

FAHRENHEIT 9/11 AND “BRIDGES”  
ACTIVIST ART STRATEGIES FOR A NEW CENTURY

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate Studies and Research  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Art and Art History

University of Saskatchewan

Saskatoon

By

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by  
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***Fahrenheit 9/11* and “Bridges: Activist Art Strategies for a New Century**

This research is intended to contribute to critical discussion concerning the development of independent visual culture initiatives giving voice to human justice concerns within the context of globalized, corporate-controlled media. The problem is how to devise visual strategies for effective cultural production that addresses contemporary social and political issues. This thesis examines two case studies of activist art, one American and the other Canadian, that utilize documentary modes to intervene in hegemonic discourses of neo-colonialism and new forms of imperialism: Michael Moore’s documentary film *Fahrenheit 9/11* and Liz Canner’s digital video public art project “Bridges.” Analyzing the artist’s background, the political context, the intentions behind the project, the visual strategies, and the effectiveness of the work, the thesis concludes that there are barriers to creating works that function catalytically in service of social change. The limits of discourse in democratic societies, the difficulties of developing participatory audiences, the challenges of transforming the projection site into a democratic arena of discourse--these are some of the general factors that inhibit a work’s effectiveness. The case studies also show that strategies of political subjectivity are needed to counter the official narratives of power, while performance as an activist tactic, particularly if combined with technologies of mass media, engages audiences and helps to break down a separation between entertainment and activism.

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## INTRODUCTION

When I was editor of *The Humboldt Journal*, I received a letter one day from an elderly man upset by a decision of the local credit union. The board of directors had voted to renege on an insurance program started in the 1950s to raise funds for the then-new credit union. Members could deposit up to \$2,000 and, upon death, the person's estate would get that money plus a further \$2,000. Now that most of the people carrying that life insurance were elderly, the credit union's insurance provider had decided to discontinue it to avoid the potential payout. Unless the members died before the Jan. 31 cut-off, they would never see that extra \$2,000.

I wrote an article and placed it on the front page under the headline "Elderly Lose Thousands in Credit Union Insurance Scheme." I also wrote an editorial chastising the credit union board for its decision and urging them to change it. During the days following, the credit union manager and board members received many phone calls from area residents angry at the credit union's actions. Two weeks later, I published another story, "Credit Union Reverses Decision," citing pressure from the public as the reason for the reversal.

The following year I left the newspaper industry to study visual arts. Three years later, as a newly-accepted graduate student, when I told people I was going to pursue research in political art I often received the response, "But what do you mean by political art? All art is political." Eventually, I had to answer the question for myself. What *did* I mean by political art?

I understand now that experiences like the credit union story helped shape my views and expectations of a truly political visual art. It raises critical awareness in its

audience. It encourages change. It is reproducible in a way that reaches broad numbers of people, or at least the community that the work targets. It provides information that the audience would not otherwise have, or offers a different slant on received information. The promise that art seems to offer, that journalism does not, is the primacy of the visual; if there exists a powerful force for change in *telling*, then *showing* must be potentially even more effective.

Journalism has its limits, for example in the public's expectations of neutrality. Conventional news-writing style limits the reporter to being a channel for other voices and presenting a balance of views,<sup>1</sup> albeit filtered through the reporter's interpretive faculties. On the other hand, editorial or column writing allows the writer's voice to emerge. I asked whether art could present an argument in the same way columnists and editorial writers argue for their perspective. I decided that the most effective political art performs a persuasive argument. It is activist art. It is suited to the "Information Age," where access to and understanding of complex and often contradictory information are crucial to acting as political beings in a democratic society. It is open-ended, involving the viewer in the struggle to make meaning. And, like the best visual art, it offers a visually interesting experience.

So what is activist art? Nina Felshin's 1995 discussion is still useful today. Felshin describes how changes in the art world, beginning in the 1960s, produced a hybrid cultural practice that blends "real world" concerns with art world concerns: "This cultural form is the culmination of a democratic urge to give voice and visibility to the disenfranchised, and to connect art to a wider audience."<sup>2</sup> Felshin traces the artistic origins of this cultural form to Conceptual art of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Felshin

and others trace its political origins to issues that activated artists, particularly in the 1980s, such as the AIDS crisis, sexism, racism, and the environment. In the late 1990s and early 21st century, activist artists have mobilized as a cultural force around issues of globalization in a way that attracts and expands upon the previously disparate trends in activist art. Use of new communications technologies, such digital media and the Internet, have come to play an increasingly important role at a time when corporate ownership of media is highly concentrated and controlled.

Felshin's definition of activist art summarizes the formal approach to this type of cultural production:

Activist art, in both its forms and methods, is process- rather than object- or product-oriented, and it usually takes place in public sites rather than within the context of art-world venues. As a practice, it often takes the form of temporal interventions, such as performance or performance-based activities, media events, exhibitions, and installations.... A high degree of preliminary research, organizational activity, and orientation of participants is often at the heart of its collaborative methods of execution, methods that frequently draw on expertise from outside the art world as a means of engaging the participation of the audience or community and distributing a message to the public. The degree to which these formal strategies--collaboration among artists, public participation, and the employment of media technology information delivery--successfully embody and serve the work's activist goals is an important factor in the work's impact.<sup>3</sup>

My methodology has been to examine in depth two case studies of cultural productions that exhibit a "democratic urge to give voice and visibility to the disenfranchised." My selection process involved reviewing various forms of activist art--including street theatre, public art, culture jamming, and film and video--and choosing projects that engaged with both the local and the global. I wanted to look at projects that were timely in the sense that they were actually being produced and/or exhibited during the period of my research in 2004 and 2005 and therefore addressed issues of urgency

and importance. Four research questions emerged during my investigations: How can cultural production serve a democratizing function in contemporary society? What visual strategies are used to invoke critical consciousness and engage an audience in critical discourse? How can cultural producers situate themselves in order to create effective work? And how might art transform and revitalize the public sphere as an arena of democratic discourse?

I settled on two cultural producers, Michael Moore and Liz Canner, and projects done by each of them in 2004: Canner's "Bridges" public art project in Saskatoon and Moore's United States-based documentary, *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Each of these cultural producers uses documentary techniques in their own way in the service of social change, while expanding the genre of documentary film. I was interested in the use of documentary because of its link with journalism. *Fahrenheit 9/11* is a film addressing corporate, state, and media power in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Moore, who comes from a working-class American family, recasts the first few years of the George W. Bush administration, including the September 11 attacks and the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, and highlights the sufferings of ordinary people. I chose this project even before its theatrical release because of my excitement about Moore's previous documentaries. "Bridges" was a digital public art video projection on the facade of the Saskatoon Police Service building.<sup>5</sup> Canner, a non-Aboriginal, New-York-based artist was addressing troubled Aboriginal-police relations in a neo-colonial context in which police are suspected of causing the deaths of Aboriginal men. I chose this project because it takes place where I live and allowed me the opportunity to engage with the artist and experience the event.

In examining projects that utilize the medium of film, I concluded that film has several strengths that make it a particularly effective tool of social change. It has duration, which allows it to present complex information. It is endlessly reproducible which suits it to mass culture and gives it a potential role in effecting change on a societal level. Film technology subsumes all the other arts in the sense that it can incorporate photographs, music, interviews, archival material, found footage, and so on, and therefore increase the range of sources for persuasive argument. Montage, which is the essence of film, allows the construction of multi-layered meanings by juxtaposing visuals, sound, and, in the case of “Bridges,” architecture, to form powerful new meanings. Film can assume different channels of access, including internet, movie theatres, DVD, television, or projections in public spaces. The digital revolution means that for the first time moving image technology can be employed at very low cost by virtually anyone with a camera and access to a computer.

One reason for the recent surge in popularity of independent documentaries is the reaction to corporate consolidation of mainstream media and the concomitant limitations on diversity of discourse. In the contemporary “society of the spectacle”<sup>6</sup> in which citizens are immersed in the images and ideology of a mass culture largely controlled by corporate interests, film is a powerfully effective medium for relating a message counter to the dominant discourse. The work can be didactic, in the sense of transmitting a message, and yet, as the work of Moore and Canner shows, this didacticism does not necessarily result in a secular preachiness. Political documentaries can be entertaining, emotionally moving, intellectually challenging, aesthetically interesting and provocative enough, at least potentially, to cause change.

I will look at various traditions of activist art as they relate to the projects, tracing connections with Brazilian activist/director Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, and the theories of political theatre in the writings of German playwright Bertolt Brecht. I will examine the role of the artist as public intellectual in the sense described by Czechoslovakian writer and politician Vaclav Havel when he wrote, "The intellectual should constantly disturb, should bear witness to the misery of the world, should be provocative by being independent, should rebel against all hidden and open pressure and manipulations, should be the chief doubter of systems of power and its incantations, should be a witness to their mendacity."<sup>7</sup> My understanding of the public intellectual is informed by the writings of Havel, Palestinian-American literary and cultural critic Edward W. Said,<sup>8</sup> and Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.<sup>9</sup> Said writes, "The purpose of the intellectual's activity is to advance human freedom and knowledge. This is still true, I believe, despite the often repeated charge that 'grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment,' as the contemporary French philosopher Lyotard calls such heroic ambitions associated with the previous 'modern' age, are pronounced as no longer having any currency in the era of postmodernism."<sup>10</sup> The two artists discussed in these pages both pursue issues related to human justice concerns. Moore, in particular, seems to embody Gramsci's insights into the development of what he saw as "organic intellectuals" who would act as "permanent persuaders" on behalf of their class for the purpose of elaborating intellectual activity that "becomes the foundation of a new and integral conception of the world."<sup>11</sup> All of these thinkers elaborate some notion of the intellectual speaking truth to power and intervening in the hegemonic discourses or grand narratives of those in political authority. Said says, "In the outpouring of studies about

intellectuals there has been far too much defining of the intellectual, and not enough stock taken of the image, the signature, the actual intervention and performance, all of which taken together constitute the very lifeblood of every real intellectual.”<sup>12</sup> This thesis is an attempt to take stock of the image, the signature, the intervention and the performance.

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<sup>1</sup> By conventional news-writing style I am referring to the inverted pyramid structure in which information flows in order of importance and the 5 Ws--who, what, when, where, why-- are answered first. Walter Fox, *Writing the News: A Guide for Print Journalists* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993) 31-45. As an aside: Fox News registered the phrase “Fair and Balanced” as a trademark in 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Nina Felshin, “Introduction,” *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism* ed. Nina Felshin. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) 10.

<sup>3</sup> Felshin, 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Moore, dir., *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Dog Eat Dog Films, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Liz Canner, dir., “Bridges,” Astrea Media and *paved Art + New Media*, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (Paris, 1967) Bureau of Public Secrets, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/5.htm> [accessed 27 Sept. 2004]. Debord says, “The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point that it becomes images.”

<sup>7</sup> Vaclav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvizdala* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) 167.

<sup>8</sup> Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

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<sup>10</sup> Said, 17-18.

<sup>11</sup> Gramsci, 5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Said, 13.

## LIZ CANNER'S "BRIDGES:" NEGOTIATING THE LOCAL

### **Introduction**

I am in the Quality Inn lounge with four friends.<sup>1</sup> Two of them are acquaintances I have recently met. The results of the recent federal election have us talking more volubly about politics than is usual for a group of people who do not know each other well. I am expressing my disappointment about the contents of the front page *StarPhoenix* article concerning my member of parliament, Conservative Maurice Vellacott, who is attempting to have the case of two white police officers reopened. The two Saskatoon officers served four months in a correctional centre for unlawful confinement after being found guilty of driving Darrell Night to the outskirts of the city on a January night. The Aboriginal man was wearing only a jean jacket and summer shoes, but being lucky, he lived to tell the tale. In the same time period, two other Aboriginal men were found frozen to death on the edge of the city. The article reported the member of parliament's belief that an injustice had been done to the two officers, who both lost their jobs. The conversation quickly turns to the "Aboriginal problem."

"What can we do? We can only give them so much," one man says.

"They have to solve their own problems," the woman responds to a murmur of general agreement. "What can we do that we haven't already done?"

"Well, personally, I think it helps if we acknowledge what our culture has done," another woman says. "I can accept some responsibility for how my culture has created the problem. That's a start."

"But I haven't done anything," the man replies.

"I mean historically. Our people, our culture. Not necessarily what you and I have

done as individuals.”

“But I haven’t been part of anything,” he insists. “My family were German-Polish immigrants who settled in ---- in 1903.”

“Exactly. Whose land was that?”

“There weren’t any Native people there.”

“Sure. Not then. But what about before that?”

“There were no Native people in ----.”

“But what about before 1903? Did history start in 1903?”

There is silence. No one answers the question.

\* \* \*

I am standing in front of the Northwest Mounted Police display in the Western Development Museum, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I arrive at the display, paid for by RCMP veterans, after wandering past the false storefronts of “1910 Boomtown,” reconstructed in an enormous hall visited annually by thousands of Saskatoon schoolchildren and tourists from all over the world. Amid the celebratory historical images and text of the West’s police force is a poster that draws my attention. It describes an Indian wanted for the murder of a Mountie. The 1895 Proclamation appeals to the colonial public in the name of “Victoria, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, Defender of the Faith...” For me, the significance of this display lies in what it does not say. It fails to contextualize. If this passage from Douglas Hill’s 1967 western history, *The Opening of the Canadian West*, describing this

time period had been placed beside the Proclamation, the display's narrative would have been quite different:

... Mounties were having trouble with the Indians, who resented the new incursions of strangers into an area where at the best of times game was scarce and survival difficult. Indeed, the Indians had made outright threats, telling a NWMP inspector in 1897 that 'we may as well die by the white man's bullets as of starvation.'<sup>2</sup>

The hidden history behind the Proclamation includes the dynamics of settler colonialism: the Indigenous peoples' struggle against starvation precipitated by colonial incursions and the police role in colonial expansion as "an advance guard to clear the way for settlers."<sup>3</sup>

Beside the Proclamation is a black and white archival photo of two men posed together in a photographic studio shot. Like the Proclamation, this photo also bears no explanatory information. On the left a Mountie is seated on the ground beside an Aboriginal man in traditional dress. The Mountie, seated higher than the Aboriginal man, holds a book with which he appears to be teaching the other man. The position of the Aboriginal man's rifle, laying on his lap and pointed harmlessly at the ground, suggests impotence. The juxtaposition of the Proclamation and the studio photo tells a story: the savage Indian can be tamed with the help of the benevolent NWMP and exposure to European knowledge.

I wander back past reconstructions of the harness shop, livery stable, general store, dentist's office, western pioneer bank, Chinese laundry, implement dealership, railway station, St. Peter's Anglican Church and NWMP Station. Overhead flies the Union Jack while the recorded sounds of wagon carts, bird song and the occasional horse whinny are heard. The displays house many of the museum's 70,000 artefacts donated by

Saskatchewan's colonial families. The extensive collection of tools, consumer items, agricultural equipment and vehicles (complete with price lists and period advertising copy) evokes a kind of reverence for the material success and technological progress of the era.

The self-guided tour brochure states, "Saskatchewan boomed with economic success from the turn of the century to 1914. Landseekers flooded the west and towns grew almost overnight."<sup>4</sup> In addition to European immigration and the move westward of second- and third-generation Eastern settlers, one and a quarter million Americans settled in the Canadian West between 1898 and 1911 bringing with them, in one year alone, cash and possessions worth more than \$50 million.<sup>5</sup> Why were Europeans and Americans flocking to the Canadian West at this time? News of the defeat of the West's last armed Indigenous resistance, the 1885 Northwest Rebellion, had spread through Europe and America, in Hill's words, "indicating that the West was now 'safe' for full-scale colonization."<sup>6</sup>

The promise of sustaining itself as "boomtown" ultimately eluded Saskatchewan when development slowed after the first decade of the century. But the museum does not deal with what came after, nor does it deal with what came before. "1910 Boomtown" is both a memorial to a particular decade frozen in time and a fictional space in the colonial imaginary. In this fictional space, Indians are unruly, dangerous and in need of civilizing, police make the world safe, and colonial settlements are civilized places of material and moral success. A century later, the news of a series of unexplained deaths of Aboriginal men, and the implication that city police officers were responsible, challenges this construct. The situation confronts the version of history that has such a hold on the minds

of the descendents of colonial Saskatchewan. It is this imaginary that the public art project, “Bridges,” simultaneously rejects and confirms.

When I first met Liz Canner after she began her three-week residency at *paved* Art + New Media, an artist-run centre in Saskatoon, I saw that her project would address issues of art, politics and documentary film that I wanted to examine in my graduate thesis research on activist art. Although the project is not as extensive as her previous projects, “Bridges” had the advantage for me of being situated in the city where I live. I was able to converse with her as the project progressed and attend the final public screening.

There were other areas of resonance. Canner and I share similar cultural backgrounds: we are both Caucasian women of a roughly similar age, university educated (she in anthropology and visual arts, I in political studies and visual arts), and from a relatively privileged socio-economic background in the sense that we were both born into First World, North American cultures as the descendents of European immigrants. While Canner was doing documentary work in the 1990s, I was working in the related field of community newspaper journalism in various locations in Canada. Canner’s project presented an opportunity for me to see close-up how activist artists with such a background (white, educated, First World) can critically engage with political issues in a once and still colonial setting. The use of documentary techniques in an activist artwork particularly interested me as it represented a fusion of my three areas of interest: journalism, politics and art.

