops for a wide range of multi-disciplinary activities. Within this context, the video medium was envisioned as a tool to diversify the hierarchies of information/media, and as a technique which would foment political unrest and encompass revolutionary aims. The radical impetus of CAYC's aesthetic, intent upon challenging the repressive regime of Argentina through form as well as content, combined with the concept of video exchange and alternative information networks, informed CEAC's approach to video, which included the production and collection of both local and international tapes as well as an emphasis on documenting events held by CEAC. Toronto artists involved with CEAC's video platform included Noel Harding's presentation of Guelph video, David Clarkson, Elizabeth MacKenzie, Susan Britton, Peter Dudar, John Massey, Ian Murray, Ross McLaren, Development Education Centre and Trinity Square Video.

Concurrent with the political emphasis on the accessibility and the 'new television' aspects of video, CEAC began to promote experimental or 'art-films' emphasizing super-8 production. Strongly influenced by Michael Snow's *Rameau's Nephew* and the films presented during the "Language and Structure..." exhibition including Vito Acconci's eight millimeter films and Yvonne Rainer's *A Film About A Woman Who*, Marras, with Diane Boadway, programmed an "Art Film" series featuring Snow, Ross McLaren, Lorne Marin, Rick Hancox, Vito Acconci, David Rimmer among others. They then approached Ross McLaren to co-ordinate super-8 opening screenings, which began October 1977, after the opening of CEAC at 15 Duncan Street. These screenings became a regular weekly feature of CEAC's programming and were documented in their journal *Art Communication Edition*. Providing a focus for local experimental filmmakers, these screenings effectively created a

community which eventually formed The Funnel in September of 1977. Local filmmakers exhibiting at CEAC during this period included Ross McLaren, who also programmed a large selection of British, Austrian, Australian, and American films, Michael Snow, Keith Locke, Jim Anderson, Peter Dudar, Brian Kipling, Jim Anderson, Eldon Garnet, Lorne Marin, David Rimmer, Rick Hancox, Ron Gillespie, Noel Harding, Raphael Bendahan, Steve Niblock, Adam Swica, Glen James, Villem Teder, Al Razutis, Holly Dale and Janice Cole, and Chris Gallagher.

Ironically, Amerigo Marras' theoretical interest lay in the technological and political application of video rather than film as a cultural practice that would challenge power hierarchies and normative ideologies perpetuated by mass-media. Thus, although the community of filmmakers which organized through CEAC were much broader in scope, and most are still actively involved in the medium, little theoretical speculation was engaged on the subject of super-8 and experimental filmmaking. With the exception of descriptive programme notes and an essay by Roy Pelletier in *A.C.E.*, #9, entitled "Creativity By Default: The Potential of Super-8," the writings which emerged from CEAC's publications concentrated on the revolutionary nature of video production. In an essay by Marras, his analysis of the video/television dichotomy foreshadows Baudrillard's "In The Shadow of the Silent Majorities." He suggests that the manipulation of the television medium creates a simulation wherein the viewer will be "completely dependent upon 'mediation' in order to watch their own reality."¹¹ The result of this consumption strategy leads to the elimination of critical judgment and political consciousness where politics do not disappear "but rather ... become invisible."¹² Marras, however, was more optimistic than Baudrillard in his assessment of the potential to alter television's communicative and technological determination. Speculating upon a new hybrid, 'telemedia,' where independent video production would intersect with television's mass communication systems, he concludes that the technological infrastructure could be revolutionized through "an ideological programme for a new condition of a self managed culture."¹³

CEAC's consequent initiatives in video reflected this stated aim. Through the acquisition of Video Ring's equipment in March of 1976, CEAC began an ambitious construction of a video production studio emphasizing broadcast quality and colour technology. In addition, CEAC became active in international video exchanges, participating in the fourth, fifth and six "International Video Encounters." One of a number of groups, including CAYC of Buenos Aires, NTV + KB of Berlin, the Museum of Modern Art of Ferrara, and I.C.C., who formed WAVE (World Video Association), CEAC emphasized a global perspective in the medium, leading them to acquire a North American-European transfer system which enabled video artists in Toronto to trade tapes and information with European producers. International and ambitious in scope, CEAC's video program was plagued by a lack of support on the part of a larger video community who did not necessarily support their ideology or their goals. CEAC and A Space, the two major centres in Toronto investigating the medium, polarized within the local setting despite their similar emphasis upon marginal and artist's production and exhibition of video. Thus, although CEAC offered an immense potential for the video community, oppositional and competitive divisions grew. The intensity of this animosity became clear, when, in the aftermath of the *STRIKE* scandal, Renee Baert, then Video Officer for the Canada Council, states in a letter directed to CEAC, dated October 26, 1978, that the "... Council had received numerous written and verbal complaints about the lack of access to the CEAC facility, an alleged censorship of projects in the selection process, the disdainful manner in which many artists either using or requesting the use of facilities [were treated]."¹⁴ Furthermore, she adds, that since the last meeting between CEAC members and the Council:

... the Council has received a telegram signed by every Toronto video or video-related organization receiving funding from the Canada Council, as well as by a number of individuals. That telegram reads as follows:

"As members of the video community and/or administrators of publicly accessible production facilities, we are concerned that the video equipment loaned by or purchased with funds from the Canada Council is being appropriated by the trustees of the Kensington

Art Association for purposes other than those for which it was granted. We are particularly concerned that said equipment may be lost forever to this community for the intended access to artists. We request that the Canada Council ascertain that the said equipment will remain in Toronto and accessible to the community of artists for which it was intended."

This is a very clear indication of a lack of support for, or of confidence in the CEAC from the very community which it was funded to serve, and gives rise to questions about CEAC's use of public funds.¹⁵

Thus although the cast of the Opera was assembled by 1976, it was cast in opposition to A Space. And, in CEAC's ensuing arias, some of the audience would prove hostile, while others would simply boycott the production.

ACT TWO: CULTURAL REVOLUTION

WHAT IS A/THE CENTRE FOR EXPERIMENTAL ART AND COMMUNICATION?

It is the working ground where the forces of intellectual production, cultural consumption, as well as the exchange and the distribution of culture are managed in accordance to the need of Art and Communication while affecting art forms.

WHAT IS ART AND COMMUNICATION?

It is the interface impact conductive within social forms as frames, structures, behavioral. Art as materialist practice and communication as dialectics in juxtaposition along contextual layerings produce revolutionary effects. Art and Communication is basically this: dialectical materialism practiced as ideology.