### **Origins of the project**

In 2003 Saskatoon-based artist Ellen Moffat was trying to come up with a project

to include in SPASM II: The Couture of Contemporaneity, a public art festival she was coordinating for *paved Art + New Media* to be held in Saskatoon in the summer of 2004. She was thinking of the work of New York-based video artist Liz Canner, whom she had met a year earlier while on residency at the Atlantic Centre for the Arts in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. Moffat felt that Canner's work using wearcam (wearable miniature video camera) technology would fit in well with the SPASM festival's concept of wearable technologies. Moffat, who had been engaged in public art since 1990, was aware of concerns related to socially-engaged public art projects and wanted to take those considerations into account while organizing a residency for Canner in Saskatoon. As the local coordinator of Canner's project, but not a collaborator, Moffat could and, due to financial constraints, had to, perform much of the initial community work that would come to define the project.<sup>7</sup>

In long-distance discussions with Canner, and with Moffat feeding Canner information on issues relevant to Saskatoon, the two decided that the theme of police relations with the urban Aboriginal people would be particularly timely and relevant in view of the highly publicized Stonechild Inquiry and the fact that Canner had produced documentaries on the topic of police brutality in Los Angeles. Although neither Moffat nor Canner is Aboriginal, Moffat had contacts in what she calls "the Aboriginal community" and decided to proceed, while aware of the potential difficulties in bringing a non-Canadian, non-Aboriginal artist to work with the Aboriginal community on local, politically charged issues. Moffat says, "I'm absolutely aware that the word 'community' is in fact a plural word and that the way into communities is through individuals, and through the interrelations we have with different people."<sup>8</sup>

Moffat describes her process of deciding who would constitute the community with whom she would consult:

Well, I probably reflected on different Aboriginal people that I know. And thought of how I know them, what their sense of politic is, what I thought their affiliations were, what I projected their receptivity might be to the project. And then developed a short list from that and then picked up the phone and made some calls.... And why I chose certain people to work with and why I chose to not go to other people is that I think it would not have been possible to further the project [otherwise].<sup>9</sup>

Settling on local Aboriginal artists Ruth and Thirza Cuthand as consultants, Moffat through them made contact with various Aboriginal organizations and individuals. One group<sup>10</sup> proved to be influential, suggesting topics and names for potential participants. Near the end of that meeting Donna Heimbecker's name came up. Heimbecker is a respected cultural worker, a Métis woman, General Manager of the Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company (SNTC), and active with programs to help Aboriginal youth. Moffat describes the meeting as anything but easy:

There was quite a bit of discussion, and I'll even say negative discussion, around the project. So although it had already been endorsed by one member of that group, it certainly wasn't the whole group that thought it was a good idea. And we did talk about questions of cultural background or questions of nationality, and so whether or not it was appropriate for this group even to assist the project - whether they wanted to endorse it by giving recommendations.... Then I could also say there's economics in it, class. When somebody comes from a privileged class and they're doing work on the non-privileged, what that means, what the dynamic is there. Is it being done with a kind of empathy? Is it being done with voyeurism? Does it exoticise the other? I gave Liz's background and the kind of projects she had been involved with previously to show that really she had a track record in this area and that it wasn't coming in for the first time, somebody who maybe was just a social do-gooder. And I flipped it around and I said this could be seen as an opportunity to get an Aboriginal voice out. This person has a lot of experience and technical knowledge in this area. Can you use this person in a positive way?<sup>11</sup>

Moffat said that Ruth and Thirza Cuthand were supportive of the project from the start:

They saw no difficulties whatsoever in having a non-Canadian, non-Aboriginal

person working on the project, and in fact they were really excited about it. And this is paraphrasing what they said, but they went, Whew, finally we don't have to just be with ourselves talking about ourselves, that we actually have somebody both from out of the country and out of our own cultural community who's paying attention to our issues. They also saw that a person in Liz's position could potentially bring a fresh perspective. As we all know, once we're really embedded in the place that we live, we do lose a kind of objectivity in being able to look at situations a bit more freshly.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the initial process, Moffat attempted to keep the project oriented towards material that resonated with Canner's previous work, and also to accurately represent the local needs. After discussing Heimbecker with Ruth Cuthand and Canner, Moffat approached Heimbecker about participating in the wearcam project, which would involve her donning a miniature video camera built within a pair of eyeglasses and filming one day in her life. After some initial reluctance on Heimbecker's part, Moffat "suggested to her that she might use this as an opportunity, that it could become a voice for the Aboriginal community."<sup>13</sup>

Once Heimbecker had agreed, it was decided that she would choose the second participant with whom she would interact during the day of filming. Suggestions included a local member of parliament, Saskatoon's mayor and Saskatoon's chief of police. The mayor was selected as the first choice. Moffat presented the project to him as one that was "about bridging relations between the communities within the city," and which would be a positive step not just within Saskatoon but also in terms of how the city is perceived from outside.<sup>14</sup> The mayor declined to participate on the grounds that his schedule wouldn't allow it. And Police Chief Russell Sabo, while supportive of the project, declined to be a wearcam participant for similar reasons. At this point there were only three weeks remaining until Canner's arrival and Sabo had already booked out-of-town meetings and confidential meetings which would preclude filming. However, Sabo

expressed his willingness to do as much as possible to improve relations with the Aboriginal community and offered as a participant Constable Keith Salzl, one of two Aboriginal Liaison officers on the Saskatoon force. Salzl, a non-Aboriginal, was involved with Aboriginal youth programs and, as such, he could put the best face on the Saskatoon Police Service.

### **Contemporary and historical contingencies**

Slightly more than three years ago, the community and our service personnel were shocked and deeply distressed by the news that two of our members, constables Hachen and Munson, had failed to live up to their oath of office. I can assure you our department and the community of Saskatoon have paid a heavy penalty as a result of their actions. For the past three years, our members have been under a cloud of suspicion and this has severely impacted the morale of our dedicated men and women who have continually tried to get beyond this adversity. It is our deepest hope that we will all learn from the mistakes of the past, and will begin to focus on making things better for the future.<sup>15</sup>

The speaker is Saskatoon Police Chief Russell Sabo, and the occasion is an Aboriginal justice reform commission meeting in the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre in June 2003. The failure of which Sabo speaks refers to the evening of 28 January 2000 when the two officers drove a poorly dressed Aboriginal man, Darrell Night, to the outskirts of the city and left him there in -22 C weather. Night's complaint led to the creation of an RCMP task force and unlawful confinement convictions against the two officers.

What the Night complaint brought to the fore involved much more than the singular action of two officers. The case reopened wounds for Saskatoon's Aboriginal citizens. The driving of Aboriginal men to the outskirts of the city was not, in fact, a one-time only event. Stella Bignell, mother of 17-year-old Neil Stonechild, had suspected that her son's death by freezing on the outskirts of Saskatoon in 1990 might be a result of police foul play.<sup>16</sup> Around the time of Night's ordeal, three more Aboriginal men were

found frozen to death on the outskirts of Saskatoon. The appalling conclusion seemed to be that police officers were intentionally driving Aboriginal men to their near-certain deaths by hypothermia.<sup>17</sup> While the names of other officers arose during the course of investigations, including the 2003-04 judicial inquiry into Stonechild's death, no one has been charged in the deaths.

Saskatoon bears the imprint of historical processes related to its formation as a primary colonial settlement. Saskatoon was originally settled in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by British people, who were followed by Central and Eastern Europeans. By the mid-1960s, Aboriginal people began to migrate to the city. According to the 2001 census, nine per cent of Saskatoon's population is Aboriginal, giving it the highest proportion of Aboriginal residents of any metropolitan area in Canada, with Winnipeg a close second at eight per cent. Aboriginal people accounted for less than one per cent of the population in Canada's two largest census metropolitan areas: Toronto and Montréal.<sup>18</sup>

The Aboriginal population, while a minority, is a growing one. In 1987, Aboriginal people made up 3 per cent of the city's population; by 2000, the percentage had doubled. The growth is due to a combination of migration from rural reserves and high birth rates among Aboriginal families. Children under the age of 15 make up 40 per cent of the Aboriginal population, while children make up only 22 per cent of the non-Native population.<sup>19</sup>

No one can spend any time in Saskatoon without being aware of the racial inflection in its patterns of development. The East-West divide, with Idlewyld Drive forming the centre, separates the generally middle-class or affluent Eastside from the economically challenged Westside. Eighty per cent of the city's 16,000 Aboriginal

residents live on the Westside, mostly concentrated in the contiguous neighbourhoods of Pleasant Hill, Riversdale, Confederation Suburban Centre and Massey Place.<sup>20</sup> The City's bi-annual newsletter of demographic information, *Populace*, points to some "disturbing trends" in the housing statistics. Despite 25 per cent growth in the population of Riversdale and Pleasant Hill between 1996 and 2001, there has been little or no new residential development in those neighbourhoods. Riversdale has the oldest housing stock in the city, with the vast majority of its housing built prior to 1960. Developers' lack of interest in these neighbourhoods is not surprising, considering that the majority (59 per cent) of people living in Pleasant Hill, for example, have household incomes less than \$20,000. There is a high vacancy rate in these areas despite the population growth, a result of low-income families being forced to live in the oldest housing stock because the newer housing is mostly smaller units.<sup>21</sup>

The result is abandonment of investment properties and further degradation of the area's aesthetics and economics. This unofficial segregation of the Aboriginal population engenders all the social characteristics of an urban ghetto: high unemployment, high school drop-out rates, gangs, drugs, prostitution, and a stigma associated with living on the west side.

Most Saskatoon Police Service personnel are non-Aboriginal. At the time of writing, thirty of the 337 officers are Aboriginal; a percentage which reflects the general demographics of the city, but in view of the high incarceration rates of Aboriginals and the need for policing in the West side, the number is considered inadequate.<sup>22</sup> When, following the Night case, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) established its own Special Investigation Unit to handle complaints about police abuse in

the province, the Unit in its first few years fielded more than 2,000 calls and investigated hundreds of complaints from the province's First Nations and Métis.<sup>23</sup> The Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform studied the issue of racism in policing and determined that, "most police officers perform their duties with fairness and professionalism regardless of the race of the person they are dealing with. Nevertheless, the Commission has concluded that racism in police services does exist and is a major contributor to the environment of mistrust and misunderstanding that exists in Saskatchewan."<sup>24</sup> Police Chief Sabo, in his submission to the commission, spoke about a variety of initiatives through the Provincial Police College, internal training, and Community Policing programs designed to "give people the understanding of where they have some racist feelings and how to break down stereotypes." He acknowledged the widespread existence of racism, but his words suggest a universalizing explanation of racism as existing in all human beings: "We recognize that all of us, every one of us in this room, I don't care who you are, you're a racist. Everybody has that little segment. You just don't realize it until it hits you in the face."<sup>25</sup> This naturalized explanation ignores the deliberate and systemic inculcation of racist beliefs embedded historically in Saskatchewan's institutions of knowledge production and dissemination, such as its museums (as noted earlier) and the education system.

Brigid Ward's undergraduate research into materials used in Saskatchewan schools during the first half of the twentieth century reveals that the images of the West to which children were exposed in texts and other educational books "communicated subtly but effectively the ideals of Empire and their present and future roles within the Empire."<sup>26</sup> Some of these texts were still in use up to the 1950s and, indeed, were still

present in the homes of Ward's relatives and contacts at the time of her research in 2004. Ward found that the "Red Men," as the texts often dubbed them, were portrayed as weak, feminized, lazy, insignificant, or savage. The text and accompanying images in children's literature conveyed an ideal construction of masculinity for white boys that encouraged the propagation of the British Empire's values. The ideal male carrier of colonial values would exhibit characteristics of "courage, self-sacrifice, duty and iron will," descriptors that were also associated with the Mounted Police, who were featured in school texts as the men who would "help enforce order on the untamed and unruly lands of the Canadian West."<sup>27</sup> In the following example, Ward analyzes an illustration, "Chief Crowfoot Addressing Assembly at the Blackfoot Crossing," from a 1943 school text *The Story of Our Prairie Provinces*:

The majority of the First Nations people, save Chief Crowfoot, are seated on the ground, and the Mounted Police are either seated in chairs, or are standing. Even the man in the lower left hand of the painting who is kneeling, is higher up in the image than the First Nations people in the foreground. The placement of these figures on the picture plane implies a hierarchy, and it is obvious that the Mounted Police are supposed to appear greater than the Aboriginal people.<sup>28</sup>

The colonial government's policy to attract the "ideal immigrant" to the West, which meant an immigrant of a white race (primarily British, Scottish, German, with East Europeans a close second) is well documented now.<sup>29</sup> What is perhaps less known is the indoctrination of imperialist beliefs and hierarchical binary thought systems among the newly-settled immigrant groups whose education conveyed the notion that colonialists are inherently superior to the Indigenous people and therefore deserving of the rights to resources and lands. There has not been enough scholarship done on the implications of children as targets for imperialist indoctrination in the Canadian West and the creation of an ideological environment of white supremacist thinking, one that has endured through

time.

I would argue that the impact of the propagation of Social Darwinist thinking on the character formation of those of colonial ancestry has been considerable. Considering that the children who were raised to perpetuate these values of Empire are the great-grandparents and grandparents of today's adults, it is perhaps not surprising that many contemporary Saskatchewan residents have unwittingly absorbed racist attitudes towards First Nations people. The naturalized explanation of racism expressed by Chief Sabo is evidence that Saskatchewan residents are largely unaware of the complexities of the province's history and its repercussions on the present.

One way that lack of critical understanding of colonial knowledge systems is felt is that discussions are often framed in such a way that Aboriginal people are deemed to have "problems" and disagreements arise as to how to deal with them (for example, how to deal with youth crime, rise of gang activity, alcoholism, and so on) as opposed to locating the problems in the contemporary legacies of imperial structures of knowledge. The Commission's report does make progress in this regard by recommending more effective "cultural awareness programs," which currently are less than 20 hours in duration. The Commission notes, "Police officers continue to be assigned to First Nations and Métis communities with minimal knowledge of the culture and history of the people they serve."<sup>30</sup> I would submit that their knowledge is not minimal; on the contrary they have absorbed a particular body of knowledge generated by the needs of Victorian colonialism.

This brief history of Saskatoon is intended to contextualize the public art project called "Bridges." As a project that deals with police-Aboriginal relations, its analysis

requires an understanding of both local and broader historical contingencies including the social, economic, historical and ideological factors with which it engages either overtly or by implication.<sup>31</sup> The prime intention behind the project was to build an intercultural bridge between the two groups, urban Aboriginals and police, that historically have had and in the present continue to have a highly charged relationship. Such a venture is subject to a number of pitfalls. An analysis of “Bridges” must consider this as its central question: How does a project that intends to provide a public forum for an Aboriginal voice, while, at the same time, creating an intercultural bridge between Aboriginals and police, navigate the terrain of power?

***Bridges: the contradictions and complexities of a public art project***

On the cool spring evening of May 29, 2004, an unusual event took place on a downtown street in front of the Saskatoon Police Service building. For close to an hour, the façade was illuminated by a two- by five-metre video image while spectators gathered on the pavement in the cordoned-off block on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. As the daylight faded and the images sharpened, the edited day of two Saskatoon residents unfolded. Their recorded voices projected into the street, transforming it into a public space of temporarily levelled power relations. Often sharing a split screen, the first-person visual perspectives of a police officer and an Aboriginal woman temporarily imposed themselves on the building’s architecture. This act of projecting onto architecture is one that Krzysztof Wodiczko refers to as “unmasking and revealing the unconscious of the building, its body, the medium of power.”<sup>32</sup> For two screenings that evening, the police building became simultaneously a privileged site of authority and a public site of contestation.

About 60 people were present for the screening of ‘Bridges’, although fewer

police officers attended than the organizers had hoped. Aboriginal spectators were also few; the screening happened to be in competition with a celebration of Aboriginal culture taking place elsewhere in the city. The difficulty of assembling an audience as a vital component of public art is apparent in the “Bridges” project. In fact, the project raises an array of issues relevant to activist cultural production, and therefore it presents an excellent case study with which to analyze the problems and potentials of contemporary art as a democratizing influence in society.

As an activist art project, it is about democratizing public space and promoting civic engagement.<sup>33</sup> “Bridges” operates within a neo-colonial society and is beset by a number of contradictions and complexities that echo these words by post-colonial theorist Robert J. C. Young when he writes, “Postcolonial theory, so-called, is not in fact a theory in the scientific sense, that is a coherently elaborated set of principles that can predict the outcome of a given set of phenomena. It comprises instead a related set of perspectives, which are juxtaposed against one another, on occasion contradictorily.”<sup>34</sup> An activist art project such as “Bridges” is best seen through a related set of perspectives to better explore the process of cultural production in a neo-colonial context.

The formal characteristics of “Bridges” can be listed as follows: site-specific, temporary, performance- and media-based, collaborative, participatory, and didactic. The work’s impact is difficult to assess without benefit of a sociological study, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, I am interested in examining the contradictions inherent in social activist art and how they might inhibit the work’s effectiveness. Discussion of these issues will be informed by Noam Chomsky’s insights into the limits of intellectual discourse in democratic nations. I argue that questions of effectiveness are

not connected only to the work's formal strategies but must be understood within the larger political context of advanced capitalism.

### **The artist**

Liz Canner has been engaged in activist art making since she was an anthropology and visual arts student at Brown University, Rhode Island, in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>35</sup> She installed a multi-media work of art, "Tibet," in the Brown University Gallery combining slides, sounds, scent, painting and sculpture to educate people about the genocide in Tibet. The following year, Canner produced her first work with youth, a music video called "No Fresh Words," the first of three works involving youth participation, including a 1994 video dialogue between Boston and Los Angeles youth on issues surrounding the crime bill, "Law and Order: Youth Get Tough on the Justice System," which appeared as part of a series on Deep Dish TV. Canner's work with youth empowerment using video as an organizing tool gave her an interest in exploring how community-based media could be used in a public art project.

Throughout the 1990s Canner's development followed two parallel paths: gallery-sited installation work involving new media, and documentary filmmaking on politically charged themes. Her 1993 documentary, "State of Emergency: Inside the Los Angeles Police Department," featured video witness footage similar to the Rodney King beating video and interviews with Los Angeles Police Department officers and their supervisors on the history of police brutality. This was one of several works related to police accountability. Some of her work deals with issues of globalization. Her 1999 documentary, "Deadly Embrace," investigated the effects of International Monetary Fund

and World Bank policies on developing countries. Her video work often appears on community media such as Free Speech TV, Deep Dish TV and Paper Tiger TV.

In 1998, Canner had the opportunity to work with Polish-Canadian artist Krzysztof Wodiczko as the editor of his “Bunker Hill Monument Projection.” The influence of Wodiczko’s architectural projections would be pivotal in the direction Canner’s work took beginning in 2001 with a public cyber art documentary on housing and community building in Boston, “Symphony of a City” (co-produced with John Ewing). Canner’s innovation was to blend Wodiczko’s research with technology developed by Steve Mann and other “hackers” at Massachusetts Institute of Technology who had been using wearable multi-media technology to augment the body and mind.<sup>36</sup> In “Symphony of a City,” eight people, each nominated by neighbourhood groups from the Greater Boston areas, wore video cameras mounted on eyeglasses to document a day in their lives from their perspectives. The unedited videos were projected onto Boston City Hall and streamed on the Internet.<sup>37</sup>

Two years later, the Arlington County, Virginia Cultural Affairs Division, commissioned Canner to do a similar digital public art project. “Moving Visions,” put wearable technology on several county residents, including a Muslim woman dealing with post-9/11 issues, to examine issues of freedom following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The footage was projected on public sites in Arlington at the two-year anniversary of 9/11 and shown at the County’s memorial concert.

### **Artist’s Intention**

Canner’s intention, once the collaborative process had determined the participants, was to use the project to create networks between the police and Aboriginal

communities. The formal aspect of having the subjects film each other was relatively new. Her previous projects had allowed each subject to record his or her own day. The idea of getting diverse participants to interact came out of some disappointments in her previous approach. The “Symphony of a City” participants included a wealthy landlord involved in deregulation of rents and a homeless student directly affected by skyrocketing rents. Canner’s idea was that the landlord’s attitudes would be influenced by viewing the homeless man’s day during the screening on City Hall. But the landlord was more interested in viewing the day of another participant, a lawyer who represents tenants, perhaps as a way of better understanding his adversary. The idea of physically connecting the participants developed during the “Moving Visions” project, when the county board chair (similar to a mayor) interacted with a homeless man. Canner describes the positive outcome:

And so the county board chair followed the homeless day-labourer for part of his day, and learned that all these people were living under bridges in his community, in fact two blocks from where he had grown up. That they were drinking from this polluted stream. All these things that he didn’t really realize, and there are a lot of homeless day-labourers there from Latin American countries, and they were seen as a bother. And he got a much deeper understanding that they have families, and learned more about their families, and that they send money home. It was, I think, a real educational experience for him, and then they turned around and within the week they allocated the money to clean up the water shed where the men were drinking from. There had been talk about building a pavilion but within two weeks they’d actually set aside I think it was \$170,000 to build this pavilion.<sup>38</sup>

Seeing that real world changes could result from a formal adjustment to the project, Canner’s strategy in Saskatoon was to have the wearcam participants interact with each other. Keith Salzl and Donna Heimbecker would participate in each other’s work day, meet each other’s families and have meals at each other’s homes. Canner liked the idea of having Salzl go to Heimbecker’s house for dinner because in the normal

course of things that would not happen: “But what happens when you do start bringing people into your home? Eleanor Roosevelt was famous for that. She said you could judge somebody’s character by who they would dine with. She would have kings dine with homeless people at her table. That was something that she really felt was important. And there is something about that. Just forming those new social relationships breaks down stereotypes. Having positive experiences with each other has been shown to reduce prejudice.”<sup>39</sup> Her previous work on police issues had given her a familiarity with that profession’s tendency towards isolation and a “brotherhood” mentality. So the intention of the project was threefold: build intercultural relationships, dispel stereotypes, “and really let the subjects tell their story in the way they wanted to.”<sup>40</sup>

The formal strategy for “Bridges” was designed to improve upon another problem in previous projects. In “Symphony of a City,” Canner was interested in a first-person documentary point of view by having the subject wear the camera. Canner’s experiment explored the question, “What happens when the subject is not visible and yet they are the camera?”<sup>41</sup> In a positive way, the experiment removes all the visual cues, the “shifting signifiers of race” to paraphrase cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall,<sup>42</sup> codified in skin, hair, and bones, as well as signifiers of class such as clothing. The strategy presents an alternative to the objectification of the subject found in traditional documentary media. While interesting and productive in a number of ways, the result is a “disembodied voice” without the visual/emotional cues that cause the viewer to empathize with the subject. By having Salzl and Heimbecker follow and film each other, Canner could accomplish two objectives: maintain the subjects’ first-person point of view and introduce on-screen appearances of the subjects.

The formal decisions therefore were closely aligned with Canner's activist agenda. The project first of all sought to put innovative media technology into the hands of an historically disempowered constituency in Saskatoon. Some decision-making ability was placed in their hands. A group of selected representatives could choose who would represent the Aboriginal community as a wearcam participant and then that person could choose her wearcam partner (although Heimbecker's choice was Sabo, who then chose Salzl). The participants were then further empowered by being able to decide, in consultation with Canner, what activities they would engage in during the day of filming. All of these areas of empowerment are subject to qualification: the constitution of the consulting Aboriginal community was influenced by Moffat's early decisions; Heimbecker's first choice of wearcam partner declined to participate; and activities on the day of filming were not completely under the control of the participants. Canner's influence would enter into the process at various points, most notably the editing stage and her decision to do further filming at a later date to address deficiencies she perceived in the original day's filming.

Naturally, this delivery of (limited) authority to the local community has an effect on the artist's ability to steer the message. The productive outcome of the county board chair/homeless labourer pairing in "Moving Visions" created a visible contrast highlighting differences of ethnicity, wealth, class, and status in Arlington County. The Boston landlord and homeless student pairing, although they did not share each other's day, created a provocative juxtaposition in the final screening as viewers watched the differences in their movements through public and private space. When Canner arrived for her residency in Saskatoon, the participants already had been chosen. The selection of

Heimbecker and Salzl already implied some limitations in the project.

Heimbecker, as we learn from the video, was raised as a non-Aboriginal in mainstream society. As the general manager of SNTC, Heimbecker is positioned as one of the city's cultural managers with the socio-economic privileges that such a position confers. Salzl is acting as a representative of the Chief of Police, who instructed him to participate in the project. Relative to the rest of the members of the Police Service, as an Aboriginal Liaison officer, he is positioned in a positive way towards the Aboriginal community. One can perhaps assume that Salzl's attitudes are not representative of the entire Saskatoon Police Service.

My view is that both communities--the Aboriginal community consulted by Moffat and the law enforcement community as headed by Chief Sabo--wanted to present their respective groups in the best possible light, an understandable approach but one that limits the effectiveness of the project from a political activist perspective. On the one hand Heimbecker, as a personable, productive, creative, enthusiastic and successful person, counters colonially-constructed stereotypes of Aboriginal people as lazy, savage or insignificant; and Salzl, also a personable, productive, creative, enthusiastic and successful person, provides a comforting view of the police. On the other hand, it is precisely because the two are "respectable" citizens of Saskatoon that they establish limits on the discourse that "Bridges" presents.

These limits are discussed in Noam Chomsky's research into the manufacture of consent in democratic societies where political power is concentrated in "small interpenetrating elites, ultimately based on ownership of the private economy in large measure, but also in related ideological and political and managerial elites."<sup>43</sup> Chomsky

argues that opposition is possible and even encouraged in democratic societies, but only as long as it conforms to a certain understanding of what is allowable in the discourse, and therefore respectable. What is not allowed is therefore not respectable. Those who choose to use a criticality unbounded by these unwritten rules are not admitted into elite groups and their writings will not be accepted into respectable literature. This ensures that “public policy will conform to the needs of the privileged.”<sup>44</sup> Elites, and those who labour for them, such as news reporters and public relations workers, police themselves so that they are not deprived of their privileges, which includes their professional reputation, their job, and funding opportunities from corporate or government sources. Chomsky’s thesis is that in democratic societies self-policing is the preferred form of ideological control, while in client states and totalitarian nations, the instruments of oppression can be more overt, involving uses of military and police violence.<sup>45</sup> Considering that the “Bridges” project is embedded in a local situation of, perhaps not overt, but covert, police violence against Aboriginal people, it is not surprising that the project is subject to a complex web of political factors.

How these factors play out in the final product, which in this case is the screening event, is the question to which I now turn my attention.

### **Dialogue as democratic discourse**

An emblematic scene occurs near the beginning of “Bridges” when Salzl and Heimbecker visit Doug Derksen, a woodshop instructor for White Buffalo Youth Lodge, a Westside centre for youth. Derksen, who tells them that “We can learn everything we need to know about life from wood,” holds up a carving that appears from one perspective to be a ballerina and from another perspective, a swan. The split-screen

image allows the viewer to see both images at once: the ballerina through Heimbecker's wearcam and the swan through Salzl's wearcam. Heimbecker and Salzl dutifully switch views to see the carving from the other's perspective.<sup>46</sup>

"So what we've learned is a really valuable lesson in human relationships," says the woodshop philosopher. He continues:

So many times two groups of people or two individuals can look at the exact same thing and see something totally different, and if they could only switch places they might see something else. But the real truth is that nobody can see the whole picture. When you stand there you really do see a swan and you see truth; you just don't see all the truth. And when you stand there you really do see a ballerina and you see truth; you just don't see all the truth. The truth in human relationships is always far more complicated than it seems at first.

The scene is so appropriate to this project that it is remarkable that Derksen's speech was not pre-planned or rehearsed, but occurred spontaneously during the day of filming.<sup>47</sup> The scene sets up a central issue in the project, that of dialogue and its potential in the process of social change. Canner's project provides the structure required for conversation: "mutual trust, respect, a willingness to listen and risk one's opinions."<sup>48</sup> Habermas's discourse ethics proposes the ideal speech situation as one where "each has an effective equality of chances to take part in dialogue; where dialogue is unconstrained and not distorted. What the idea of an ideal speech situation does is provide us with some ways of identifying and exploring the distortions that exist."<sup>49</sup> As speakers raise different kinds of claims to truth and rightness, actions can only be claimed legitimate in situations where they can be justified in an ideal speech situation. The question is whether this ideal speech situation can take place when dialogue is conditioned or distorted by inequalities of power, in which case the less powerful actor in the dialogue could find what they have said used against them by the more powerful actor. Mark Smith suggests there are

moments when an ideal speech situation can occur despite inequalities of power:

Dialogue does not require egalitarian relationships, but it does entail some sort of reciprocity and symmetry.... Problems of ideology and distortion can be addressed -- hegemony can never be complete. In the movement of social relations, actions and ideas still have to be justified, people have to talk and be convinced. For as long as people require others to do their bidding, or to join with them in some enterprise, there has to be conversation, otherwise they cannot hope to fully achieve their aims. *For subordinated groups the room for manoeuvre here may be small for much of the time, but in any system there are moments of crisis and dysfunction where voice takes on new meaning and levers can be placed under oppressors' positions.*<sup>50</sup> (Italics mine)

The Night and Stonechild cases and their consequences, such as the inquiry, justice commission, protests, and media attention, constitute just such a moment of crisis and dysfunction *where voice takes on new meaning and levers can be placed under oppressors' positions*. The Police Chief's willingness to offer Salzl's participation and allow the screening on the police building arises directly from this crisis and the chief's need to repair relations between the Aboriginal population and the Saskatoon Police Service. The City of Saskatoon has its own need to build positive relationships with the Aboriginal population, which is the fastest growing urban subgroup. The City's 2003 corporate plan highlights the need to "strengthen relationships with Aboriginal communities" in the areas of housing initiatives, employment and training, orientation services for new Aboriginal residents, and formal meetings between City Council and the Saskatoon Tribal Council and the Saskatoon Metis Council.<sup>51</sup> The local situation has potential for fostering an ideal speech situation.

Habermas claims that there is within our structures of communicating a "stubbornly transcending power," which is a claim to reason:<sup>52</sup> "The claims each and every statement has to make as to its own validity hold some possibility of dialogue and hence of furthering understanding."<sup>53</sup> The "Bridges" project is formally set up as a type

of dialogic structure involving both visual perceptions and speech, an enactment of the swan/ballerina metaphor. The video technology is handed over to the participants in the kind of theatrical act of empowerment envisioned by Brazilian activist Augusto Boal, wherein those who are normally the consumers of spectacular media, or the objects of its gaze, become first-person subjects.<sup>54</sup>

However, as I argued above, Salzl and Heimbecker represent the limits of accepted discourse within the local political environment of Saskatoon. Salzl represents the interests of Chief Sabo and the Saskatoon Police Service. Heimbecker, in her role as cultural manager, is dependent on positive relations with other ideological, political, and managerial elites in Saskatoon. Unlike the county board chair/homeless labourer pairing in “Moving Visions,” the two “Bridges” participants arguably have the same class interests. Chomsky’s notion is that the representatives of state and corporate power and the official intellectual opposition together establish the limits of accepted discourse. What neither will say constitutes the unrevealable; to speak it would be an unacceptable disruption to the implicit bargain between elites. It is only by shedding light on the unrevealable that citizens of a democratic society can hope to break through the powerful ideological structures upholding systems of inequality and oppression. So when examining “Bridges”, it is important to look at how the video deals with the most contentious of subject matter.

### **“Bridges” the video**

The video charts a mostly linear path through the day beginning with early morning ablutions, but that day is heavily edited by Canner to fit into an (approximately) one-hour screening time. It opens with a view of Heimbecker through the bathroom

mirror while her voice-over situates her as a Metis woman who grew up in “mainstream community [in Melfort, Saskatchewan and Victoria, British Columbia] where being Aboriginal wasn’t cool.” As an adult she met a group of artists who together created SNTC “to empower and motivate young Aboriginal people through the arts.” The view switches to Salzl’s morning routine. We watch him in the bathroom mirror while his voice briefly recounts his background as a small town Saskatchewan boy who grew up to be a police officer, and after three years of “responding to calls and catching bad guys, I felt there had to be better ways to reach young people.” This led him to become an Aboriginal Liaison officer. As Heimbecker drives to meet Salzl with the intention of “enter[ing] into Keith’s world in order to be a witness to his day,” her voice describes the Aboriginal-police situation in her own terms:

An Aboriginal man was taken and driven out of town by police officers and was left there to freeze to death in the cold of winter. So there have been other incidents in and around the city of Saskatoon where Aboriginal people have been found frozen to death.... And of course Aboriginal people are going to live in fear wondering, Oh my God, am I going to get taken in the back of a police car and get dropped off? So that’s the reality and the fear that they live with. So until we’re able to educate them and let them know that’s not the intent and purpose of the police department, then that’s what they end up thinking.

This is one of only two occasions when the issue of the freezing deaths is referred to directly.

Salzl’s drive to work parallels Heimbecker’s. He does not refer to the deaths, but frames the situation in his terms: “My job is to help build trust, and you build trust through friendships and relationships.” Salzl and Heimbecker meet outside the Saskatoon Police Service building, and some initial joking--Salzl assures Heimbecker she doesn’t have to worry about getting a parking ticket--establishes the cordial relationship that they maintain throughout the day.

They first meet with Chief Sabo, who frames the situation his own way by referring to the “problems” since “Darrell Night was dropped off by two of our officers.” He does not mention the unsolved deaths by freezing. They discuss the Police Service’s attempts to recruit more Aboriginal officers and the creation of two Aboriginal Liaison officer positions, one of which Salzl occupies. Sabo and Heimbecker compliment each other on their respective programs: the Aboriginal Liaison program and SNTC’s work with youth.

After visiting Derksen at the White Buffalo Youth Lodge, Heimbecker and Salzl attend a meeting of the City’s race relations committee. The topic under discussion is a complaint by a local woman who achieved unwanted publicity after writing to independent member of parliament Jim Pankiw asking to be deleted from his mailing list. Pankiw had been mailing to constituents pamphlets that were widely regarded as racist and that, in this Aboriginal woman’s words, “were really causing emotional pain to the children.... The home should be a safe place. It’s not a safe place when you’re getting stuff like this in your mailbox.” Pankiw had then excerpted the woman’s letter, without her permission, in his next pamphlet. A committee member was sympathetic: “He’s a chronic problem. I guess all we can do is support another candidate in the next election.” Heimbecker and Salzl then visit Joe Duquette high school, the only all-Aboriginal high school in the city, and one which focuses on academics as well as emotional and spiritual healing. The school principal discusses with Heimbecker a student he thinks would benefit from SNTC. The video leads us to other activities in the participants’ day that highlight positive programs and developments for youth: a justice initiative that directs selected youth away from jail time, and SNTC’s Bannock Bistro, a drug- and alcohol-free

space planned for Aboriginal youth.

The sense of conversation and dialogue is most effective when the two participate in a talking circle at SNTC. Salzl is now entering Heimbecker's day. This is clearly her territory; the circle opens with prayer and a smudge. Heimbecker's parents are there, as well as Aboriginal lawyer Michelle le Clair Harding and some youth. Le Clair Harding speaks forcefully about justice issues she encounters in her practice, pointing out that Saskatchewan has the highest incarceration rate of youth in the Western world. She attributes this to the overcharging of Aboriginal youth, whom she claims are racially profiled by police. To the Saskatoon police, "driving while Indian, walking while Indian" are activities that constitute suspicious behaviour, le Clair Harding says.

When it is Salzl's turn, he mentions the 120,000 calls the Police Service receives per year: "Most of our work is not going out and finding the crime. We don't have the time for that. We're called there and that's why we're out there, to help people.... We get beat up more than any other police service that I know of." Salzl goes on to talk about the positive work he does with youth: "The things that I do don't make the news because they're not seen as exciting."

The speech acts of le Clair Harding and Salzl enact the wood carving metaphor: *So many times two groups of people or two individuals can look at the exact same thing and see something totally different, and if they could only switch places they might see something else. But the real truth is that nobody can see the whole picture.* Le Clair Harding perceives racial profiling and overcharging of Aboriginal youth; Salzl perceives a police service attempting to respond to 120,000 calls for help per year and being "beat up" and castigated by the press. To paraphrase Derksen, each one sees truth, they just

don't see all the truth. While it is questionable whether the exchange did result in each party being able to see the other's point of view (there is nothing in the video to make a claim either way), it does provide the viewer with the opportunity to identify and explore the distortions that may exist.

One of the participants in the talking circle, the Metis girl Nicole Saint Germain, exemplifies both the cost borne by individuals in a racially divisive culture and the potential for hope. Her speech act is the moment when the video touches an emotional chord. We see her through both Heimbecker's and Salzl's wearcams so all the visual cues are present for empathic identification by the viewer. Saint Germain talks about growing up Metis, and thus exposed to racism from "both sides." Incarcerated for the first time at age 13, she spent years living on the streets. She reports, "If my self-esteem was low, I'd go out and take somebody's self-esteem by assaulting them." She describes how a "door was opened" by anger management training, mediation, talking circles and teaching by Aboriginal elders, and then adds, "I am still searching for my identity. At SNTC I've been introduced to a lot of the cultural practices and ceremonies that otherwise would have been extremely uncomfortable or unavailable to me." Visibly crying, Saint Germain says, "I was raised with a lot of people telling me this is the way it is, and this is the way it's always going to be." Today she attends college and lives in her own apartment, two accomplishments she never imagined possible before.