— Art Communication Edition, #2.¹⁶

SCENE ONE: The Grand Opening

With a \$55,000 Wintario grant, CEAC became the first artist-run space in Toronto to buy a building and effectively establish a large multi-media centre. In September 1976, CEAC staged a grand opening at 15 Duncan Street, a building on the corner of Adelaide which housed the Liberal Party as well as the CEAC's facilities. Entitled, "CANNIBALISM," the opening week demonstrated a diversity and a controversy which would become CEAC's reputation. Opening night, Saturday, September 18, 1976, featured a concert with Michael Snow on piano and Larry Dubin on drums, paralleling CEAC's proclivity to program well-known composers in the experimental music field. For both CEAC's sponsorship of Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* at Convocation Hall in May of 1976 and Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* in March of 1977 presented Toronto audiences with Canadian premieres of musicians whose work had received international recognition but who were relatively unknown in this arts community. In the case of Reich, the audience was both small and hostile, and in the case of Glass, the audience was also small. For Snow and Dubin's piece, however, the audience proved quite large, and stayed to experience Ron Gillespie's *Katchibatta* performance featured the same night. Documented on film by Ross McLaren, the performance situated the audience as the aggressor and featured the performers enacting ritual definitions of territory. Entering the performance area like a Guru followed by the faithful (Glen James, Lily Y, Marlene X, Debbie Pollovey who were members of SHITBANDIT), Ron Gillespie carried a staff with horns mounted at the top and crawled naked on his knees, his thighs and ankles bound together with leather. Circling each other like animals in mating gestures, the performers would alternatively challenge each other and then the audience. The climax came when they began to throw lighted matches at the audience who responded by hurling beer bottles into the performance area. At this point, SHITBANDIT disbanded, retreating before an audience outrage, and the opening night of CEAC came to a close.

The elements of alchemy, shamanism and mysticism which informed the performance pieces of SHITBANDIT, were mirrored by Wendy Knox-Leet's performance *Bringing in the Harvest*, also featured in the opening week of the Duncan Street space. Based upon her investigations of megalithic stone monuments and burial grounds, a review in *A.C.E.*, #4, describes the piece as a twenty-minute ritual where Knox-Leet used a six-foot bundle of corn stalks attached to a wooden frame, a canvas dog effigy, and proceeded with her body greased, chestnuts wrapped around her neck and ankles and horsetails strung around waist, to:



Wendy Knox-Leet: *Bringing in the Harvest*; 1976; performance at CEAC. Photo: Gar Smith.

... withdraw metal and plastic icons from the entrails [of the dog] and stitch together the stomach opening. These ornaments were attached to the bundle of corn stalks, and then the whole structure was suspended from her forehead by a natural linen strap. With increasing speed, Knox-Leet traced the pattern of the double and triple spirals, the squared circle, and a three-four-five triangle. The whirling motion of the body, corn stalks, and horse tails flying through space transmits elemental connection with forces of the universe, instinctual creation, and of fertility and initiation.¹⁷

One of a number of performances produced at CEAC by either Knox-Leet or Michael Berman, *Bringing in the Harvest*, was conceived in relation to a manifesto, "Ritual Performance," published by Wendy Knox-Leet and Michael Berman in *A.C.E.*, #3. Within this manifesto, they describe the visual elements as "conductors of spiritual power," the sculptural elements as "a ritualistic preparation and initiation into the time-space continuum," the sound elements as "piercing the core of the audience," and the movements gestural, shamanistic, and primeval. "Ritual Performance," they conclude, is a "revolutionary form which takes this limited and predefined structure (perception), and EXPLODES it. As it shatters into fragments, we see the key to survival."¹⁸ It is these performances, enacted in the first months of Duncan Street, and Ron Gillespie's exploration of behaviour, violence, and sexuality, that influenced CEAC's theoretical formulation of "Behavioural Art" in *A.C.E.*, #7.

Although *Missing Associates* did not perform in the opening week of CEAC, their explorations of experimental and structural dance were instrumental in the formation of both contextual and behavioural ideas that later permeated CEAC's philosophy. Composed of Peter Dudar, a choreographer and a filmmaker, and Lily Eng, a dancer

trained in the martial arts, their collaborations marked an investigation and style of dance which directly opposed the Martha Graham modernist school prevalent in Toronto. Publishing manifestos which both self-aggrandized their productions and criticized those of their contemporaries (see their broadsheets, *Missing in Action*, #1 and #2), *Missing Associates* were an important, if alienating, aspect of Toronto's experimental art scene. Structural and minimalist in concept, and aggressive in execution, the performances of *Running in O and R*, *Getting the Jumps*, *Crash Points 2*, as well as the films of *Two Deadly Women* and *Running in O and R*, sought to challenge the definitions of movement and poise current in dance terminology. Being in a sense explorations of behaviour patterns and 'ordinary' actions, their work was seen both in the context of structural film and in the ritual aspects of body art while their polemic situated their investigations within the parameters of futurism, marxism, and anarchism referencing the opposing ideologies of Bruce Lee and Mao Tse Tung. Describing a performance of Lily Eng's at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1977, Dudar indicates the degree to which their collaborations were shocking to a general public:

As Lily entered to do her solo number, I reminded her to make it at least 15 minutes. A security guard approached the 2 martial artists in one of my pieces and asked what was wrong. Derek and Henry said 'Nothing'. The guard then asked what THAT WOMAN was doing. 'Performing' they answered. 'No she's not!' he responded, and stormed into Lily's performance area. She was lying on her back at the time. He said something and tried to grab her arm. She pulled back, her lips moving. All I could make out was 'Get the fuck out of my performing space!' He drew back (he seemed to be contemplating charging in), noticed the 150 people or so staring at him, then exited, so to speak. Lily went on a bit, then laughed maniacally a



Lily Eng: performance at CEAC. Photo: CEAC Collection, York University Archives.

couple of times ... She then addressed the audience: Every time I come into this fucking place the fucking security guards harass me. Well if you want to get me out you'll have to fucking come and drag me out! ... When she was set I roundhoused Lily quite loudly in both ribcages, moving her a couple of feet to each side in each instance, then sidekicked her in the small of the back where normally it really hurts. The steel pieces in the brace took most of the shock, and the leather binding helped emphasize the sound.¹⁹

Although the performances, videos, and films presented in CEAC's opening week expressed the commitment to a multi-disciplinary approach to 'art and communication,' it was Heather MacDonald's *Rain Room*, which was the focal point of the Duncan Street opening. An environmental installation built by the CEAC collective, the *Rain Room*, was an eight-by-eight foot enclosed room with white sand on the floor, white walls, a grid of copper piping on the ceiling, heat lights and speakers. Inside the room, it rained for two days, and then the heat lamps were switched on for two days, causing a cycle of humidity which became dry heat, and initiating the rain cycle again. The audio accompanied the climatic changes with opposing sound. It soon became a symbol of tragedy when Heather MacDonald committed suicide late in 1976. For the active members of CEAC, who included Missing Associates, Ron Gillespie, Bruce Eves, Amerigo Marras and Suber Corley, and Heather's friends, her suicide was viewed in relation to her struggles to support her art which included a lack of funding and an eviction, along with other artists, due to land speculation, from a building at 89 Niagara Street. For Marras, her suicide became a political issue, a struggle of an artist "under the brutality of capitalizations with eviction from her work place without a just cause, under the weight of paralytic institutions and of amoured funding agencies."²⁰ After her suicide, a collective of her friends approached the Art Gallery of Ontario with a request to install the *Rain Room* as a commemoration together with documents leading to her 'action'. In the ensuing negotiations with the A.G.O., and with Marras's statement in A.C. E. #3 criticizing the necrophilia of an institution which would only validate work after an artist's

death, the installation of the piece became an issue over the politics of suicide and the politics of state directed art.

In A.C.E. #3, an unsigned article called "The Lumpen and the Lumpen Eaters," attacked the "unwielding institutionalizing patronage of reactionary minds that make up the government funding agencies" in the "let's not cause a scene land of the beavers."²¹ The article continued with a definition of the lumpen artist as one who experiences a series of "perverse art crimes" from the romanticization of the autonomous artist in colleges, to the "brick wall of near impossibility of receiving financial or moral support"²² from older artists co-opted by the grant system and from funding agencies who support a "safe, reactionary, institutionalized art ... exemplified by the representatives to the Venice Biennale ... the most recent example being Greg Curnoe in 1976 with his 1964 pop art style."²³ This invective against Canada's state-funding system as an institution which places itself "into the pie-in-the-sky ivory-tower framework of producing endless streams of useless objects pandering to the tastes of the bourgeoisie"²⁴, and the positioning of CEAC within the parallel gallery system as the "only" artist run centre "maintaining a direct interest in political and artistic activism,"²⁵ established a tone for CEAC which would guarantee its oppositional energy and its alienation from much of the artistic community.

SCENE TWO: The Contextual Art Conference

"Here we have the grandfather of conceptual art, and we have the promoters of contextual art, and we're all going to battle it out and see who's going to run off with the art trophy."

— Sarah Charlesworth, from the transcripts from the Contextual Art Conference, CEAC, November 10 and 12, 1976.²⁶

The atmosphere was banal while charged with defensiveness, combativeness, and constraints parading as noblesse oblige. As I often do under the weight of bad faith, I absented myself — until near the end the situation seemed so silly that black humour seemed a viable respite. In short, I think this transcript is fairly worthless. Except perhaps as a workshop on alienation.

— Joseph Kosuth, in a statement "What is This Context" produced in response to the conference proceedings.²⁷

In Lund, Sweden, February 1976, a CEAC touring group including John Faichney, Lily Eng, Peter Dudar, Ron Gillespie, and Amerigo Marras discovered a pamphlet by a Polish artist, Jan Swidzinski, expounding a theory of 'contextual art'. Published in English translation in 1977, Swidzinski's "Art as Contextual Art," proposed "art not as the syntactic proposition of conventional art or as the analytical proposition of conceptualism, but as the indexical proposition/the occasional sentence/of naturally contextual meanings."²⁸ Describing the logic which rules art as epistemic logic, and contextual art as "signs whose meaning is described by the actual pragmatic context" where there occurs "the continuous process of the decomposition of meanings which do not correspond to reality and in the creating of new and actual meanings,"²⁹ Swidzinski arrived at the paradigm:

REALITY INFORMATION ART NEW OPEN MEANINGS REALITY³⁰

The thrust behind these statements, which comprised part of the "Sixteen Points of the Contextual Art Manifesto," was to situate the practice of art within a model which accounted for a dialectical reality where 'truth' was subject to the context/topicality of the everchanging/fluxating of reality. Searching for a model which could describe the relationship of art to a modern condition of knowledge, Swidzinski identified three models which co-existed in current art practices. The first, the universal model of classical art, assumed that the "signs with which civilization shows reality are transparent for art,"³¹ and arose from a belief that language expresses a reality of recognition rather than structure. The second, originating in Romanticism, was relativistic. In this model, a direct and homogeneous image of the world depended upon the tools with which we learn about it. Citing structuralism, Swidzinski suggested that a problem arose in this model between the relation of the signifier and the signified, the relativism of modernism was unsure whether art produces a 'true' reality, a different reality, or a reality which only expresses knowledge about art. Citing Ad Reinhardt's proclamation, "permanent revolution in art as a negation of the use of art for some other purpose than its own," Swidzinski proposed that

this declaration of art for art's sake as the "last expression of this tendency".³²

For Swidzinski, the consequences of relativism became a philosophical problem of neopositivism, from which he traced the origins of both relativism, and a third model, conceptualism. This third model was identified by Swidzinski as the platform articulated in Joseph Kosuth's *Art after Philosophy* and the Art and Language publications originating with Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin in England and Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden in New York. According to Swidzinski, the language of conceptualism attempted to bring the semantic function back to art in order to produce art which functioned as meaning rather than as formalism. However, Swidzinski critiqued this model by claiming that the only difference between modernism and conceptualism was the means of expression, relativists using visual signs, conceptualists using the language of logic. This, he insisted, created a tautology in which the analytical sentence and a language of logic became a sign which was non-transparent, therefore ceasing to relate expression to reality. And, although Swidzinski references both the *Collectif D'Art Sociologique* of Hervé Fischer, Fred Forest, and Jean-Paul Theno, who situated art as "the practice of negative utopianism directed against the bourgeois order,"³⁵ Joseph Kosuth's second programme of the *Artist as Anthropologist*, and the para-marxism which created a schism in the Art and Language group, he describes them as "declarations of good will"³⁶ addressing these problems. In conclusion, he suggests that it is his platform of contextual art which finds for art the discourse of a social practice.

For Marras, it seems, Swidzinski's ideas functioned as a philosophical praxis which could bring CEAC's presentation of an artistic practice, including ritual performance and behavior art, Missing Associates' structural dance performances and Beth Learn's use of the term 'contextualism' in the "Language and Structure..." exhibition, into an internationalist and revolutionary (marxist) art discourse. Moreover, the platform which Swidzinski proposed became appropriated by CEAC as the theoretical ground upon which didactic, interrogative, and situational performance could realize an 'object' of social practice through the dialectic of meaning created between the audience and the performers. Thus, in the 'context' of this praxis, Marras had found a means to place CEAC's social practice of art on the international art map of cultural manifestos. What was still to be done, however, was to inform the coterie of artists producing these manifestations of para-marxist theory about CEAC's imminent role in promulgation of cultural revolution. And so he arranged a "Contextual Art Conference" to be held at CEAC on November 10 and 12, 1976, with the participation of Anthony MacCall, a British structuralist filmmaker, Joseph Kosuth and Sarah Charlesworth, New York artists involved with *The Fox*, Jan Swidzinski and Anna Kutera of the Polish contextualist school, Hervé Fischer of the *Collectif D'Art Sociologique*, Joanne Birnie-Danzker, who working for the NDP and had worked at *Flash Art*, and Amerigo Marras. Others who were invited but declined participation were Victor Burgin, Peter Kubelka, an Austrian filmmaker associated with the structuralist avant-garde of New York, Chantal Pontbriand, the editor of *Parachute* magazine, Ian Burn of the Art and Language group. Karl Beveridge and Carol Conde declined to sit directly on the panel but participated from the floor. Others who participated from an audience position included Vera Frenkel, John Scott, John Bentley Mays and A.A. Bronson, John Faichney and Ron Gillespie.