A moment of pathos occurs after the talking circle when an Aboriginal man approaches Salzl to talk about how he has tried for years to get into the RCMP but is never accepted. He casually reveals that he has a couple of DUIs (driving under the influence) and was charged with resisting arrest (a fight with a police officer which he

calls a “learning experience”). The man seems oblivious to the likely reason behind his rejection for police training. His story reveals the complexity of even a seemingly straightforward proposed solution to the police-Aboriginal issues: increasing the number of Aboriginal officers.

An interesting conversation occurs when Salzl comes to Heimbecker’s house for supper with her family. The discussion turns to the residential school experience and the effects of the Indian Act. The family’s elder, Mary, recounts the following story: “My father died when he was 105. And he had said, ‘What they do is come with a big truck--a cattle truck or something--and pick up my little children from the reserve. My mom was six years old. They’re taking them to Duck Lake at this point.’” Speaking of her mother’s experience, Mary continues, “First they cut her hair off, stopped her from speaking her language; no wonder she was so angry.” Donna eventually responds that they’ll be there all night if they talk about the whole history of colonization. I was left with the sense that this conversation was cut short by Heimbecker. Wodiczko’s phrase “post-traumatic silence” perhaps explains the lack of direct and extended discussion of certain issues in the “Bridges” video. Wodiczko says the process of unlocking this silence requires not only critical but clinical approaches.<sup>55</sup> The “Bridges” screening must be an act of critical attention and also of healing. The unwillingness to delve into potentially contentious subject matter is perhaps symptomatic of some of the project’s contradictions and the limits placed on discourse. It is also a sign that the process of healing, like the project of democracy, is an unfinished one.

Canner’s intention was to create intercultural bridges between police and Aboriginal communities. The project’s intention could therefore be at odds with raising

subject matter that might be divisive, including conflictual histories of colonialism. At the same time, Canner had a strong background in dealing with controversial subject matter and had no wish to produce a video that appeared to cover up harsh realities. She talks about how some of her original expectations for the project were confounded after the day of shooting: “I think initially I was wrestling with the footage because, by chance, because of the work that Donna does and the work that Keith does, especially the work that Donna does because she’s dealing with high risk youth, that a lot of the stories we were collecting and what was happening was reinforcing stereotypes in some way.” The footage ran the risk of creating the impression that Saskatoon has many Aboriginal youth in need of uplifting programs which are being provided by the “Bridges” participants: Heimbecker, Salzl, Doug Derksen, teachers at Joe Duquette High School, and so on. Canner wanted to provide a context for the information, something that would shed light on why so many Aboriginal youth are considered ‘at risk.’ So she and Heimbecker decided to shoot an interview with an Aboriginal elder, Ernie Poundmaker, at a later date and edit it into the video.

Poundmaker’s contribution balances the depictions of helping and healing with the realities of the neo-colonial city: “There are some things that go on in this town that I think would horrify a lot of people. And I think it did,” he says at the end of “Bridges.”

It got to the point where the average Joe out there really began to question the police force here and their integrity. The people being driven out of town. People don’t talk about it a lot, but there were a lot of beatings and things that happened. A lot of brutality towards Indian people. Intimidation. So it was a flashpoint and I think it was an awakening. But we can change that. We can heal that. We can fix that... We’re going to educate maybe the Saskatoon Police Service about how to deal with us.

The video ends with a young Aboriginal woman holding her baby and singing

“Amazing Grace”: “I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.” A young man enters the scene and completes the family tableau. “Bridges” ends on this hopeful note.

Augusto Boal in his *Theater of the Oppressed* proposes that Aristotelian and Hegelian conceptions of theatre see it as “a purging of the spectator’s ‘antiestablishment characteristics’;” in contrast, the political theatre of Bertolt Brecht “clarifies concepts, reveals truths, exposes contradictions, and proposes transformations.”<sup>56</sup> There is a danger in “Bridges” that the hopeful final words of Poundmaker (“We can fix that.”), combined with the positive programs discussed, and the mother-and-child conclusion, instil in the viewer the “quiet somnolence at the end of the spectacle” desired by Aristotle on behalf of state order, rather than the “beginning of action” desired by Brecht. The danger is that the video returns a sense of equilibrium; yes, things were bad, but good and well-intentioned people are working to make things better. Against this, Brecht believed that “the equilibrium should be sought by transforming society, and not by purging the individual of his just demands and needs.”<sup>57</sup> Boal’s proposition takes political theatre even further into activism, a “poetics of the oppressed” in which the spectator participates in the theatre so that by reassuming a protagonist function there, he or she assumes this function in society.<sup>58</sup>

Certainly “Bridges” develops formal mechanisms that give a member of the Aboriginal community a protagonist function. When Heimbecker dons the wearcam she begins the Boalian project of tearing down the wall between actor and spectator. She controls the spectacle to a large degree, and it is her perspective that comprises half the video. However, Boal’s poetics enacted revolutionary *live* theatre in which interactivity

with the larger audience was crucial. The nature of video technology prohibits interactivity in the way Boal envisioned because the audience cannot interrupt and intervene. Heimbecker and Salzl have dual roles: empowered first-person protagonists in their own production, and actors watched on screen by a passive viewing audience.

We empathize with all the characters, from the beleaguered police officer to the young Metis girl in the talking circle. Boal denounced empathy as “the most dangerous weapon in the entire arsenal of the theater and related arts (movies and TV).”<sup>59</sup> He says, “Its mechanism (sometimes insidious) consists in the juxtaposition of two people (one fictitious and another real), two universes, making one of those two people (the real one, the spectator) surrender to the other (the fictitious one, the character) his power of making decisions. The *man* relinquishes his power of decision to the *image*.”<sup>60</sup> “Bridges” does not present fictitious characters; however, they function as virtual image and as characters to the audience. We know they are real, but their presence is a media illusion. Their mediatized being is framed by decisions made by a variety of individuals, the artist’s editing process, and the exigencies of filming. The larger audience cannot interact with them during their performance as in Boal’s interventions.

These contradictions might have severely limited the effectiveness of “Bridges” were it not for an important element that complicates the project and upsets any promise of equilibrium: site.

### **Site and space**

The Saskatoon Police Service building’s reflective windows keep us from seeing within; the panoptic gaze is normally turned outward as police control the surveillance mechanisms of society. When the “Bridges” video appears on its façade, there is a sense

of incongruity. The camera, bearing its burdensome history of surveillance technology and colonial othering, is in the hands of a representative of the police force and a representative of the colonized. Both visual perspectives are given equal time, sometimes appearing singularly and sometimes dually in a split-screen image. There is parity of voice and perception through formal artistic means. Canner is literally and metaphorically projecting an alternative vision of equality onto an edifice of power and authority.

The translucent image is a kind of window into the lives of Salzl, Heimbecker and others who participated in their day of filming. The window offers conflicting views of both the Saskatoon Police Service and Aboriginal people, sometimes confirming stereotypes, sometimes contradicting them. The act of screening proposes many questions that are not necessarily raised explicitly in the video itself.

Now the police are under a kind of surveillance. We stand in front of the edifice with unanswered questions. We consider what it means to temporarily inscribe a democratic vision on the walls housing this instrument of state power. We wonder what those still inside, invisible to us, think about what we are doing out here on the street. I cannot help thinking about the Aboriginal men who died of hypothermia on the outskirts of Saskatoon. They are referred to only twice during the video. The fact that no one has been held accountable for their deaths is not mentioned at all; but that is the issue that seems to hang in the interstice between artwork and site.

There is a sense of discomfort. The positive feelings created by the video are confounded; there is horror in the knowledge that these walls may harbour those who committed crimes against Aboriginal men. The fact that this is implied in the act of

intervention, rather than stated didactically, increases its effectiveness. At every moment when we are tempted to accept the conciliatory tone of the video, we are pulled back by the heaviness of the edifice and its implication of dark secrets. The intervention into public space *claims this as public space*, obliquely demanding accountability. This is how “Bridges”, as public art, successfully performs a democratizing function.

The use of architecture as a projection site gestures towards Foucault’s notion of power in Western societies, in which power reproduces itself in official discourses created and maintained by Western knowledge structures and flows through institutions, such as those of learning, medicine, and law and order.<sup>61</sup> Architecture is the physical form embodying institutional power within the city. Wodiczko sees architecture as a medium of power that can be unmasked and revealed through a night time projection, “when the building, undisturbed by its daily function, is asleep and when its body dreams of itself.”<sup>62</sup> The projection is a “symbol attack. A public, psychoanalytical séance” which “reveals the contradictions of the environment and the events actually taking place there.”<sup>63</sup> In a neo-colonial city like Saskatoon, the urban socio-geography tends to fragment groups and isolate communities. The opportunities for communication across these boundaries are few and difficult. Speaking of his own work in cities around the world, Wodiczko says,

In this situation art is a critical practice. In the urban context artists find their place in the building of new communication or rebuilding communication. This general agenda needs very different, specific forms of activity, whether they are performance pieces, counter-design projects, or projections. Whatever the work, it doesn’t matter, it should be an ongoing process to question what is happening in the city and engage the architectural forms of the city and space itself into the purposes of communication, so the issues of the city, the issues of life, and experiences of the city are projected on the urban structures.<sup>64</sup>

Often the local liberal reaction to Aboriginal issues is, “They have to find their

own solutions,” an attitude that on the one hand acknowledges an Aboriginal right of agency and on the other denies the responsibility of the dominant culture to participate. Moreover, this attitude completely obfuscates the possibility that the problem might lie in the fabric of mainstream society itself, in its racism and its colonially-derived systems of knowledge and institutions of power. The “Bridges” projection elliptically points to this interpretation. While the video itself concentrates on solutions to issues of youth and trust in police, the imposition of the video on the architecture (in a metaphorical sense) of state authority returns attention to the mechanisms of political power.

My analysis of the project’s potential effectiveness as a public art intervention is based partly on temporal contingencies. If the Stonechild Inquiry had not been ongoing at the time of the screening, if the deaths of the Aboriginal men had been solved satisfactorily and those responsible brought to justice, then the projection would very likely have come off as a successful public relations event for the Saskatoon Police Service signalling a new attitude towards Aboriginal relations. However, all was not well with the Saskatoon Police Service, despite the affability of Salzl’s reality performance. It was the contradictions of the environment and the events actually taking place there that gave the event its *frisson*, potentially inciting that sense of dissatisfaction with the existing state of things which is the beginning of activism. As an art event, “Bridges” appeared at the rather productive moment when both sides were willing to tackle a joint project focusing on their relations with one another. And yet, in apparent contradiction to this cooperative spirit, silence, secrecy and intimations of a virulent racism interject their uneasy strains. As the screen fades to black, the Saskatoon Police Service building stands solid and unchanged by the temporal disturbance. Or is it? The project interrogates the

contradictions and complexities of this local situation in ways both subtle and penetrating.

If a public art project is to be successful it must raise critical consciousness in the audience. In public art, audience is as much a part of the work as any of its formal elements. It is also the most difficult to control, predict, or measure in terms of effectiveness without the aid of a sociological analysis, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. My concluding comments on audience are therefore highly speculative.

### **Audience**

Of all the aspects of the “Bridges” project, audience is the most problematic. The dialogue taking place in the video presented an opportunity to generate a parallel dialogue among the audience members on the street. Canner said, “It’s about hoping that the people who are watching the projection will meet each other and talk and that there’ll even become just within the audience some form of civic engagement. So it’s this idea of the viewer not watching something in a dark theatre where they’re very isolated in their own little seat or at home isolated, but actually getting the public out to watch something outside in a public arena, and hoping that will generate some kind of dialogue.”<sup>65</sup> In Wodiczko’s words, “It becomes clear that if those people (in a projection) can say something, if the monument can speak, then perhaps the public in turn can also do something. There is some possibility of spreading the contagious process of unnerving, irritating, and interrupting the passivity and total silence of the city.”<sup>66</sup> The event was advertised with a promotional article in the city newspaper as well as interviews with Moffat on radio and television prior to the screening. However, news media did not turn out for the event itself and there were no reviews in the local papers.<sup>67</sup> The low turnout

for the event, between 60 and 100 people, leads me to the conclusion that many Saskatoon residents do not want to be unnerved, irritated and interrupted.

The “silence of the city” is not a pregnant silence anticipating interruption; it is a tacitly agreed upon silence, broken only by unavoidable news reports and official inquiries involving limited participants. The silence is held together by many things, chief among them a normalized racism that avoids challenge, a fear of direct or indirect violence, and the limits of acceptable discourse in Saskatoon. One comment I heard went something like this: “We know all this stuff,” expressing the feeling that the project rehashed information already familiar to Saskatoon residents. Sort of a “yes, but so what?” Much of the audience consisted of the local arts community interested in the project as part of the overall programming of SPASM II. Canner saw the police as the main intended audience, but there were few police officers in attendance and subsequent events suggest that the project did not raise critical consciousness among them.

Six months after the “Bridges” event, Aboriginal-police relations again grabbed headlines with the police reaction to the Stonechild Inquiry findings, which resulted in no criminal charges but the firing of two officers. The firings were ordered by Police Chief Sabo, who, as we have seen, has an interest in improving Aboriginal-police relations. However, the rank and file unanimously supported the fired officers in a police union vote that constituted a kind of public mutiny against Sabo.<sup>68</sup> Canner’s previous project pairing a homeless day labourer and the county board chair had direct and positive consequences in the form of a decision by the county board to allocate money to ameliorate conditions for the homeless. In contrast, “Bridges” appeared to have no effect on the situation. The outcome can be seen as evidence of the depth of the problem: the

inadequacy of the public art project to address serious and deep-seated attitudes, and, in Justice David H. Wright's words (in concluding comments about the Stonechild case), the "chasm that separates Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in this city and province."<sup>69</sup>

There had been some talk prior to the screening about arranging more formal opportunities for facilitated dialogue, for example between police and youth in the audience, but due to time and resource limitations this did not occur. The time and resource constraints on Canner and Moffat became significant barriers to fully developing the audience aspect of the project. For example, Moffat mentioned that invitations to police officers were late and inadequately distributed.<sup>70</sup> A scheduling conflict posed a barrier to better Aboriginal participation in the audience because a major Aboriginal cultural event was taking place elsewhere. If more time and resources had been available to develop audience, it is possible that the project might have been more effective.

In critical writing about public art, the question of audience is vital. Public art causes artists and critics to look closely at what is meant by the concept of 'public(s)' and 'audience(s)'. Independent curator Mary Jane Jacob writes, "This work [activist public art] changed the definition of art as we have known it in this century by bringing the community into the creative process as coauthor, rejecting the modernist notion of the artist as sole heroic artistic genius, and returning art to its communal origins, especially as evidenced in non-Western traditions. As public art shifted from large-scale art objects, to physically or conceptually site-specific projects, to audience-specific concerns (work made in response to those who occupy a given site), it moved from an aesthetic function ,

to a design function, to a social function.”<sup>71</sup> As a result, Jacob says, the role of public art can be seen as one of stabilizing communities, improving society, contributing to quality of life and saving lives.<sup>72</sup> However, as can be seen from the “Bridges” project, the roles of artist and audience are far from clear cut and unproblematic.

Critic Patricia C. Phillips likens the concept of public participation in social-change oriented public art projects to Maryland State Board of Education’s controversial decision to legislate community work as part of students’ high school curriculum.<sup>73</sup> Enforced volunteerism will fail to instill the values of democratic participation that it is designed to foster, its critics say. Likewise, public art may be expecting too much from audiences that might not be interested in volunteering their participation. In discussing the difficulties of identifying and coalescing an audience for public art, Phillips says, “How can one expect to have an engaged audience for a work when there are so few strategies to galvanize new publics other than rigid mandates, self-conscious means, and exhausted models of volunteerism... Where does the audience for public art come from if public life is so dangerously depleted?”<sup>74</sup> In trying to avoid too much controversy, public art can become “just another piece of evidence, another confirmation, of the fatigue of public life and the loss of urban vitality.”<sup>75</sup> Phillips says that the most promising public art is one in which artists “assist in the construction of a public--to encourage, through actions, ideas, and interventions, a participatory audience where none seemed to exist”; the formation of audience therefore becomes “the method and objective, the generative intention and the final outcome.”<sup>76</sup> This moves the artist even more in the direction of social catalyser because it may require long-term strategies in order to affect the dynamics of public life in local communities in an enduring way. Moffat discusses this

when she says, “I think it [the “Bridges” project] has more layers to be dug into than Liz was able to get at, or that I was able to even facilitate Liz to get at. And I don’t think I could have gotten deeper. If I had only been working on this project for two years, then it would have been possible to go deeper and further.”<sup>77</sup> Moffat then suggests that perhaps “something [is] better than nothing,” and that at least projects of this kind raise questions, undertake educational work, and begin a process of changing people’s perceptions that could be a sort of “butterfly effect,” possibly contributing in a way towards a greater goal.<sup>78</sup> The artist as social agent must be evaluated within a different time frame, and within a view of art as the production of, in Phillips’ words, “insistent gestures” and “many small incursions.”<sup>79</sup>

An analysis of audience seems to show a generally lacklustre response to “Bridges.” Is this due to faulty planning for the “construction of a public”? Is the local culture of silence surrounding issues of racism so pervasive that audience is recalcitrant rather than participatory? Is the poor turnout a passive rejection of dialogue by Saskatoon residents who register their *no* vote by failing to show up? I would argue that all these factors inhibited the audience response to “Bridges.” But, on the other hand, it does not mean that the work failed. As Phillips says, “Art requires a new reading that accepts the work--production--as the site of praxis and meaning. Not an empirical, direct cause-and-effect process, public art cannot be endorsed or refuted by quantifiable data... In this difficult, uncertain, but perhaps hopeful time of change, public art needs to be a more modest, transitional, revisable, and sustained activity in communities.”<sup>80</sup>

The “Bridges” project runs counter to the parts of Saskatoon culture that are founded on colonial values. The project represents parity between Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal voices; it proposes that those voices inhabit the same space; it challenges the historical view of the police as bringers of justice to the West; it suggests that the locus of racial problems in the urban environment is within white society; it encourages dialogue; it draws attention to secrets; it resists offering easy solutions; it presents conflicting views of reality.