In bringing together this configuration of participants, and placing their contributions in the context of a Toronto arts centre, several opposing relationships between theory and practice and its context surfaced. Charlesworth and Kosuth implied that the conference was a 'set-up', in which their practice was to be positioned in relation to a previously unknown Polish artist's critique, with Marras as an opportunistic middle-man. This issue of 'positioning' was further complicated by the intricacies of a split which had occurred between Kosuth and the New York Art and Language group over the production of the periodical *The Fox*. The "declarations of good will" which Swidzinski had described in the Art and Language group's adoption of a para-marxist position had disintegrated into opposing political philosophies when Kosuth, together with this group, and others such as Karl Beveridge and Carol Conde, decided to publish

texts as a collaborative group, foregoing identification as individuals in support of cell solidarity. Inevitably, *The Fox*, disseminated in a context of the New York art market, became associated with Kosuth, individualism still permeating the ideology of America, declarations to the contrary notwithstanding. Moreover, the group began to splinter over political alignments of Maoism, marxist-leninism, and anarchism. By the time of the conference, both Kosuth and Charlesworth had disassociated themselves from the confines of a strict marxist ideology and had adopted a loose and self-styled combination of feminism, anarchism and marxist ideas. Karl Beveridge and Carol Conde, after the split in *The Fox*, had thrown up a New York style of art practice, and returned to Canada, exhibiting *It's Still Privileged Art* at the Art Gallery of Ontario in February of 1976. Feelings ran high in the 1970's over these ideological undercurrents, leaving a wake of hostility and political posturing which was all but opaque in origin for those who were not familiarized with the rhetoric of a marxist polemic.

Thus, for Kosuth and Charlesworth, Swidzinski's manifesto was an attempt to engage them in a highly specialized discourse they expressed a wish to demystify, and to re-position positions which they had recently rejected. But, on another level, their unwillingness to identify a position or ideology assumed the arrogance of artists producing at the cultural centre who feel no need to engage the periphery with a clear understanding of their aims. The result of these political and cultural undercurrents was a two-day conference in which the participants attacked/denied/defined/revised positions on the nature and practice of political art. Meandering from the posture of specialists in a discourse to a free-for-all audience discussion, the conference transcripts reveal an intense two day discussion which was difficult, provocative, and probably invaluable for a number of Toronto artists who became exposed to the intricacies of marxist, para-marxist and capitalist attitudes towards the production of art. Swidzinski himself was attacked at the beginning of the conference for assuming he could propose a 'social practice' based upon forty pages of theoretical generalizations. Hervé Fischer then tried to re-establish an amicable level of discourse by stating his collective's intention to create not a social practice but a sociological practice. Based upon Adorno's negative dialectic, Fischer proposed a dialectic of theory and practice which would allow a means of criticizing society rather than creating prescriptive models, which, including marxism, he characterized as "an answer system, ready-made, to try to get the power, to try to get into a bureaucracy."³⁷ For Fischer, the political role of the artist was not to produce models or values, but to produce the means by which all classes in society could arrive at their own self-determinism of language and structure. Charlesworth, however, refused to participate in a dialogue at this level, and immediately launched into a polemic against "positioning" and the impossibility of the conference's "context" to allow any viable analysis of the participants' contexts as producing artists. Birnie-Danzker insisted throughout upon bringing the discussion back to a context of ideology and economics which engaged the audience. John Scott brought forward the local issues of a marxist artist working in Toronto's art scene and as a union shop steward. A.A. Bronson and John Bentley Mays found the whole discussion of artistic imperialism and economic appropriation "astounding," failing to see what was wrong with a hierarchical structure that valued "famous" artists' discourse over the average man/woman's perception.

Like a stew which had too many cooks, the discussions flip-flopped between abstraction and personal experiences. But, in the final analysis, the setting of the conference gave Toronto the context for a far-reaching discussion on cultural imperialism, political positions in art practice, the issue of producing in a state-funded art context. For Kosuth the conference became an issue of "bad faith," but, for the majority of the audience and participants, the polemics engaged by Charlesworth, the discussions about the artist's relation to a mercantile market and an absence of one, the problems of producing work in a system which buys and sells either objects or ideas, and the whole problem of posturing art as communication when the language of this discourse is inaccessible to those one wishes to engage, gave them the possibility to discuss the nature of a marxist or alternative art practice that was not monolithic in its assumptions of ideology and aims. For it was in these discussions, convoluted as they

may have been, that Scott could argue that General Idea "reinforces oppressive structures,"³⁸ that Birnie-Danzker could pose Partisan Gallery's murals as "community art," and that Toronto artists engaged in a polemic of state-funding versus the seduction of a New York market. Ten years later, these issues still haunt the production and practice of a politically defined art in Toronto, and their undercurrents, often unarticulated, surface in artists' work. In this sense, ours is not an 'absent' history, but an assumed history, in which those artists who formed their ideas through the cauldrons of a 1970's political stew now function in a climate which veils the complexity of the contradictions from which their practice grew.

SCENE THREE: Behaviour Art

CEAC's interest in promoting a context for performance art in Toronto continued through 1977. During this period, Katerina Sieverding's presentation of her work on transexuality and her work in progress examining Chinese and American propaganda photographs, *China-America*, as well as an interest in the work of Marina Abramovic and Arnulf Rainer, contributed to a growing articulation of a 'contextual' art practice. But it was with the three-week residence in March of 1977 of Reindeer Werk (Tom Puckney and Dirk Larsen), two performance artists from Britain who proposed a 'behavioural school' that CEAC's articulation of a 'contextually defined behaviour' solidified. Reindeer Werk accompanied their performances with a body of published writing, presenting their work in an international circuit of alternative spaces which included the contextualist's Galerie Remont in Poland, De Appel in Amsterdam, and CEAC in Toronto. Their manifestos, reprinted in *A.C.E.* #4, #5, and #7, called for an expediency in art which would explore the contradictions which underlie societies based upon 'double-think' which "begat ideas, which begat literacy, which begat the concept."³⁹ Their performances, 'action' orientated, involved articulating the formal mechanics of 'socially' unacceptable behaviour. Peter Dunn described their collaboration as the appearance of two people "suffering the traumatic contortions and involuntary spasms of severe behavioural disorder,"⁴⁰ in which:

... small idiosyncratic gestures acceptable as 'habit' slowly transformed into the involuntary pacings, rubbings, and scratchings associated with neurotic 'ritual'. Finally, after random fluctuations of intensity, it attained a pitch comparable to severe hysterical psychosis ending with the performers spent in exhaustion.⁴¹

The shock tactics and the aspects of shamanism in these performances paralleled the exploration of ritual in Ron Gillespie and Michael Berman's work, while Reindeer Werk's indictment of conditioned response proposed to critique the 'double-think' of an Orwellian world of media saturation and state-directed control. In a specifically American context, this investigation of behaviour offered an examination and critique of Roy Ascott's Skinnerian models and the dominance of behaviour modification which permeated the empirical and clinical sciences in their approach to the definition of deviance and of response.

For CEAC, the platform of Reindeer Werk gave the investigations being pursued by Ron Gillespie, Missing Associates, and the movement of OCA students towards the aesthetics of punk, a theoretical credence in a European context. Misunderstood or disregarded in a Toronto setting, and perhaps indifferent to the acceptance of their platform, CEAC began a strategy of aggressive promotion on the continent. Functioning as a 'group' or 'collective' in their approach to cultural exportation, CEAC had already toured Europe in October of 1976, highlighting the work of Missing Associates and Ron Gillespie. And it was during this tour that exposure to contextual art, the 'action' school of performance, and Reindeer Werk led to further collaborations in theory and practice with these groups. Based on the experiences of the Contextual Art Conference, CEAC presented three evenings of 'contextualism' in New York in February 1977, to introduce the idea of "art-as-empty-sign, that is structure in which the introduction of meanings is the activity of the audience."⁴² But, with the residence of Reindeer Werk, the aim of presenting 'contextual' performance became fused with the notion of behaviouralism, leading to the dissemination of 'contextual behaviouralism' as a social practice which refused to 'cooperate' with the capitalist reinforcement of

production and consumption. Characterizing this practice as ranging from therapy communes to the establishment of a school where members would exist as "behavioural catalysts -non-functioning as 'tutors' or 'students' but existing as questions,"⁴³ to the interface of provocation and demarcation of aggression, Marras listed the translation of actions into art as:

1. psycho-physical deprivation of a precise element.
2. confrontation with an unaware group.
3. analysis of social conditions through the effects of a given ideology.
4. media analysis and its assumed language.
5. dialectical interface and collective creation.
6. bringing to its extreme contradiction a definitive condition.⁴⁴

This combination of the hot/psychotic of behaviour and the cool/analysis of contextualism, was first presented as a platform on March 24, 1977 at Pier 52 in New York. A collaboration of Bruce Eves, Ron Gillespie, Amerigo Marras, Marsha Lore and Reindeer Werk, the 'behavioural action' was intended to challenge the definition of culturally deviant acts such as cruising, a common occurrence at this pier. Tom Puckney, Dirk Larsen, and Marsha Lore stayed in a car with the headlights on which shone through a hole in the wall creating an interior context of "a leather queen cruising ground."⁴⁵ Inside the wall. Ron Gillespie, Amerigo Marras and Bruce Eves took a series of photographs, illuminated by the headlights and a single flashlight, of:

Me [Eves] on my knees with Ron's cock in my mouth.
My legs hanging over the edge.
My foot holding Ron's hand down securely on a broken pane of glass.
The flashlight in Ron's, Amerigo's and my mouths.
My cruising stances.
The tension on Ron and Amerigo's faces.⁴⁶

Similar in aim, but different in content, were the collaborative performances presented by Eves, Marras, Suber Corley, and Diane Boadway during CEAC's second European tour in May of 1977. Taking part in discussions held in Paris by the *Collectif D'art Sociologique* and in Poland by the Contextualists, the CEAC group also presented a series of didactic seminar/performances examining the issue of the art-world frame of reference and the attempt in performance to break down audience/performer barriers. Arranging themselves in the four corners of a gallery, Eves, Marras, Boadway, and Corley spoke into a microphone fifteen seconds apart, a photographer obscuring the view of the audience positioned in the middle of the room and intimidating them with a barrage of 'candid camera' shots.

The text consisted of seventy statements which proposed an antithetical stance to dominant ideologies, rather than an 'alternative' which could be re-appropriated by the cultural hegemony. Samples of the texts read included:

Any particular performance, like any particular moment in time can only be presented once.
The spontaneous situation is the performance.
Performance is flux.
Theatre is in direct opposition to the theory and praxis of behaviour and context.
Performance art has not yet left the wall.
The performer and the audience are autonomous.
Performance art creates no interchange.
Performance art creates no solutions.
Performance art does not alter perception.
Performance art can no longer exist within the art world frame of reference.
The art world frame of reference fails.
Performance art fails.⁴⁷

The reactions in Europe to this didactic approach revealed much of the irony implicit in a project which sought to announce its own failure while maintaining the privilege of speaking within the context of an art world frame of reference. At De Appel in the Netherlands, an audience member felt as if the CEAC performers were "acting like gods of the art world, talking down to people there."⁴⁸ And, at the Museo d'Arte Moderna, Bologna, and the Palazzo Diamanti in Ferrara, the group's questioning of an audience's collaboration with bourgeois and capitalist ideologies evoked a less than civil response. According to the description of their performances documented in Diane Boadway's journal of the tour, the reaction of the Ferrara

audience was the most exciting, where in answer to such questions as "does a repressive society reproduce repressive social models?"

Some students get up on stage and begin to mimic us. They stand in the corners and one at the microphone on the table takes a beetle and places it upon the microphone and then tries to hit it with a sledgehammer. Amerigo begins to stamp his feet loudly and clap yelling 'bravo bambino'. More students join in and they rip the paper with the statements and the questions off the wall and take it out in the courtyard and burn it in a ritual.⁴⁹