The colonial inhabitant as a cultural-political construction was not merely superior to the Native, but inhabited an entirely different space, intellectually, morally and physically (through the reserve system or through ghettoization). Therefore, to fully absorb the complexities and contradictions of “Bridges” would pose a crisis of identity for the inheritor of colonial values. Embedded in this crisis is the threat of incommensurability. Any emphasis on cultural difference that is not framed within the familiar colonial binary raises fears that cultural antagonisms are not subject to resolution. The root of this anxiety is that unresolved cultural antagonisms can only end in violent confrontation, a not-unfounded fear considering the history of the twentieth century.

The final scene in “Bridges” showed, not an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal joined in song, but a young Aboriginal family, a reminder that Aboriginal women are having children at double the rate of non-Aboriginal women. The Aboriginal population neither died out (as the Americans predicted) nor did it fully assimilate (as the Canadian government attempted). The spectre of a minority population growing at double the rate of the majority haunts the neo-colonial mind. Indigenous struggles for land and rights elsewhere in Canada, such as the defence of native land in Oka, Quebec, and the dispute at Ipperwash Provincial Park, Ontario have both resulted in violence and death.<sup>81</sup>

Therefore, there is not only the fear, but indeed the reality, of violent contestation over land, resources, and power.

However, the above supposition falls into the very universalistic constructions and binaries of thought that I am critiquing. Homi Bhabha questions the “timid traditionalism” of the Left, “always trying to read a new situation in terms of some pre-given model or paradigm, which is a reactionary reflex, a conservative ‘mindset.’ ” Against addressing people as “colossal, undifferentiated collectivities of class, race, gender or nation” Bhabha says, “The concept of a people is not ‘given’, as an essential, class-determined, unitary, homogenous part of society *prior to a politics*; ‘the people’ are there as a process of political articulation and political negotiation across a whole range of contradictory social sites. ‘The people’ always exist as a multiple form of identification, waiting to be created and constructed.”<sup>82</sup> The “Bridges” project can be interpreted as implying a “third space” which enables other positions to emerge. Bhabha says, “This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.”<sup>83</sup> This strikes me as an important notion to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of Canner’s project. “Bridges” is perhaps gesturing towards that imminent third space.

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<sup>1</sup> The following vignette is reconstructed from an actual experience.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Hill, *The Opening of the Canadian West* (Don Mills: Academic Press Canada, 1967) 252.

<sup>3</sup> Hill, 252.

<sup>4</sup> *Welcome to 1910 Boomtown, Saskatoon*, Brochure (Saskatoon: Western Development Museum, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Hill, 261.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, 209.

<sup>7</sup> The funding secured meant that Canner's residency was of shorter duration than desired.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen Moffat, conversation with the author, 8 June 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Moffat.

<sup>10</sup> Moffat did not wish to identify the particular group.

<sup>11</sup> Moffat.

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<sup>12</sup> Moffat.

<sup>13</sup> Moffat.

<sup>14</sup> Moffat.

<sup>15</sup> *Legacy of Hope: An Agenda for Change*, Vol. 1, Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform, 21 June 2004. Chapter 5, 6.

<sup>16</sup> See Stella Bignell's testimony in Honourable Mr. Justice David H. Wright, Commissioner, *Commission of Inquiry Into Matters Relating to the Death of Neil Stonechild* (Regina: Queen's Printers, 2004) [www.stonechildinquiry.ca](http://www.stonechildinquiry.ca).

<sup>17</sup> Locally, the practise has been dubbed "Starlight Tours," suggesting that Night's experience was not a singular event.

<sup>18</sup> "Aboriginal Peoples of Canada," Statistics Canada, 2001.  
<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/abor/canada.cfm#5>. [accessed 29 Sept. 2005]

<sup>19</sup> Aboriginal census data includes treaty Indians, registered Indians, Métis and Inuit.

<sup>20</sup> "A Profile of Saskatoon's Aboriginal Population," *Populace: A Bi-annual Publication of Concise Information about Saskatoon*, Vol. 3, Issue 1 (Saskatoon: City Planning Branch, Spring 2001) 1.

<sup>21</sup> "Housing Issues in the Inner City," *Populace: A Bi-annual Publication of Concise Information about Saskatoon*, Vol. 4, Issue 2 (Saskatoon: City Planning Branch, Fall 2002) 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Legacy of Hope*, Chapter 5, 9-12.

<sup>23</sup> *Legacy of Hope*, Chapter 5, 25.

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<sup>24</sup> The report states: “There is no doubt that racism does exist. However, the Commission has also heard that most police officers perform their duties with fairness and professionalism regardless of the race of the person they are dealing with. Nevertheless, the Commission has concluded that racism in police services does exist and is a major contributor to the environment of mistrust and misunderstanding that exists in Saskatchewan.” *Legacy of Hope*, Chapter 5, 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Legacy of Hope*, Chapter 5, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Brigid Ward, “Building Empire in the West: Children’s Schoolbooks from the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” unpublished paper, 31 March 2004, 1. This material was used with the permission of Brigid Ward who did the research as an undergraduate student for Prof. Keith Bell’s “Picturing the West” art history class at the University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>27</sup> Ward, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Ward, 19-20.

<sup>29</sup> See for example, Bruce R. Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> *Legacy of Hope*, Chapter 5, 8.

<sup>31</sup> As Aboriginal people regain self-determinacy, they choose to build separate organizational and institutional structures, a signal of white society’s failure to change its own entrenched ways of being. I am thinking here of the First Nations University, Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, Joe Duquette High School, Wanuskewin Heritage Park, restorative justice programs, and the myriad of political-cultural organizations that represent and provide programming for First Nations or Métis people. The need for an FSIN Special Investigations Unit is a prime example; its creation highlighted the underreporting by Aboriginal people of justice-system abuse to the existing Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP and the Saskatchewan Police Commission.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Mark Vallen, “Krzysztof Wodiczko: Illuminating Contradictions,” *Art for A*

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Change, Web site, <http://www.art-for-a-change.com/Krzysztof/krzy.htm> [accessed 11 June 2004].

<sup>33</sup> Liz Canner, Conversation with the Author, 24 May 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 6.

<sup>35</sup> The following biographical section is based on information provided to the author by Liz Canner.

<sup>36</sup> Steve Mann, "Smart Clothing: the Wearable Computer and WearCam," <http://n1nlf-1.eecg.toronto.edu/personaltechnologies/> [accessed 8 July 2005].

<sup>37</sup> *Symphony of a City*, [www.symphonyofacity.org](http://www.symphonyofacity.org)

<sup>38</sup> Canner.

<sup>39</sup> Canner.

<sup>40</sup> Canner.

<sup>41</sup> Canner.

<sup>42</sup> *Race, the Floating Signifier, Featuring Stuart Hall*, dir. Sut Jhally, the Media Education Foundation, 1996.

<sup>43</sup> Noam Chomsky, "Interview," *The Chomsky Reader*, ed. James Peck (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987) 44.

<sup>44</sup> Chomsky, "Interview," *The Chomsky Reader*, 45.

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<sup>45</sup> Chomsky, “The Manufacture of Consent,” *The Chomsky Reader*, ed. James Peck (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987).

<sup>46</sup> All quotes and references to the video are from “Bridges,” dir. Liz Canner, a co-production of Astrea Media and *paved Art + New Media*, Saskatoon, Sask., 2004.

<sup>47</sup> From conversations with the artist.

<sup>48</sup> Mark K. Smith, “Dialogue and Conversation,” *Infed*, <http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-dialog.htm>, first published July 1996, last updated 14 Feb. 2004, 4. [accessed 6 Feb. 2004].

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Smith, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, 4.

<sup>51</sup> City of Saskatoon, *Corporate Business Plan*, March 2003, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Smith, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Urizen Books, 1979).

<sup>55</sup> Elise S. Youn and Maria J. Prieto, “Interview with Krzysztof Wodiczko: Making Critical Public Space,” *agglutinations.com*, 11 April 2004, <http://agglutinations.com/archives/000035.html> [accessed 11 July 2004] 2.

<sup>56</sup> Boal, 106.

<sup>57</sup> Boal, 106.

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<sup>58</sup> Boal, 119.

<sup>59</sup> Boal, 113.

<sup>60</sup> Boal, 113.

<sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Mark Vallen, "Krzysztof Wodiczko: Illuminating Contradictions," *Art for a Change*, <http://www.art-for-a-change.com/Krzysztof/krzy.htm> [accessed July 11 2004] 2.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Vallen, 2.

<sup>64</sup> "Pataphysics Magazine Interview with Krzysztof Wodiczko, 1991, from the Kitten issue. [http://www.pataphysicsmagazine.com/Wodiczko\\_interview.html](http://www.pataphysicsmagazine.com/Wodiczko_interview.html) [accessed July 11 2004] 2.

<sup>65</sup> Canner.

<sup>66</sup> Youn and Prieto, 2.

<sup>67</sup> A review written by the present author appeared in a national arts magazine: Maureen Latta, "Liz Canner," *BorderCrossings* 23:3, August 2004, 125.

<sup>68</sup> Katherine Harding, "Two Police Officers Fired in Stonechild Case," *Canadian Press*, 13 November 2004, A16, found at Resist.ca, <http://resist.ca/story/2004/11/14/91345/929> [accessed 11 July 2005].

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Harding.

<sup>70</sup> Moffat.

<sup>71</sup> Mary Jane Jacob, "Outside the Loop," *Culture in Action*, ed. Mary Jane Jacob, Michael Brenson, and Eva M. Olson (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) 55.

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<sup>72</sup> Jacob, 55.

<sup>73</sup> Patricia C. Phillips, "Public Constructions," *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) 61.

<sup>74</sup> Phillips, 64-65.

<sup>75</sup> Phillips, 65.

<sup>76</sup> Phillips, 67.

<sup>77</sup> Moffat.

<sup>78</sup> Moffat.

<sup>79</sup> Phillips, 68-69.

<sup>80</sup> Phillips, 68-69.

<sup>81</sup> Oka: On 11 July 1990 a Quebec provincial police officer, Corporal Marcel Lemay was killed in a land rights dispute. Ipperwash: On 6 September 1995, Dudley George, a Chippewa from Stoney Point, was killed by police in a land rights dispute.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," *Identity and Consciousness: (Re)presenting the Self*, organized by Sheila Petty, Regina: Dunlop Art Gallery, 1991 (12-17) 17.

<sup>83</sup> Rutherford, 13.

## FAHRENHEIT 9/11: MICHAEL MOORE'S CRITICAL STRATEGIES

### Introduction

Returning to Saskatoon from a European trip, I stopped to visit family in Toronto and excitedly told them all about the magnificent prehistoric temples I had visited in Malta, megalithic structures predating the Egyptian pyramids and Stonehenge. One family member appeared sceptical. "Why haven't I heard about them?" she asked. I tried to explain that while the media is saturated with images of the pyramids, for whatever reason the temples at Malta have not had much air time. She did not seem entirely convinced. The incident made me realize how much 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Western cultural understandings of reality are derived through media representations, and also how unaware most people are about the predominant role representation plays in their mental constructions of the real. Everybody accepts that there is such a place as China, even though most Westerners have never been there. We accept its existence unreservedly because we have seen media representations of it. If I deconstruct the question, "Why haven't I heard about them?" I conclude that the question does not relate to word-of-mouth reports of the temples' existence, but rather to an existence within the data sphere, the virtual space of television, cinema, print media and now the Internet, which is largely responsible for our understanding of reality. In fact, the temples do have a web presence, but "Why haven't I heard about them?" implies the more passive role of information receiver (mainstream television and movie watcher) not the active role of researcher (Internet searcher).

In fact, I might not have known of the Malta temples myself if I had not seen a National Film Board Studio D documentary, *The Goddess Remembered*, available in

public library video holdings. This is what made the temples “real” to me, and caused me eventually to want to travel to Malta to explore them for myself.

This connection between representation and our assumptions about what is real occupies me as I begin to explore the political significance of occlusions from representation within mainstream culture. My point here is that representations of life and life as a lived experience are causally interwoven. Just as representations are shaped by material reality, so too is material existence shaped through representation. Documentary representations, in particular due to their indexical nature,<sup>1</sup> are a crucial form of praxis for those activist/artists who are committed to social and political change. The authoritarian impulse is to shape the understanding of reality for a passively consuming public by constructing narratives mainly through images, words, innuendo, and juxtapositions in the media. Together, government public relations, corporate advertising, and mainstream media co-create an ideological underpinning that assists in the reproduction of the status quo. It is as often what is left out of this narrative as what is included that influences a society’s sense of reality. The narrative constructed from these diverse forms of societal power is far from seamless or uncontested, and bears many contradictions. I am speaking here of the Gramscian notion of the hegemonic: “that reciprocally confirming yet always contested realm of ideas and values that reinforces the relations of domination and subordination within society.”<sup>2</sup>

Within this context, the activist artist’s most powerful role may be to create a counter-narrative, to work against the hegemonic constructions of reality, to determine the media in which they have been constructed, to unmask those in authority who are creating these constructions, to show how the construction is made, and to present an

alternative narrative from a radically different point of view. The capitalist democracy offers gaps, or windows of opportunity to test the limits of democracy, through which counter-hegemonic voices can be heard (as already discussed in Chomsky). The most significant lesson for me in the conversation about the Maltese temples is that when people do not see or hear about something in a form they implicitly trust (i.e. media images), they assume it does not exist. Even hearing about it from a presumably reliable observer (me) was not sufficient to immediately unseat accepted notions.

Informed and adept cultural producers can use the media as a tool to speak truth to power in the sense that Edward W. Said means when he discusses the subject in the fifth of his 1993 Reith Lectures, “Speaking Truth to Power.” Intellectuals arrive, with difficulty, at their truth by researching a situation to the best of their ability, then “comparing the known and available facts with a norm, also known and available... The goal of speaking the truth is, in so administered a mass society as ours, mainly to project a better state of affairs and one that corresponds more closely to a set of moral principles—peace, reconciliation, abatement of suffering--applied to the known facts.”<sup>3</sup> The documentary film can be a powerful tool for such a person whose aim is “not to show everyone how right one is but rather to try to induce a change in the moral climate whereby aggression is seen as such, the unjust punishment of peoples or individuals is either prevented or given up, the recognition of rights and democratic freedoms is established as a norm for everyone, not invidiously for a select few.”<sup>4</sup> The power of documentary is derived partly from the subjective truth-speaking of the filmmaker who, to paraphrase the pioneering 1920s Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov, deciphers the world anew.<sup>5</sup>

Documentary as a tool for social change dates back to the early days of indexical representation when Danish photographer Jacob Riis organized small lectures illustrated with lantern slides showing the appalling conditions immigrants endured living in New York's East side in the 1880s. Between 1904 and 1918 Lewis Hine photographed for publication the life of newly arrived immigrants and the exploited poor to raise public awareness of the social conditions among working class people, and in the process developed a new style of depiction that by the 1930s would be called documentary. Work by Riis and Hine is typically written about as taking place within a progressive stance of reform, proposing correctives to the capitalist system in order to alleviate the suffering which is its by-product and also to mitigate social conflict.<sup>6</sup> Their critical but hopeful stance held up dire images of reality against American values of equality, justice and progress to influence public opinion and highlight legislative changes, such as child labour laws, that could ameliorate conditions. The assumption was that an enlightened public would support improvements after being exposed to evidence, particularly visual evidence, of its necessity.

With the advent of the moving image, John Grierson became the prime mover behind documentary in Britain and Canada during the 1930s and 40s, shaping the way documentary filmmaking developed through his work overseeing film for Britain's Empire Marketing Board and as founder of Canada's National Film Board. The conventional view of Grierson as a left-wing populist who used documentary filmmaking to help citizens make better decisions in a democratic society is disputed in Joyce Nelson's reevaluation of Grierson's work during the 1920s through World War II, *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend*. On the contrary, "Grierson's thinking

was aligned with those multinational interests; he saw them as a possible way of bringing peace, global harmony, and economic order into a potentially chaotic and disordered global situation.”<sup>7</sup> The many films Grierson oversaw that depicted workers were far from an expression of Communist sympathies. Rather they were an attempt to bring labour into the “manufacture of consent” (to quote Walter Lippmann who had a significant influence on Grierson) needed for capitalist society to function smoothly. Lippman, in his seminal books, *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925) recognized the role for mass media in the formation of public opinion. His belief, which Nelson argues Grierson shared, was that society was divided into men of action and the “bewildered herd” whose role was and should be as spectators of action.<sup>8</sup>

Nelson says, “I think what Grierson brilliantly recognized at the time was that, in the midst of significant challenges to modern capitalism brought on by both the Soviet revolution and the stock market crash, there was a need to portray the working class, and colonized labour, in ways that would maintain the status quo. To leave labour undepicted on film would be to ignore a significant sector whose consent was necessary to the unfolding of capitalism’s next stage.”<sup>9</sup> According to Nelson, the documentary movement of the 1930s under Grierson’s direction was not even reformist in the sense that it sought to encourage changes to improve conditions for the working class under capitalism. Instead, it was devoted to changing the attitudes of the working public itself about its own role in the economic order.

Any contemporary activist documentary work must be undertaken within an awareness of a critical reevaluation of the documentary form. Filmmakers such as Trinh T. Minh-Ha developed critical and reflexive strategies to explore and expose the politics of

representation. Her work cuts across several boundaries--fiction, documentary, experimental films, theory--and offers a plurality of messages to the viewer while disrupting the grand narratives of the human sciences, particularly those constructed by ethnography. Films such as *Reassemblage* (1982) and *Naked Spaces--Living is Round* (1985) deal with the notion of film as a critical process of constructing meaning. Minh-Ha says, "For power to maintain its credibility--or for the 'fake' to look 'real' (that is, for the 'real' to go on unchallenged), as cinema dictates--its workings must remain invisible."<sup>10</sup> Exposing the workings of the cinematic form of documentary, Minh-Ha decisively breaks with any notion that documentary can or should be neutral or objective. By problematizing the genre, her films generated new terms from critics such as the "personal film," "personal documentary," and "subjective documentary," but Minh-Ha's discussion of her own work shows that such terms fall into an illusory binary opposition between subjectivity and objectivity "as if anyone can produce such a thing as objective documentary."<sup>11</sup>

Michael Moore's 2004 documentary, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, can be understood within this critical re-evaluation of the documentary mode. Cutting across boundaries of documentary and performance, the film is an example of a powerful intervention in political culture, inviting a transformation in consciousness while creating a counter-narrative to the hegemonic discourse around late 20<sup>th</sup>-century American politics.