By contrast to the audience response towards the practice of a 'contextually defined behaviour,' the seminars CEAC attended in Paris and in Poland were long drawn out and intensely serious discussions upon the nature of defining a revolutionary practice of art. The Paris seminar, attended by CEAC, Peter Dunn and Lorraine Leeson, Swidzinski, and sponsored by the *Collectif D'Art Sociologique*, agreed upon a manifesto entitled "The Third Front" which was published in *A.C.E.* #6, as a strategy to combat the 'capitalist division of labour in the art market.' Committing themselves as locii of groups to the establishment of an "international network of communications,"⁵⁰ they spent much of the seminar attacking the cultural hegemony of the New York art world. Similarly, a "Polish Front" was established at the seminars in Warsaw to oppose the imperialism of a New York international centre. Thus from the first contextual discussions at CEAC to the final seminar in Poland in July of 1977, the contradictions of establishing an antithetical practice in an art world dominated by the consumerism of American ideology remained unresolved. Moreover, the emphasis upon New York as both the centre of the art world and the centre of capitalism only re-inforced its hegemony, swallowing the attempts of these groups to create an oppositional front rather than more recent strategy of regionalism. But, despite the contradictions which are so glaring ten years later, the dominance of the New York art scene was a problem for both Canadians and Europeans seeking recognition of an alternative. For in order to be recognized, and therefore have some possibility for communication with a larger public, one did indeed need to pass through the centre which, by definition of the market, co-opted radicalism. Thus the hegemony of New York, whether real or perceived, created a situation where Sarah Charlesworth could declare that "I am not about to become a political artist, although I am concerned with political questions and I am an artist,"⁵¹ while her 'colonial' counterparts scrambled to establish political platforms and political fronts to oppose the ease with which New York artists breezed in and out of their ideological stances.

SCENE FOUR: Raw War

In the spring of 1977, an explosion of local bands adopting the paraphernalia and alienated stance of the 'punk' hit the Toronto scene. Perceived initially by Marras as a spontaneous behavioural reaction to a highly-saturated media scene, CEAC sponsored the first punk venue in Canada. Organized by The Diodes, a band of OCA students, Crash 'N Burn was located in the basement of CEAC from May until August, 1977. The Diodes, originally including John Catto, David Clarkson, John Hamilton and Ian MacKay, collaborated with Marras and Eves in the production of a 45 rpm disc called *Raw War*, which was distributed as *A.C.E.* #8. Featuring the music of The Diodes, the disc was interspersed with droning statements by Marras and Eves reading from the behavioural manifestos of CEAC and Reindeer Werk. Characterized by Marras as producing a "great awakening in the brainwashed television public,"⁵² the record stands today as an example of the incongruity of a highly sophisticated rhetoric pasted onto the extremely raw and naive sound of hard-core punk. The saving grace of the disc, probably unintentionally, is the voice of a woman at the end of the single who responds to the polemic of "you people are the police" and "how can ideology change social practice," by crooning "fuck-off" and "stick it up your ass," an extremely crude and inherently feminist response to a marxist ideology that suppressed the issues of the women's movement in the quest for cell solidarity and the panacea of revolution which would mysteriously, and automatically cure the ills of a patriarchal society. Other bands which played at Crash 'N Burn in the summer of 1977, a hole-in-the-wall space with a bathtub for a beer fridge, included the all-women's bands The Curse and The B Girls, The Poles featuring Michaele Berman — who had taken

ritualistic performance to its media extreme — The Dishes, the Viletones, and The Dead Boys. Performance-orientated events such as Fashion 'N Burn added a sarcastic and humorous overtone countering the sensationalist violence accompanying Nazi Dog's self-inflicted violence during The Viletones' performances. Fashion 'N Burn's interjection into the punk craze, "Is the new wave a permanent wave?," also suggested the fleeting nature of this youth rebellion in the wake of impending record contracts and media hype. The clarion call of 'no future' became the sell-out of a music industry future, and CEAC's initial enthusiasm for punk revolution quickly became an analysis of consumerist appropriation and disillusionment. In September, 1977, CEAC closed Crash 'N Burn, and the short-lived energy of the punk explosion fragmented as bands found alternative venues and record contracts. All that remains of the heyday of Toronto's musical nihilism is the record *Raw War* and a film by Ross McLaren, *Crash 'N Burn*, documenting its excess.

RAW/WAR by AMERIGO MARRAS and BRUCE EVES. Statements: Reindeer Werk and Art Communication Edition. Voices: Amerigo Marras, Bruce Eves and Paul Robinson. Music: John Catto, David Clarkson, John Hamilton and Ian MacKay. Recorded live at the Crash 'n' Burn, 15 Duncan Street, Toronto, Canada. @ 1977 Crash 'n' Burn Records.



Jacket sleeve of *Raw/War*, the collaboration between CEAC and The Diodes

SCENE FIVE: Free International University Workshops at Documenta 6

All the European tours and contacts became a dress rehearsal for an audience which counted, when Amerigo Marras, Bruce Eves, Lily Eng, and Ron Gillespie were invited to the "Violence and Behaviour Workshop" of the Free University For Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research in September, 1977. Joseph Beuys was the darling radical of New York and Europe, and CEAC was being admitted to his Church. For, with the entré of this invitation, CEAC scrambled with the same vigour with which they had established the "Third Front" four months early to declare their autonomy. The New York hegemony, it would seem, had extended further than the centre, as the wag of Beuy's little finger created the same divisions which CEAC had denounced as a capitalist and imperialist ploy to be fought from the periphery united as a front of common ideals and aims. For, in *A.C.E.* #9, Marras issued a communique directed at Hervé Fischer and the *Collectif D'art Sociologique* which attempted to worm out of the contradiction that, at a 'free international university' based on an open situation, Fischer's group had been excluded. To address this

exclusion, Marras announced that "to share commonalities does not necessarily mean to stagnate in a precise model. In fact, shifting the focus makes us realize that there are alternatives to anyone's alternatives."⁵⁴ And then, in an absolute tumble of political somersaults, he declared that:

How does one defeat the dominant ideology if the alternatives are split by the same dominant ideology? Precisely by oneself becoming the occasional member of some of the thousands of networks in operation and thereby shifting the ground without freezing the role.⁵⁴

This decision, on the part of CEAC, to justify exclusion on the grounds that it would defeat a dominant ideology suggests that rather than achieving a position of antithetical thought, they had instead been engulfed by the 'double-think' of a imperialist ideology which suddenly positioned them as the lumpen-eaters in the "lets not make a scene land of the beavers."

Their experience at Documenta 6 could be likened to the "perverse art crimes" with which CEAC had berated the state-funded infrastructure of the Councils and the consumerist ideology of creating. At the Documenta sessions, Bruce Eves' insistence upon bringing to the examination of behaviour the issue of homo-erotica, and placing the 'mimicry' of drag and sado-masochism in a role of providing a safe distraction and effectively castrating threats through appropriation, was neither understood nor well received. His analysis, however, of 'mimicry' in punk, fashion, and gay art, echoing Baudrillard's simulation and Kristeva's warning against the endless recuperation by the enveloping nature of late capitalism, was one of the most succinct statements on the crisis of post-modernism to be issued from the CEAC platform. Marras, however, in all his contradictory polemic, did not seem to recognize that some contradictions are promulgated by the dominant ideology and threaten to swallow marginalization whole. Thus, despite CEAC's experience of Documenta as a competitive showcase in which each participating group went out of their way to prove they were more radical and more-marginal-than-the-next for a fedora-headed master, Marras returned to Toronto, bent, bound, and determined to establish a 'free international university' at CEAC. Documenta became the scene in the opera where comedy turned to tragedy, where politics became a bargaining site of bad faith, and where polemic ceased to function as an antithetical tool. It also became, in the tradition of theatre, a foreshadow of events to come, rather than a spontaneous performance which situated its actions outside of the art world frame of reference.

ACT THREE: STRIKE!

We want to come out closer to the de-training programme, opposed to the service systems ... We have to realize a polemical state, a state of permanent questioning. The polemics and its art are the core of our surfacing and switch. To uncover the sore points, the polemics, to challenge them is what we mean with STRIKE.

— Editorial by 'The STRIKE Collective,' STRIKE, January 1978, Vol. 2, #1.

NO BUTTER, NO BUTTER, NO BUTTER: CEAC DRY HUMPS THE AUDIENCE. MOTOR CITY MEETS CEAC: A CONFRONTATION WITH SEARING ANARCHO-FAGGOTRY. ENCOURAGING YONI CONSCIOUSNESS. HETRO-CLONES FOR GAY CONSUMPTION: THE AUDIENCE AS SURROGATE SEX VICTIM. WARM IT UP BEFORE YOU EAT IT; MOTOR CITY GETS CRAMPS AND GOES HOME.

— Tom Dean, lead for article, STRIKE Vol. 2, #1, January 1978.

SCENE ONE: On Organization & the Notion of Polemic

On Friday, December 30, 1977, in Toronto, five police officers raided *The Body Politic* and seized twelve boxes worth of files, including a subscription list dating back years. Consequently, three people were charged under two obscenity statutes. The issue: an article published in *The Body Politic* about men loving boys and a photographic guide to gay sex entitled "Loving Man." In the autumn of 1977, nearing the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the Federal Republic of West

Germany, a wave of assassinations stunned the country, including the deaths of chief prosecutor Siegfried BuBack, Dresdner Bank head Juergen Ponto, and the president of the manufacturer's association Hans Martin Schleyer. Following the outrage and the paranoia of the bourgeoisie, Andreas Baader 'suicided' in prison, instigating a backlash of outrage on the part of students and the left-wing. In Italy, the Red Brigade engulfed the country in a unpredictable war of violence and chance terrorism, culminating in the kidnapping of Aldo Moro on March 16, 1978, and the total crackdown of the Autonomous worker's movement. Terrorism was in the air. It was the beginning of the post-political era.

At CEAC in Toronto, Bruce Eves, Amerigo Marras, Suber Corley, and Paul McLelland switched the name of *Art Communication Edition*, CEAC's journal of activity and manifestos, to a "brave new word": STRIKE. The nature of the polemic between the covers of the paper, however, did not alter dramatically. Marras re-affirmed his search for an 'antithetical' ground on which to locate the critique of a dominant ideology that constructed a mercantile art system. Peter Dudar and Lily Eng published their invective against the Art Gallery of Ontario and the state of dance in Toronto which echoed Marras's anger during the *Rain Room* installation. John Faichney organized an exhibition of book art. Fred Forest of the *Collectif D'art Sociologique* published a communique explaining a sequence of events wherein *Newsweek* refused to run his advertisement selling "Artistic Square Meters" in France — his ad, entitled "Buy France Piece By Piece," was considered deceptive advertising and there was "inadequate information concerning the financial structure of your company."⁵⁵ From the absurd to the sublime, STRIKE also listed a number of workshops/seminars conducted by members of the newly established CEAC School. Among the eclectic offerings were a "Basic Filmmaking" workshop by Ross McLaren, an "Introductory Seminar on Evolution" by Ron Gillespie and Veronica Loranger, "Kindergarten and Inflato-Art" by Harry Pasternak, "Video Cassette Editing" by Saul Goldman, "Art and Revolution" by Amerigo Marras and "Buddha Maitrey Ame Wears a Purple Taffeta Dress" by Lily Chiro.

In conjunction with the school, a series of open Monday night discussions were held at the CEAC library to plan an extravaganza of seminars on the topics of human rights, ideology, behaviour, work, and community. Entitled "5 Polemics to the Notion of Anthropology," the seminars were held in April and May of 1978. Included as guest speakers were Marty Pottenger of *Heresies* magazine, Bruno Ramirez of *Zerowork*, a journal calling for the elimination of work, Maria Gloria Biccocchi of Art Tapes in Florence, and Gerald Borghia, a sociobiologist pioneering work in the field of genetic science. Guest artists included Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, whose work in Britain focused upon community intervention through poster campaigns, and Marina Abramovic, a performance 'extremist' from Yugoslavia. Also planned was a Toronto segment of Caroline Tisdall and Joseph Beuy's Free International University which fell through in the subsequent scandal that would number CEAC's days.

The most publicized event of the "Polemics" seminars was the lecture and discussion led by Benard-Henri Levy, founder of the *nouvelle philosophie* in Paris. Based on a critique of marxism, rationalism, and classical dialectics, Levy's anti-authoritarian and anti-system stance was derived from the influence of Solzhenitsyn. To understand the last fifty years of history, he argued, "you must understand the camps. You must begin with the point of view of the prisoner."⁵⁶ Jay Scott, reporting in *The Globe and Mail*, described the seminar:

Several people are on hand, an oil and water beaker of leftists who ask questions and sneer at Mr. Levy's answers and rightists who make statements and sneer at Mr. Levy's responses. To mix the metaphor, since nothing else is mixing: his audience is hard-top, not convertible.⁵⁷

Calling for a philosophy which was immediate and individual in protest, he stated that of he were a Canadian, he would "talk about Indian reserves, about unemployment, and the RCMP — who are listening to you and opening your mail."⁵⁸ And, upon opening the next issue of STRIKE, it was as if Levy had had a profound influence on a group who managed to assimilate only half of his platform. For,



Warren Davis interviewing Amerigo Marras for CBC television. Photo: CEAC Collection, York University Archives.

in the transcripts published from the Red Brigades and the exposé of Salvadorian death squad tortures in the second issue of *STRIKE*, it was clear that CEAC had internalized the point of view of the prisoner; meanwhile, an inserted manifesto, entitled "Dissidence in the 1978 Venice Biennale," declaimed once and for all their rejection of an art practice within capitalism. Their editorial, however, issuing a support for "leg shooting/knee-capping to accelerate the demise of the old system," and their cover "displaying a blow-up of the bullet-ridden bodies of former Italian premier Aldo Moro's bodyguards,"⁵⁹ insured that Scott's article would be the last sympathetic press CEAC would receive. And it seemed that it was only after the scandal and government withdrawal of support that CEAC discovered a 'Canadian context' for their polemic, publishing in *STRIKE* #3, October, 1978, a critical exposé of the RCMP who clearly had been opening their mail and listening to their phone-calls.