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The teenaged boys passed in front of a row of Michael Moore videos. "Hey guys, you've got to see this movie." I couldn't help but smile as I heard one of them enthusing to his friends about Moore's work. This is not an unusual scene in a video store, except

for the fact that the movie in question is a documentary. When did documentaries become cool? The same time they became more socially relevant, more creative, and more overtly subjective. This chapter attempts to understand the strategies animating the documentary that John Berger calls a watershed event politically,<sup>12</sup> Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The film has been credited with launching unprecedented interest by the public in viewing documentaries, encouraging the production of politically-charged documentaries, and having an impact on the American political scene. A review in the *San Francisco Chronicle* is typical of some of the laudatory comments: "In the 90-year history of the American feature film, there has never been a popular election-year documentary like this one."<sup>13</sup> The movie and its obvious popular effect also sparked efforts to stifle the film, dispute the information presented, and discredit the filmmaker, efforts which amount to a significant anti-Michael Moore lobby.<sup>14</sup>

I will look at the political context in the United States from which the film emerged, in particular the impact of the consolidation of media ownership on the diversity of views being expressed in the United States and the impact of the attacks of September 11, 2001. The situation was ripe for an individual in a position to speak truth to power through the medium of film. Within the historical situation of an increasingly right-wing authoritarianism, *Fahrenheit 9/11* stands as a counter-narrative to the official narrative created by government propaganda and a conservative news media. Moore adopts a number of genres and formal techniques to construct this counter narrative: reportage, performance, appropriation, juxtaposition, first person voice, Brechtian and Boalian theatrical techniques and the classic Aristotelian technique of empathic identification. This chapter examines Moore's narrative strategies in *Fahrenheit 9/11* and

shows how he uses a personal voice to radically critique America and move towards a countermyth and meaning.

### **Political context**

The key document for understanding the political context within which *Fahrenheit 9/11* became a political and cultural phenomenon is one prepared in the year 2000 by the Washington-based think tank The Project for the New American Century (PNAC) called *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategies, Forces and Resources for a New Century*.<sup>15</sup> PNAC is a non-profit, educational organization established in 1997 with the goal of promoting American global leadership.<sup>16</sup> *Rebuilding America's Defenses* lays out the assumptions of PNAC's founders, that having won the Cold War, America stands as the world's pre-eminent superpower, and that successive (Democratic Party) governments have been lulled into a false sense of security, resulting in declining military spending and a general shirking of military responsibilities. Thus, the document argues, America has been left vulnerable to challenges by newly arising threats. The document proposes a number of transformations to the military that together constitute nothing less than a new American imperialism: the projection of United States power around the world while protecting the homeland and its allies, fighting and winning multiple large-scale wars simultaneously, maintaining nuclear superiority, a global first-strike airforce, and the military domination of space and cyberspace.

The document describes the shift in global politics from the Cold War to the 21<sup>st</sup> century as moving from a bipolar to a unipolar world, where the primary goal is no longer containment of the Soviet Union but preserving *Pax Americana*. "Today the task is to preserve an international security environment conducive to American interests and

ideals... to secure and expand the 'zones of democratic peace.' ”<sup>17</sup>

According to the document, PNAC builds upon “the defense strategy outlined by the Cheney Defense Department in the waning days of the Bush [Senior] Administration... Leaked before it had been formally approved, the document was criticized as an effort by ‘cold warriors’ to keep defense spending high and cuts in forces small despite the collapse of the Soviet Union.”<sup>18</sup> The lack of support among the public and Democratic Party leaders for securing American geopolitical leadership was a major obstacle to the acceptance of the vision outlined in the PNAC document. This lack of support, according to the writers, was due to a faulty belief that the collapse of the Soviet Union had created a “strategic pause,” a peace that allowed Americans to relax from the long demands of the Cold War. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, broke this peace and abruptly transformed the climate of public opinion into one highly favourable to the Project’s vision. The attacks were immediately absorbed into a rhetoric of fear propagated by the new Bush administration, which adopted the essence of *Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategies, Forces and Resources for a New Century* into its new national security strategy, with PNAC founders such as Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld and PNAC participants such as Paul Wolfowitz becoming key people in the Bush Administration.<sup>19</sup>

The strategic manipulations of the Bush Administration that merged the terrorist threat with the alleged threat that Saddam Hussein’s Iraq posed to United States national security has been well documented.<sup>20</sup> Back in 2000, the PNAC document cited Iraq as one of the top five threats to United States security interests because of Iraq’s potential ability to challenge United States interventions in the region. Shortly after September 11,

2001, the Bush Administration began to link Saddam Hussein to the terrorists in order to justify an invasion of Iraq.

Among the domestic consequences of the terrorist attacks and subsequent wars on Afghanistan and Iraq were the strengthening of instruments of social repression and control. The chilling effect this has had on artistic expression and political dissent can be seen in the fate of Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) founding member and Professor of Art at the University of Buffalo, Steven Kurtz. The Federal Bureau of Investigation charged the artist under section 175 of the Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act of 1989, as expanded under the Patriot Act for possession of harmless bacteria used in an art project. The charge was later downgraded to mail and wire fraud but at last report the FBI is once again seeking terrorism charges.<sup>21</sup> Critical Art Ensemble's cultural production deals with diverse issues ranging from genetic modification to public versus private space. The purpose of the group's work is "to imagine and create products, texts and processes to resist authoritarian culture in its many different forms and manifestations, and to create autonomous zones where a different world can be imagined."<sup>22</sup> Once referred to colourfully as "a philosophical terrorist cell" by cultural critic Mark Dery,<sup>23</sup> CAE is a canary in the gold mine for all anti-authoritarian cultural producers working in the United States. While neglected by the mainstream media, the case is nevertheless well known in the art world as indicated by the who's who list of artists donating work to a benefit auction for Kurtz.<sup>24</sup> Thus the case has a chilling effect on both the art and the academic worlds (Kurtz is part of both). This and other incidents make it clear that activist artists are being targeted by the FBI as a means to stifle dissent.<sup>25</sup>

Further inhibiting the potential for critical public debate is the consolidation of

media ownership among a few media conglomerates. Project Censored sounded the warning bell in its listing of the top 25 censored stories of 2002 and 2003. Each year, students and staff at Sonoma State University's Project Censored, screen thousands of news stories which are then evaluated by 89 media and political experts to select the top most important undercovered news stories in the United States. The publication expresses concern about the increasing commercialization and privatization overtaking media globally.<sup>26</sup> The evaluators found that, although the best investigative stories centred on the erosion of civil and human rights, United States foreign policy, and United States militarism, the most significant of these stories were virtually ignored by the mainstream press. "The deeper the analysis went, the more shallow the coverage seemed to become," the publication reports.<sup>27</sup>

The publication states,

Perhaps the *most* censored subject of this year is the growing concern among both liberals and conservatives that a dangerous trend is emerging within our political institutions. This trend has a name that is proclaimed loudly within the independent press, on both the right and the left, but is rarely mentioned in the editorial columns of our daily newspapers and only hinted at on network and cable television. Some call it jingoism, others nationalism or, more strongly, fascism.<sup>28</sup>

The tendency is for media, big business and government increasingly to cooperate on news reporting, "stripping ordinary citizens of the tools they need to be informed, active participants in a democracy,"<sup>29</sup> and making independent media more important in maintaining a democratic society. Arguing the need for media reform, veteran media critic Robert W. McChesney states, "that U.S. democracy is in a decrepit state-- exemplified by a depoliticization that would make a tyrant envious--and that the corporate commercial media system is an important factor in understanding how this sorry state came to be."<sup>30</sup> At the same time, there has been an increase in the activities of

independent media, such as Indymedia.org, alternative newspapers, website news, and radio stations. The independent documentary also comes to play a vital role within this context of militarism, repression of civil rights, and media consolidation.

### **The artist**

Within this context, what kind of individual can emerge as an independent voice of resistance on the cultural front? Chomsky's theories of the manufacture of consent in democratic societies (already described elsewhere in this thesis) posit the notion that while meaningful opposition is possible in democratic societies, elites will typically stay within the bounds of accepted discourse to preserve their reputations, jobs, and privileges. Elites who may appear to be in opposition actually are engaged in mutually supporting the status quo, the most obvious binaries being the Democratic versus Republican Parties, liberal versus conservative, and the Administration versus the media. Michael Moore himself articulates this perspective in a 2002 interview: "The purpose of the liberal is to police the political discourse, so that the left end of the discussion goes no further than just a tiny bit left of centre, and then to marginalize everybody else out here as if they are not part of the debate."<sup>31</sup> Moore's significant contribution is to undertake a radical critique of the American system and move that critique into the mainstream.

Moore comes from a working class background, and is a descendent of Irish immigrants who came to the United States in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>32</sup> His paternal grandparents and father worked at General Motors in Flint, Michigan. His mother's father was a country doctor who worked near Flint. Flint has a long history of leftist activity; the modern labour movement began there with the sit-down strike of 1937. And it was the first American city to have a black mayor, even when 70 per cent of

the city was white.

Moore was born into this milieu in 1954, grew up during the sixties, went to Catholic school and after eighth grade enrolled in a seminary. He admired the Berrigan brothers, two American Catholic priests, writers and social activists devoted to civil rights and anti-poverty work, and leading activists against the Vietnam War. Both were repeatedly arrested and served prison terms. Moore believed that the priesthood was the way to effect social change,<sup>33</sup> but went back to secular school after discovering girls. In high school he presented a slide show about the worst polluters in Flint, and in his final year got elected to the school board, where he successfully organized to rid his school of its principal. Moore rejected higher education by dropping out of college and also declined to join the assembly line at General Motors. He ran an alternative local radio show and a leftist, muckraking alternative newspaper while participating in political rallies, anti-apartheid campaigns, and anti-nuclear protests. In 1982, he married a graphic designer, Kathleen Glynn, whose family also worked for General Motors and who would become a collaborator on his documentary projects. Moore developed a reputation as a difficult person with whom to work; he was hired and fired as editor of *Mother Jones* magazine, and a subsequent job working on Ralph Nader's newsletter had a similar conclusion.

It was around this time that General Motors announced a round of layoffs, and Moore decided he wanted to make a movie about it. He raised \$58,000 by selling his house and furniture, and by organizing bingo games. *Roger and Me* documents Moore's personal journey to meet General Motors chairman Roger Smith and ask him to accompany Moore on a tour of the sites indicating the layoffs' deleterious effect on Flint

citizens. While Moore was ultimately unsuccessful with Smith, the journey, simultaneously personal and public, carried meaning beyond Flint to a troubling and hidden meaning of America. The film brought together humour, personal experience, observation, archival footage, pop culture juxtapositions, performative interventions, and representative characters and episodes in a way that would become Moore's signature style. He dealt with the economics and geographies of class during late 20<sup>th</sup>-century capitalism, a theme that would re-emerge in *Bowling for Columbine*, a film about gun violence, and permeate his critique of post-9/11 America in *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

This class theme has led cultural critic John Berger to write that one of the astounding aspects of *Fahrenheit 9/11* is that "15 years after the fall of communism, a decade after the declared end of history, one of the main theses of Marx's interpretation of history again becomes a debating point and a possible explanation of catastrophes being lived."<sup>34</sup> When searching for historical comparisons within which to understand Moore's work, I discovered the most productive comparison in discussions of leftist artmaking, such as 1930s United States Popular Front literature and art, found in Schulman's *The Power of Political Art*; in the theoretical work of German playwright Bertold Brecht; and in the activist theatre of Brazilian director Augusto Boal and the media stunts of the Yippies.

Like Moore's, some of the work Schulman analyzes tends to rely on an "I" and a personal voice "to radically critique conventional middle America and move toward a countermyth and meaning."<sup>35</sup> Like Meridel Le Sueur, author of the 1931 essay "Corn Village," Moore develops an idea of "people's culture as a counter to the predominantly male, capitalistic, Wasp culture of official America."<sup>36</sup> A notable difference between

cultural work of the 1930s and Moore's *oeuvre* is the serious tone of the earlier work, while Moore relies heavily on humour as well as pathos; and unlike the Popular Front, which believed in Socialism as the remedy for America's problems, Moore's critique does not culminate expressly in an alternative economic and political vision; as I shall point out shortly, Moore is firmly embedded in a radical strain of American libertarian leftist values, rather than communist/socialist values. However, like Popular Front artists and writers, Moore presents a people's politics with an emphasis on those of the working class. Moore's filmic techniques have much in common with Brecht's pioneering theatrical innovations designed to counter the smoothing over of contradictions, the creating of false harmonies, and the idealization that occurred in bourgeois theatre.<sup>37</sup> In Moore's performative interventions are found the echoes of Boal's interventions in daily life as a means to raise political consciousness and in the media interventions of the Yippies.

### **Previous work**

All of Michael Moore's work depends on a social context to transmit a social and political message. This section considers Moore's pre-*Fahrenheit 9/11* visual work: his films, *Roger and Me*, *The Big One*, *Bowling for Columbine*, and two television series, *The Awful Truth* and *T.V. Nation*. In these works, Moore develops a set of strategies and a counter-narrative, which he then carries into *Fahrenheit 9/11*, a film which functions in some respects as the culmination of an ideological proposition being worked out in the earlier work.

Moore situates his work in his personal connection to site and to the issues he is representing. Early in both *Roger and Me* and *Bowling for Columbine*, footage from

home movies showing Moore as a child weaves together the personal and the political, the private and the public. Moore situates himself as the narrative “I” who experienced the history of his hometown, Flint, Michigan, the primary site in *Roger and Me*, and a secondary site in *Bowling for Columbine*. In *Roger and Me*, “He personalizes this era by describing a family in which, ‘everyone worked for GM from dad, to uncles and cousins,’ and where, Moore playfully intones, ‘every day was a great day.’”<sup>38</sup> In *Bowling for Columbine*, Moore’s home movies are sandwiched between firearm commercials, old Charlton Heston movie clips and banal footage of children bowling. In this way the artist becomes a conduit for the experience of others who shared this history. Moore connects himself to site and to the psychic terrain of working class America.

Utilizing documentary techniques, Moore frames his representation of gun violence in the United States by interviewing members of a Michigan militia group, the head of the National Rifle Association, the brother of the Oklahoma City bomber, a representative of the world’s largest bomb manufacturer, and a counterculture recording artist, among others. Moore creates juxtapositions that transform mere reportage into a radical analysis of American militarism. Surveillance video footage shot from inside Columbine high school during the school shootings appears next to an interview with Lockheed public relations representative Evan McCollum inside Littleton’s weapons factory--a huge bomb casing visible in the background. In this way, Moore is making a pivotal connection between the previously unimaginable violence of teen mass murder at the local high school and the daily activities of the town’s largest employer. “We are Columbine,” is the company’s slogan, and McCollum confirms, “We embody that spirit.” Columbine, as it is pointed out elsewhere in the film by a local real estate agent, is now

synonymous with a particular kind of contemporary horror, school shootings.

The power of juxtaposition lies in the relationship between visual images rather than in the images themselves. The visual montage of interview material, television and movie clips, news footage, and surveillance footage must be read as a text. The relevance of the images is their relationship to ideas being presented. The complex narrative that results disrupts any previous reading of the material and recasts the imagery as an ideological proposition: that gun violence is both evidence and outcome of a deadly convergence between capitalism, imperialism, militarism and white supremacy as it is being practised, and has been practised historically, in the United States.

After the Lockheed public relations man states that he cannot understand Moore's insinuation of a connection between the building of weapons at the bomb factory and the school shootings,<sup>39</sup> a series of violent news clips with didactic text provide a survey of the many United States military interventions overseas--Iran, Vietnam, Chile, El Salvador, Panama, and Nicaragua, as well as aid to Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban. The text tallies up the dead. The accompanying soundtrack is eerily ironic: "It's a Wonderful World." The segment ends with the too-familiar scene of a plane hitting the World Trade Centre. In a concise visual way, Moore counters the Lockheed man's disclaimer while establishing a global context for thinking about violence in America.

Moore's work is notable for its ability to cross over from traditional documentary to activism. In positioning himself as an activist, Moore transforms his work into praxis. In *Bowling*, Moore accompanies two young men, disabled by bullets bought at K-Mart, fired during the high school massacre, and still lodged in their bodies, to K-Mart headquarters to try and "return the merchandise." After several public relations personnel

attempt to turn them away, Moore and the young men decide to go to a K-Mart store and buy all their bullets. The following day they return to corporate headquarters with bags of nine millimetre bullets and local news crews in tow. The action gathers a crowd, and after being told they must wait outside, an impromptu press conference is held and an announcement made that within 90 days K-Mart stores will no longer carry firearm ammunition. A jubilant Moore exclaims, "That blows my mind. That's more than what we asked for." Such interventions are reminiscent of the "invisible theatre" pioneered by Brazilian activist Augusto Boal in the 1970s: "Invisible theatre... consists of the presentation of a scene in an environment other than the theatre, before people who are not spectators. The place can be a restaurant, a sidewalk, a market, a train, a line of people, etc. The people who witness the scene are those who are there by chance."<sup>40</sup> Moore's action is not mere filmic representation; it carries the "thrill of the real," Baudrillard's phrase<sup>41</sup> for discussing representations of terrorist violence--and an apt phrase for Moore's interventions. Moore really is challenging K-Mart to stop selling bullets. And the action has real world consequences: a change in K-Mart corporate policy.

In the K-Mart action, the two Columbine survivors stand in for the experience of all the victims at Columbine as well as other victims of gun violence.

The half-hour shows in Moore's television series, *The Awful Truth* and *T.V. Nation*, are heavily based on performative strategies. In one episode of *The Awful Truth*, Moore invites a group of gay men and women to board a pink bus (dubbed the Sodomobile) and counter anti-gay protests by a fundamentalist group targeting funerals

of AIDS victims. The group, costumed in outrageously stereotypical gay clothing, dance, sing and cavort among the gay bashers until they drive them away, having ruined the seriousness of their homophobic message: “God hates gays.” Another episode has Moore presiding over a mock funeral at the headquarters of an HMO to protest on behalf of a man refused coverage for a life-saving kidney transplant. The man, who is present at his own “funeral,” and his supporters collaborate in the performance. The outcome: a decision by the HMO to fund kidney transplants. The K-Mart staff members, fundamentalist protestors, and HMO personnel are unwittingly absorbed into Moore’s actions, as are the members of the public who are there by chance, and the press who seek to represent the event. The participation of this audience is crucial because of the possibility that, without it, neither K-Mart nor HMO executives might have felt compelled to alter policy. The anti-gay protest breaks up because onlookers are now laughing at the antics of the clowning performers, instead of experiencing the protestors’ message of hate. The audience provides a powerful witnessing function central to performance art, which Moore engineers to full advantage.

Another layer of audience is the media audience, those who watch the film. Not only does this audience experience the “thrill of the real” but the work serves a pedagogical function. The media audience learns that many of the actions had a real effect in the world, and Moore constantly encourages viewers to create their own actions.

The unprecedented popular success of Moore’s films is evidence that his work is reaching a large and diverse audience. *Bowling for Columbine* was recognized at the Cannes Film Festival and the Academy Awards; his films have broken box office records for documentary films; and the cancellation of *T.V. Nation* drew 50,000 letters of protest,

the most mail ever received by the Fox Network demanding that a show be reinstated.<sup>42</sup> In fact Moore himself, as a personality, has achieved a mythical level of influence due to the effectiveness of his work. According to *The New Yorker*, “In the past three years Moore has become a political hero... People revere him.”<sup>43</sup> Moore himself attributes this success to his belief that he represents the majority of Americans, whose voices are not normally heard in a conservative corporate-controlled media and who are not adequately represented in government. Moore’s work has prompted similar hyperbolic reaction from detractors angry with what they see as Moore’s misleading and manipulative techniques and unpatriotic content. For example, a Google search for the phrase “hate Michael Moore” garners 1,550,000 websites.

Moore readily reveals his own ideological agenda in comments such as this in *The Big One* referring to a post-Cold-War world: “I like to say, ‘One evil empire down, one to go.’” Moore sets himself against a liberal consensus that grants power to an economic and political elite whose job is to ensure the smooth running of the state on behalf of the masses whom the elite view as unfit to govern directly. In this way, Moore’s work is firmly in the tradition of a revitalized agit-prop, which “no longer points to any one ideology, least of all Marxism; the mere act of questioning is the political act exemplar.”<sup>44</sup> The Griersonian approach to documentary can be seen as one of helping to usher in the partnership between labour and capital that had come to an end by the time Michael Moore took his journey into Flint’s social and industrial heart in *Roger and Me*. Ironically, Moore appropriates the documentary form to demystify the power differential between labour and capital that Grierson had worked so hard to mystify. By unmasking Roger as the all-too-human being at the top of a corporate hierarchy whose decisions

caused economic and social chaos to the citizens of Flint in the name of corporate progress, Moore undoes the Griersonian legacy of documentary filmmaking, retooling it to prod working-class viewers into facing their allegorical role as rabbits raised for pets or meat. The notion of the working masses as a bewildered herd is made explicit and untenable, as are the consequences of leaving the field of action to men like Roger Smith.

In his class-based approach, Moore uses techniques of spatialization in both *Roger and Me* and *Bowling for Columbine* to expose the social and cultural forces within America. Natter and Jones analyze the role of site in the former film, *Roger and Me*, explaining that it uses various locations in Flint to illuminate the contradictions of post-Fordist capitalism.

Whereas Moore's self-consciously nostalgic commemoration of Flint as it existed in the 1950s depicts a common place joined by a shared sense of progress emanating from a capitalist-labour alliance, the new space of Flint has been bifurcated into an elite landscape of private enclaves amidst urban decay. It is within the former sphere that Roger Smith lives, and the latter in which the effects of economic transformations are lived... Power relations are thus dramatized by Moore as spatialized configurations.<sup>45</sup>

Interviews with the elite of Flint in their spaces--golf courses, lawn parties and private clubs--are juxtaposed with dingy images of families being evicted from their run-down homes on neglected streets. The brutal exposure of a Flint family's household furniture and personal items piled on the curbside contrasts sharply with the impermeable privacy of General Motors headquarters in Detroit, where Moore tries in vain to meet with Roger Smith and ask him to spend a day in Flint visiting the detritus of corporate restructuring.<sup>46</sup>

"Anything above the first floor is private property and off limits," a security guard tells Moore, preventing him from taking the elevator. Roger Smith is inaccessible on the 14<sup>th</sup>

floor; his former employees have neither roof nor walls.

In *Bowling for Columbine*, Moore continues his analysis informed by an understanding of class in America. In *Bowling*, violence in America is dramatized as spatialized configurations, a slightly more complex undertaking than his task in *Roger and Me*. Moore is problematizing the notion that gun ownership is part of being a responsible American, related to a proud history and, as more than one character articulates, a patriotic duty. He refigures it as an issue of class and race within an advanced capitalist framework, his use of space effectively situating these ideological issues in specific sites. Moore visits America's most powerful gun lobbyist and NRA spokesman, Charlton Heston, in his exclusive gated home in Beverly Hills, where we hear that gun ownership is a freedom issue. The prevalence of gun violence in the United States is related to America having "more mixed ethnicity than other countries," speculates Heston in an unrehearsed conversation with Moore that functions as Boalian performance in which truth comes through spontaneity. A real estate agent guides Moore through a middle class Littleton suburb, where windows and doors are barricaded and so-called safe rooms promise extra protection from predators. We learn that most guns are in the white suburbs and it is young white men, stealing guns from their friend's dads, who sell them to the black youth of the inner city.

Moore juxtaposes these images of a white enclave with scenes from Buell elementary school in Moore's hometown of Flint. Buell is the site of the youngest school shooting in the United States in which a six-year-old black boy shot a classmate, a white girl. Over footage of news crews cynically lined up to cover the shooting, Moore notes that the national media had never visited Flint before; if they had, they might have seen a

different tragedy that would explain the utter impoverishment in areas of this hometown of the world's largest corporation, General Motors.

In an area where 80 per cent of students live below the poverty line, the child shooter is the son of a single black mother who was bussed 1-½ hours to work two jobs in the restaurants and malls of one of America's wealthiest areas. This forced situation, part of a work-for-welfare scheme, effectively deprived her son of parental supervision and yet still failed to provide enough money to pay the rent. An eviction forced her to send her son to a relative who happened to own the fatal weapon. The work-for-welfare scheme is the result of the privatization of welfare in the state, and we learn that the program is run by none other than Lockheed Martin, the world largest weapons manufacturer. Both sites where the boy's mother worked benefited from special tax breaks because they used welfare recipients as employees. Images of the upscale mall, with bright lights and candy colours, and Dick Clark's American Bandstand Grill, with cheery music and an all-white clientele, are juxtaposed with images of the sad, unpainted houses and muddy yards of the low-paid, work-for-welfare employees 40 miles away.

Moore creates a complex narrative that exposes the power relations behind the seemingly inexplicable tragedy of a school shooting. An event that some Americans saw in racist terms (local law enforcement received numerous calls from enraged citizens wanting the boy 'strung up') is reframed by Moore as the consequence of an alliance between state and capital that, among other things, legalizes forced labour, instils a climate of fear and encourages an armed citizenry. The government, General Motors and Lockheed are exposed as the perpetrators of an economic violence framing the event. Lockheed, we now know, benefits financially from imperialist violence overseas as well

as from economic violence at home and the opportunities it provides for exploiting a vulnerable, economically disenfranchised class.

As activist, Moore pushes the work further, intervening in the sites to transform them from private to public space. He intervenes in the Heston home when he places a photograph of the young victim of the Buell school shooting next to a pillar, subversively transforming the enclave into a temporary shrine to the victim of gun violence. By taking his media audience into the sites of privileged power such as the Heston mansion, General Motors headquarters, and the Lockheed factory, Moore challenges notions of private space. His work seems to say, if these people and corporations have such power over the lives of Americans, then surely Americans are entitled to claim entry to such spaces. Moore transforms these sites by his presence and, by cinematic extension, ours.

Natter and Jones point out that Moore, in *Roger and Me*, fails to inspire viewers to “imitate the forces of resistance” by purposefully not including any characters representing a positive force for change. Labour is shown to be passive and unable to affect the social and economic transformations in Flint. Likewise, Moore does not depict a vigorous resistance to violence in *Bowling for Columbine*. One of the only depictions of resistance, the futile protests at National Rifle Association meetings by Columbine parents, fails to accomplish any result. Significantly, Moore departs from the documentary tradition of representing the efforts of those seeking to overcome their oppressions.

The reasons behind this choice reveal Moore’s radical intentions as an activist attempting to create, not representations of change, but work that, in Brechtian style, invites the viewer to consider new ideological positions. Denying the audience characters

who represent successful figures of resistance, Moore attempts to activate feelings of resistance through a sense of outrage, thereby breaking the ideological consensus between ruler and ruled. Natter and Jones state, “Including strong figures of resistance, with whom the audience could develop a mimetic identification, might have only undercut this sense of outrage by suggesting that the pluralist model encompassing state, labour and capital is alive and well in America.”<sup>47</sup> The film becomes a form of resistance “made more effective by the absence of resolved tensions and mimetic models of identification,” and it serves as “an impulse to praxis by provoking the viewer to respond to the violence it re-presents.”<sup>48</sup>

Moore’s work radically reframes issues, disrupts consensus, and interrogates liberal capitalist values. His work exposes what might be considered random violence and inevitable poverty as being embedded in the specific structures of United States-style economics and politics--a structure enacted by specific people in specific sites. Engaging multilevel participation by various audiences, Moore’s work draws on the performative strategies of political street theatre.

### **Fahrenheit 9/11**

How can we adapt artistic tactics and strategies to intervene in the dominant discourse? In this section, I will analyze Moore’s narrative strategies as a form of praxis in his 2004 documentary project, *Fahrenheit 9/11*. A hybrid of diverse media and activist art traditions, the film draws on techniques of journalism, performance art, political montage, appropriation and theatricality. Moore utilizes whatever means necessary to accomplish the goal, which is simultaneously political and artistic. The film reframes pivotal events of the new millennium in American politics: the 2000 election of

Republican president George W. Bush; the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; and the subsequent wars on Afghanistan and Iraq.

### **Artist's intentions**

Of *Fahrenheit 9/11* Moore has said, "What this film is going to do is to peel back the layers so the [American] people can see what is really going on."<sup>49</sup> In his three documentaries, he focuses on specific issues and historical moments--GM layoffs in Flint, school shootings at Columbine high school, President George W. Bush's presidency--but always he is attempting to show something more profound about American society. As he said referring to *Bowling for Columbine*, "This is a movie which says that something is more seriously and deeply wrong with the USA, and our gun problem is a symptom of the larger illness that exists."<sup>50</sup> This radical political perspective appears most fleshed out at the culmination of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, when Moore narrates:

George Orwell once wrote that it's not a matter of whether the war is not real or if it is. Victory is not possible. The war is not meant to be won, it is meant to be continuous. A hierarchical society is only possible on the basis of poverty and ignorance. This new version is the past and no different past can ever have existed. In principle, the war effort is always planned to keep society on the brink of starvation. The war is waged by the ruling group against its own subjects and its object is not the victory over either Eurasia or East Asia, but to keep the very structure of society intact.<sup>51</sup>

The "larger illness" is the very structure of American society--a hierarchical, advanced capitalist society where the "haves" wield total power at the expense of the "have nots," a class war that extends United States power into a global phenomenon of war and exploitation. It is a society where multinational corporations and the United States government and its allies work hand in hand to ensure the continuation of this structure by instilling fear in the populace, a fear projected most conveniently onto non-White races both within and outside of the United States.

Moore has expressed his political goals by saying that he hopes his audiences decide to take on the struggle for themselves: “One day there’ll be no need for me. I’m actually hoping to put myself out of business.”<sup>52</sup> So what is the struggle that he hopes people will take up for themselves? Moore sees himself as part of a pro-democracy movement: “The patriotic ones are the ones who are not afraid to ask questions, who are not afraid to dissent, who are not afraid to say and remind those in Washington that you are there to serve us. You are the servants, not the masters. I mean that’s what real patriotism is.” And in the same interview, he urges:

Well, the main thing is don’t be depressed. That’s exactly what those in power want you to do. They want you to feel hopeless and powerless, when, in fact, the exact opposite is true because you live in a country where it’s one person, one vote. And there are more of us than there are of them. There’ll always be more of us than there are of them. So we should just look at the sheer numbers - always be in charge. It’s only because we don’t choose to exercise the power we have that we find ourselves in the place that we’re in... Now is the time to wake up, stand up, speak up, fight back. We’re in the right. They’re in the wrong. It is that simple. And take heart in that.<sup>53</sup>

Moore’s views harken back to that radical of the American Revolution, Thomas Paine, whose late 18<sup>th</sup>-century writings derided state (and religious) authority and argued that real authority resides in the People. Paine’s 1776 pamphlet, *Common Sense*, states: “First. — That the King it not to be trusted without being looked after; or in other words, that a thirst for absolute power is the natural disease of monarchy. Secondly. — That the Commons, by being appointed for that purpose, are either wiser or more worthy of confidence than the Crown.”<sup>54</sup> Paine believed that government should serve the People, rather than the other way around, and that people should look after one another (he was one of the first to argue for social security for the poor and elderly). Moore is firmly within that tradition of American values; however, it should be remembered that although

Paine's writings were extremely influential (In the words of the USHistory website: "He communicated the ideas of the Revolution to common farmers as easily as to intellectuals, creating prose that stirred the hearts of the fledgling United States."<sup>55</sup>), his later work radically critiquing the authority of organized religion led to his marginalization, and he died largely neglected and abandoned.

Whereas Paine in the 18<sup>th</sup> century talked of the "adulterous connection" between state and church, "human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit,"<sup>56</sup> two centuries later Moore makes a strikingly similar case regarding the connection between corporations and state. So whether talking about the "natural disease of monarchy" (Paine), or the "larger illness that exists" (Moore), it is significant that Moore's work is part of a leftist libertarian strain in radical American thought. My own political views are leftist libertarian, so I am looking at Moore's work as someone who shares the same ideological beliefs.

In artistic terms, Moore has articulated an approach in which art and politics are completely reconciled. "When I make a film, I'm not doing it purely for political reasons. If I just wanted to do that, I'd run for office. I love to go see a good movie... try to remember when was the last great film that you saw and when you left the theatre it was like a religious experience; you have tears in your eyes because this art form was honoured by what you just saw on the screen."<sup>57</sup> An artistically fine film, which is entertaining, is more effective at charging an audience, according to Moore's perspective, making it more likely that the audience will "wake up, stand up, speak up, fight back." Making a film or undertaking direct action are two different, but equally valid, options when deciding how to operate as a politically active citizen. Moore considered gaining

leadership of the National Rifle Association and dismantling the organization from within, but decided to make *Bowling for Columbine* instead.

### ***Fahrenheit 9/11* as Brechtian theatre**

Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* is Brechtian theatre at its best. Bertolt Brecht, the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century playwright, producer/director and drama theorist, conceived of theatre as an agent of social and political change. In his theorizing, he called it epic theatre, and Moore's techniques have much in common with Brecht's. In fact, documentary film allows Brecht's methods to be adopted much more naturally and effectively than they were in the fictional live theatre mode within which Brecht struggled, only partially successfully, to realize his vision of a revolutionary art form. Brecht's list of characteristics of epic theatre (contrasted with the characteristics of dramatic theatre that Brecht believed stifled revolutionary impulses) show how suited they are to documentary film, particularly as Moore has interpreted the genre (keeping in mind a contemporary post-modernist and feminist awareness of the dated androcentric language and Cartesian dualism between reason and feeling).

### **Characteristics of<sup>58</sup>**

#### **Dramatic Theatre**

Plot  
 Implicates the spectator in a stage situation  
 Wears down his capacity for action  
 Provides him with sensations  
 Experience  
 Spectator is involved in something  
 Suggestion  
 Instinctive feelings are preserved  
 The spectator is in the thick of it  
 The human being is taken for granted  
 enquiry  
 He is unalterable

#### **Epic Theatre**

Narrative  
 Turns the spectator into an observer  
 Arouses his capacity for action  
 Forces him to take decisions  
 Picture of the world  
 Spectator is made to face something  
 Argument  
 Brought to the point of recognition  
 The spectator stands outside, studies  
 The human being is the object of the  
 He is alterable and able to alter

Eyes on the finish  
One scene makes another  
Growth  
Linear development  
Evolutionary determinism  
Man as fixed point  
Thought determines being  
Feeling

Eyes on the course  
Each scene for itself  
Montage  
In curves  
Jumps  
Man as process  
Social being determines thought  
Reason

Epic theatre refuses to engage in the illusion of dramatic theatre (also called Aristotelian theatre) and its techniques of catharsis, total identification with the actors, and representing an event as happening in the present. These techniques serve to satisfy and pacify the audience, as for example Hollywood movies do today. In contrast, epic theatre, like documentary film, continually reminds audiences that they are watching a report of events. Brecht's techniques included use of captions, statistics, projected images, and music as an ironic counterpoint to the visuals. Brechtian theatre refuses to provide the audience with a hero who overcomes his obstacles, leaving the spectator still aroused toward action when the play ends.

One of the most important techniques Brecht pioneered is referred to as the alienation effect or the distancing effect, the effect that makes things seem strange or different so that the spectator sees something previously familiar in a new light. It also has the effect of reminding the audience that what they are seeing is a constructed illusion (as opposed to hiding the illusion behind naturalistic devices). The credit sequence in *Fahrenheit 9/11* is a prime example of Moore's use of the alienation effect. The sequence shows the architects of the new American imperialism--George W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Paul Wolfowitz, Colin Powell, and John Ashcroft--being groomed by makeup and hair people for television appearances.

They are checked for sound, while laughing and even smirking before the opening of their media events, believing that their actions are not being captured yet for public consumption. Wolfowitz engages in self-grooming by licking his fingers and smoothing them over his hair. The familiar faces of television news are being made unfamiliar, even repugnant. While organized media events often try to show political elites as “natural people,” Moore uses the same footage, such as Bush with his dog, in a different context to create a sense of repugnance.