SCENE TWO: Finale with Full Chorus

It's the ferment of ideas that makes these people cultural revolutionaries. Where their revolution is headed and how influential it will be is pure speculation, but what they are doing now is worth more than a cursory glance.

— Bruce Kirkland, *The Toronto Star*, March 19, 1977.

The mutilation behaviours, virus works, punk art, kidnapping practices, bombings, terrorist actions, arson and even political behaviours have made art-behaviour a vastly more effective instrument than the simple subjective artists in the 1960's and their paper tiger paws.

— Ron Gillespie, unpublished text on behaviourism.⁶⁰

CEAC is an institution in power, and therefore dangerous. Solidarity is rarely a communion and commonly a retreat into fear and

alienation, a block with which to wield power: ideology as corporate alienation. The projection of violence is not altruistic but masturbatory and adolescent.

— Tom Dean, "No Butter, No Butter," *STRIKE*, Vol. 1, #1.

We are opposed to the dominant tendency of playing idiots, as in the case of punks or the substainers of the commodity system. The questioning of thorough polemics of the cultural, economical and political hegemony should be fought on all fronts. To still maintain tolerance towards the servants of the State is to preserve the status-quo of Liberalism. In the manner of the Brigades, we support leg shooting/knee capping to accelerate the demise of the old system. Despite what the 'new philosophers' tell us about the end of ideology, the war is before us and beneath us. Waged and unwaged sector of the population is [sic] increasing its demands for 'less work'. On the way to surpass liberalism we should prepare the barricades.

— Strike Editorial, "Playing Idiots, Plain Hideous," *STRIKE*, Vol. 2, #2, May 1978.

Ont. Grant Supports Red Brigades Ideology — Our Taxes and Blood-Thirsty Radicals

— frontpage headlines, *The Toronto Sun*, Friday, May 5, 1978.

***** MAY 10, 1978, ALDO MORO'S BODY IS FOUND *****

What position do we take in relation to the BR [Red Brigades] ? We present their accusations of the ruling order in an extract of their court proceedings published in our paper. We share their anger and we agree that it is the power sector that must be on trial. We do not believe that terrorism makes any sense in the context here and we question the theoretical basis of any vanguard group that intends to lead or speak for the people, as little better than the farce of



Reindeer Werk: performance at Acme Gallery, London, 1976. Photo: Angela Puckney.

representation that exists in the present power structures of the state. We have published this material on the BR to rectify the repressed and distorted coverage they have received by all media. — Statement to the Press, May 12, 1978, STRIKE Collective (Amerigo Marras, Suber Corley, Bruce Eves, Paul McLellan, Roy Pelletier, Bob Reid.)

"I move, seconded by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. McKenzie):

'That the methods of deciding on Canada Council grants be made fully public at once, that all grants to organizations, groups or individuals under investigation by Canadian security services be immediately suspended and that the Prime Minister is forthwith ordered by the House to call a judicial inquiry into the shocking aims, decisions and actions of the Canada Council.'

— defeated motion by Tom Cossitt (MP, Leeds), May 23, 1978, Canada. House of Commons Debates. 30th. Parliament. 3rd Session, May-June, 1978, p. 5624, item 1412.

Make no mistake about the seriousness of STRIKE's threat to humanist values. Art is only a minor battlefield. The Board of Directors of STRIKE is well prepared for a larger fight. Through the Free University, International Art Fairs and visiting guests, experts in the fields of sociology, economics, philosophy, psychology, architecture, they are preparing for long term revolutionary work. In recent issues, the journal has denounced art, capitalism, Russian and Chinese models of Marxism, Liberalism, CAR... Ironically, STRIKE is the official publication of CEAC which relies for the majority of its revenue on federal and provincial funding... Having established a facade of respectability, CEAC, through its affiliated publication, has now formed a political front to denigrate all art-making, to urge the overthrow of all existing structures and to declare its support for the terrorist strategy of the Red Brigade. Now that STRIKE has declared its destructive platform, continued financial aid by the provincial or federal government must be seen to be a support of the publishers' connections and entrenchment with violent political revolutionaries. It is equally ironic that STRIKE's indulgence in self-promotion by sensationalized and deviant behaviour, and its endorsement of 'leg shooting/knee capping to accelerate the demise of the old system' has been supported by tolerance and silence of an art community unwilling to take any moral stand on art or politics. — from a "Letter to the Editor," in *Open Paper Today*, June 1978. Signed by Fran Gallagher, Bruce Parsons, Toby MacLennan, Ron Shuebrook, Art Green, Alison Parsons, Natalie Green, c.c. to Louis Applebaum,

Director of the Canada Council.⁶¹

I feel obliged to respond to a letter that was directed to Louis Applebaum by persons affiliated with the Fine Arts Department of York University... 8. "CEAC has now formed a political front" "the publishers' connections and entrenchment with violent international political revolutionaries." Oh, come on now. Are these more people who read the Sun and take it literally. There is absolutely no foundation in reality for such ridiculous statements...

9. We totally agree with the next paragraph that the "art community is silent" and "unwilling to take any moral stand on art or politics" — from a letter to Arthur Gelber, Vice Chairman, Ontario Arts Council from Suber Corley, dated May 29, 1978.⁶²

The Metropolitan Council at its meeting held on June 13, 1978, adopted Clause No. 2 of Report No. 20... Embodied in the foregoing clause is a recommendation that no grant be made to your organization in 1978.

— from a letter to Suber Corley from the Metropolitan Executive Committee, Toronto, dated June 19, 1978.⁶³

Quite clearly, such a statement [the STRIKE Editorial] is an indictment to physical violence which is to be directed at individuals and to be carried on outside the legal framework of our society. Council members believe that such statements are unacceptable in a democratic society where there are other means of expressing protest or criticism... They do not believe that public funds should be used directly or indirectly to support the advocates of such views... They have therefore decided that the Council should not make further payments to the centre until they are provided with a satisfactory explanation of the philosophy and objectives of the centre's directors.

— from a letter to Amerigo Marras from Timothy Porteous, Associate Director, Canada Council, dated July 4, 1978.⁶⁴

Because we hold the Kensington Arts Association/Centre for Experimental Art and Communication responsible for STRIKE, and because STRIKE has taken a position in support of terrorism, the Ontario Arts Council withdraws its funding from both STRIKE and CEAC.

— from a letter to Amerigo Marras from Arthur Gelber, Vice-Chairman, Ontario Arts Council, dated July 10, 1978.⁶⁵

It grieves me to hear that you have decided to hold back funding which you have promised CEAC for this coming year's projects. I find it hard to believe that an educated man as yourself could possibly be