Unlike propagandist strategy, which seeks to immerse, seduce and reassure, Moore’s strategy is to engage an audience’s thinking processes. With this sequence, played out against the film’s credits, Moore is accomplishing a number of things up front. He is reminding us that the politicians with their speeches and ready press-conference answers are themselves engaging in theatricality, complete with make-up and prepared on-stage presences. The jarring effect prepares the viewer for the dis-illusion to follow, as time and again Moore juxtaposes their prevarications with behind-the-scenes truths, ironically captured for posterity with the same cameras that are recording the prepared lies. As Berger points out, the film “has succeeded in intervening in a political programme on the programme’s own ground.”<sup>59</sup> The distancing effect of the sequence helps the audience to adopt a critical stance with regard to everything that follows. Significantly, the sequence also draws attention to the construction of the documentary itself (by playing against the film’s credits). *Fahrenheit 9/11* reveals itself as a cinematic construction, and does not employ the naturalistic techniques of Aristotelian drama and the Hollywood film, which are designed to hide their constructed nature and lure the spectator into a trance-like state of total immersion and identification. Neither does it buy

into false ideas about “objective” documentaries. For Moore, all media is constructed and he wants his audience to be fully aware of this throughout the experience.

After the credits, the film immediately cuts to a black screen with audio that we quickly recognize as the crash of a hijacked plane hitting the twin towers, followed by the sound of people screaming and a fade-in to New Yorkers looking skyward with expressions of horror, panic and grief. This restrained solution to depicting the pivotal historical event of September 11, 2001, is evidence of Moore’s desire to counter the media’s strategies with his own. The repeated media airing of the destruction unfortunately has proven to be powerful propaganda, bolstering public support for the Bush administration’s military aggression against enemies. Moore resists traumatizing his audience with this easy provocation. He allows distance from the emotion-charged event rather than seducing the spectator into experiencing it as if it were happening now. Slow motion footage displays the troubling, almost lyrical beauty of debris flying through air dense with white ash, allowing the audience space for contemplation and reflection on their own memories of the event as virtual witnesses.

The Brechtian actor keeps a distance from his own role to avoid cathartic audience identification. That is why narration is employed in Brecht’s plays. Moore, as the narrator and arguably the central character in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, is a classic Brechtian protagonist. Moore acknowledges his role when he says, “I exist in my films as a stand-in for the audience. I’m just there doing what you probably would like to do and holding back from wanting to choke a few of these people. I try to keep my presence pretty low just because I don’t like to look at myself up there on the screen.”<sup>60</sup> He also expresses his subjective and personal approach to his films when he says, “I don’t really want to

represent anybody apart from myself when it comes to the actual filmmaking process.” (He has said that while the facts presented are objectively verifiable, the opinions expressed are his own.)<sup>61</sup> So Moore’s role is dual. His physical and narrative presence serves a dramatic function as the narrator/commentator provided to encourage reflection and invite audience identification, but in a detached way.<sup>62</sup> And, to borrow Michael Renov’s description of the filmmaker practising a return to subjectivity, he embodies “a practitioner-self who shows us the world anew.”<sup>63</sup>

### **Subjectivity/objectivity**

It is more productive to understand *Fahrenheit 9/11* in the context of a Brechtian-style theatre than as traditional documentary film, which is closely related to journalism. Expectations of a journalistic objectivity cause confusions to arise, such as the comment from one Polish reviewer who criticized the film saying, “People are very sensitive to aggressive propaganda, especially when it pretends to be an objective documentary or a work of art.”<sup>64</sup> Or this comment by a film critic for a DVD rental company: “There’s no such job as a standup journalist.”<sup>65</sup> Comments such as these reveal assumptions about objectivity and journalism that are not supported by a quick look at a standard journalist’s text such as Walter Fox’s *Writing the News: A Guide for Print Journalists*, in which Fox traces the growing importance historically of interpretation derived from reporters’ own observations and judgements. Fox writes, when radio news created the first “seamless web of instantaneous communication covering the entire planet... all news would now have a global dimension. It was no longer adequate for reporters simply to furnish a factual account of *what* had happened; of the traditional ‘five W’s’ of reporting, the *why* suddenly became paramount... Newspapers, wedded to the concept of

‘objectivity,’ were reluctant to take the plunge even though the print medium was ideal for the interpretive role.”<sup>66</sup> Fox said that print news began to embrace interpretive journalism during World War II and fully embraced it by the 1960s, “goaded by the revelations of the underground press and muckraking magazine.”<sup>67</sup> A number of artists have re-evaluated the documentary film genre by looking at presumptions of objectivity, most notably Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s *Reassemblage*, which forces a questioning of whose ‘truth’ is being portrayed by the eye of the camera and for what unacknowledged purposes. Minh-Ha says,

But for me, there is a certain naivete in believing that one could bring about changes in consciousness without challenging or uncovering the ideology of mainstream cinematic expectations. Realism, as practiced and promoted by many, consists of ignoring one’s constant role as producer of realities (as if things can just speak by themselves without the intervention of the one who sees, hears and ‘makes sense’ out of them) and, therefore, of taking one’s view as immediately objective and absolute (‘This is *the* reality’).<sup>68</sup>

Minh-Ha argues for the necessity of making films politically that are cognizant of the dominant ideology.

Moore’s films do not claim objectivity. Natter and Jones have written of *Roger and Me*, “It is impossible to conceive of this narrative strategy in distanced, apolitical terms... the director not only manifestly inscribes his politics into the film at various junctures, he repeatedly leaves traces of various objections his interlocutors direct towards his own subjectivity... it is through such admissions that his film is objective, in the sense that its perspectivalism is apparent to all.”<sup>69</sup> Moore himself has said, “So I’m not trying to appeal to a broad audience because then you’d be trying to water it down and pulling your punches because you’ve got to please everybody. You just have to please yourself and trust that there’s other people, like you, that feel that way.”<sup>70</sup> Moore

also includes a reference in *Fahrenheit 9/11* to the White House's reaction against Moore's accusations that Bush was a deserter during the scene that deals with the connection between Bush and James R. Bath, the money manager in Texas for the bin Ladens. And he includes a shot of Bush criticizing him for not having a "real job."

### **Audience**

Moore speaks in the first person during his narrative and often speaks to "you" as a direct address to the people, which can be inferred to be ordinary Americans (i.e. all those who are not the political and economic elite). In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, he asks, "Is it rude to suggest that when the Bush family wakes up in the morning they might be thinking about what's best for the Saudis instead of what's best for you or me?"<sup>71</sup> When the president addresses his audience in the film, he is speaking to an entirely different constituency. At a black tie function, Bush says: "This is an impressive crowd. The haves, and the have mores! Some people call you the elite. I call you my base."<sup>72</sup> Moore's base is the working class, a constituency of which he is a member by birth and upbringing. Despite the fame and financial wealth resulting from his films and books, Moore continues to wear ballcap, jeans and t-shirt as emblems of his continuing identification with the working class. In this way, Moore can be understood as an organic intellectual as envisioned by Gramsci: "These organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they belong."<sup>73</sup> The new organic intellectual is distinguished by being "in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader,' and not just a simple orator."<sup>74</sup>

Moore revels in the subversive aspect of his growth into a corporation. "One of

the wonderful flaws of capitalists is that they will actually help me produce something against their interests, if they can make a dime out of it.”<sup>75</sup> His persona is not only, presumably, Moore being himself, but also a performative strategy for his role as a stand-in for the audience. This same strategy, of appearing to be one of the people, is used by Bush, too. The idea that an oil millionaire, the son of a president, and an individual who, according to journalist Bob Woodward, can influence the Saudi Arabian government to lower oil prices to smooth his way into power,<sup>76</sup> is just one of the people is revealed as nothing more than a ruse in Moore’s narrative. Bush tries to appear as a down home character hunting ducks and clearing brush on his Texas ranch; Moore contrasts the PR footage with the aforementioned scene of Bush addressing his “base” at an exclusive black tie function.

While it is apparent that Bush speaks to different audiences depending on what constituency he is appealing to, the film’s tactics reveal that Moore’s audience is likewise not monolithic but diverse. Moore speaks at various times to different audiences by using popular culture “in-jokes” that will be understood by a specific audience, such as youth, or those who came of age as Moore did in the 1960s and 1970s. I will discuss this further in the section on music.

### **Montage: deconstructing and reframing**

Montage is a critical part of *Fahrenheit 9/11*; in fact, montage (the filmic convention which allows juxtaposition) is so central to the film’s narrative strategy that it is impossible to list every instance of it. Montage is the practise of cutting together fragments of film, often producing contrasts, shocks, or rhythms, which have a physical or psychological impact on the viewer, and aimed at producing a conceptual effect.<sup>77</sup>

Montage, which Eisenstein and other Soviet directors so famously pioneered in the 1920s (“The essence of cinema does not lie in the images, but in the relation between images!”),<sup>78</sup> is a process of the production of meaning, a meaning not inherent in any particular fragment alone. My reading of the technique is that conflict is crucial to an understanding of montage, as it is the apparent incompatibility of juxtaposed images that give montaged sequences their emotional tone and psychological frisson. Montage allows an escape from the linear narrative and naturalism that Eisenstein (and other early socialist artists) dreaded, and emphasizes the desire to produce a consciously manipulated narrative.

Moore’s mentor on his first film, *Roger and Me*, was Kevin Rafferty, creator of the politically charged *Atomic Café*, a documentary that relies exclusively on montage sequences of archival footage to criticize United States nuclear weapons development and public relations strategies in the 1950s.<sup>79</sup> *Atomic Café*, a *tour de force* of politically motivated filmic montage, obviously had a major influence on Moore’s technique. In *Fahrenheit 9/11* Moore appropriates archival footage--including never-before-seen news footage, already televised news clips, press conferences, as well as clips from popular culture such as Western films--to make statements about his subject matter.

The film is replete with Moore’s brand of ironic political satire; for example, the “Coalition of the Willing” sequence--in which clips of young hula girls dancing in the Republic of Palau, a man driving an ox cart in Costa Rica, and a Viking ship in Iceland--deftly illustrates the lack of significant support for Bush’s militarism among the world’s nations. In a sequence reminiscent of Dadaist artist John Heartfield’s early 20<sup>th</sup>-century photo-montage, Moore takes a satirical jab at the Bush administration by juxtaposing

Bush's wild-west style war rhetoric with footage from 1930s Western films. The identical use of the phrase "smoke 'em out" by the president and Western film actors suggests that Bush is (consciously or unconsciously) mimicking popular culture characters to capitalize on the Western's role in the creation of American mythology.

Moore also uses montage of media clips, in a very postmodern way, to critique the media; for example, Moore's narration says sarcastically, "Fortunately, we have an independent media in this country who would tell us the truth," followed by a montage of various news clips from ABC, FOX, NBC, CNN and CBS showing reporters' blatant biases.<sup>80</sup> By showing news clips of George W. Bush and Rumsfeld repeatedly referring to Iraqi president Saddam Hussein and terrorist group al Qaeda in the same sentence, Moore uses montage to reveal how Bush, with the media's help, misled the public about a connection between Hussein and the terrorists. Montage is also effective at countering the historical forgetting central to authoritarianism; by juxtaposing clips of Bush and Powell warning the public that Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction with contradictory clips of Powell and Rice reporting at press conferences in 2001 that Saddam Hussein "has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction,"<sup>81</sup> Moore counters the official narrative by revealing its contradictions.

Montage allows Moore to powerfully juxtapose images of wounded Iraqi children and grieving Iraqi women with Rumsfeld's smug press conference assurances of "The care that goes into it [targeting capabilities], the humanity that goes into it." Contradiction of official narratives is one of the best uses Moore makes of montage. There is no need for editorializing as Moore allows the architects of American neo-imperialism to hang themselves with their own propaganda.

Montage also allows Moore to deftly convey what otherwise perhaps would be a bulky and tendentious class analysis of United States culture. Montage allows him to juxtapose images of “[the] rich elite who control the war and [the] working class who die in it”<sup>82</sup> as an effective visual strategy for constructing a contemporary class analysis of American society aimed at an audience highly attuned to images and the fast editing cuts of popular media and not likely educated in (or open to) Marxist political philosophy.

To summarize, montage in *Fahrenheit 9/11* allows the filmic juxtaposition of various images and sounds for multiple purposes: to engage in ironic political satire, to reveal contradictions in the official narrative, to expose power and class relations behind current events, and to reframe events in contemporary American history. The use of apparently conflicting images (e.g. reassuring words from a government leader cut with appalling images of wounded children; serious war pronouncements from the president cut with frivolous scenes from Western movies) results in new concepts that have a significant impact on the spectator due to the emotional and psychological effects of montage. The film functions within a postmodern discourse and set of practises due to its appropriation of mainstream media to critique media and politics. By utilizing the language of television news and Hollywood film, Moore’s political montage speaks directly to an audience well versed in this language, turning the tactics of state and media against themselves.

### **Music as counterpoint**

Montage extends into the use of music, which is used to great Brechtian effect in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. In Brecht’s theatre, songs “are no longer auxiliaries to text, reinforcing it--they stand alone or in opposition. Songs are not used to heighten emotions at moments

of climax; they serve as commentaries, generally leading to a V-effect [*Verfremdung's effekt*]-thus lyrics may be wry and humorous, melodies may be jazz-influenced, jerky and unromantic, or songs may satirize popular sentiment... For Brecht the music and the action should each make the other appear strange.”<sup>83</sup> Moore’s tendency is to use music as an ironic counterpoint to create political satire. “Shiny happy people holding hands / shiny happy people laughing” is heard to shots of Bush and cabinet members with the Saudi elite holding hands and smiling for photo opportunities. After damning evidence of ethically questionable dealings between the American and Saudi governments, the comic relief serves to sharpen attention. Viewers might not remember the precise damning information, which is quite complex, but they will remember the satirical montage of “happy people holding hands.”<sup>84</sup> The comic moment is immediately followed by a blurry but unmistakable shot of a public beheading in Saudi Arabia, a shocking image that drives home Moore’s point that the “special relationship” between the Bush family and the Saudi Royals contradicts liberal American values and is bad for Americans.

During a later scene of American soldiers conducting a Christmas Eve raid on an Iraqi family, the choice of musical counterpoint to the fear obviously experienced by the crying Iraqi women and their college student son is “Santa Claus is coming to town,” a song whose tone and meaning stand in opposition to the scene’s content. However, the lyrics are a perfect corollary to the action as soldiers in tanks select their target (“You better watch out / You better not cry... Santa Claus is coming to town”) and kick in the door of a residence in Baghdad (“He’s making a list, checking it twice / He’s gonna find out who’s naughty and nice”). They enter the dark house and, amidst crying and general chaos, drag a man from the second floor (“He sees you when you’re sleeping / He knows

when you're awake / He knows if you've been bad or good / So be good for goodness sake"). Moore's genius for political comedy has been noted by numerous writers. In a profile in *The New Yorker*, writer Larissa MacFarquhar writes, "Comedy and populism combine in Moore to produce a political force of especial potency, ridicule knocking down what anger leaves upright."<sup>85</sup> And music, especially Moore's use of popular songs familiar to his audience, becomes a shared language, a shorthand with which Moore can get across otherwise complex or dense material.

This shorthand can become a kind of subversive code to speak to a very specific audience; for example, the guitar riff from Eric Clapton's "Cocaine" is instantly recognizable to youth and anyone even slightly counter cultural who grew up in the 1970s. However, it would not likely be as familiar to right-wing fundamentalists who comprise the backbone of Bush's support. The riff is inserted slyly into a reference to George W. Bush being suspended for failing to take a medical exam while serving in the Texas Air National Guard. The insinuation is that Bush skipped the exam to avoid having his drug use detected. The moment is brief and not really relevant to the material being presented, which is the important information about Bush's connection to James R. Bath, the Saudi moneyman. It functions as a humorous aside, an irreverent nudge and wink, codified for a certain audience.

The concept of music as a counterpoint gets turned on its head during a scene where American soldiers talk frankly about their experiences killing innocent civilians. A few reveal the practise of hooking up a compact disk player to their tank's internal communications system so they can listen to music through their helmets as they kill. We are told that the popular song is "The Roof is on Fire" because it symbolizes Baghdad

burning from United States air and ground strikes. The soldiers sing to the camera, “The roof, the roof, the roof is on fire, we don’t need no water, let the motherfucker burn, burn motherfucker, burn...” The whole sequence is intercut with images of Iraqi corpses rotting, children crying and faces disfigured by napalm attacks. This very literal use of music by American soldiers to heighten their emotions and reinforce their appalling task stands in sharp contrast to Moore’s ironic use of music as counterpoint to make what are essentially ethical statements. As ethical statements they reflect Moore’s own perspective. Popular music allows Moore to convince the audience of his perspective through a culturally shared language.

### **Subverting corporate P.R.**

At a time when marketing experts are urging closer cooperation between product makers and feature film makers to seamlessly interweave brands into dramatic productions (“a brand or product must fit naturally in a scene to be successful and not break an audience’s focus”<sup>86</sup>), *Fahrenheit 9/11* manages to turn the corporate hype for film product placement on its head. Film product placement, also called brand integration, it is the latest strategy for corporate marketers to utilize the cultural force of film as the most powerful medium for communication in the world. The legendary stories of film product placement include increased BMW Z3 sales after *James Bond*, a 50 percent increase in Red Stripe beer sales after *The Firm*, and a whopping 4,000 percent increase in Etch-a-Sketch sales after *Toy Story*.<sup>87</sup> Brandcameo is brand channel.com’s section listing the top box office films along with a record of every brand appearance in them. In late September 2004, Brandcameo featured *Fahrenheit 9/11* as the movie with the most brands out of the 30 top box office rulers. Disney, Nike, United Defense, Wal-

Mart, Watergate Hotel, Zytech, Unocal, Harken, Carlyle Group, and Halliburton were listed among the 52 brands that appeared in the documentary. Brandcameo commented, “Many other brands appear too quickly and too briefly to note. As a documentary, it shows just how branded the ‘real’ world is. Halliburton’s placement may be the worst of 2004.”<sup>88</sup>

In fact, *Fahrenheit 9/11* functions as a big-screen version of *Adbusters*, the Vancouver-based magazine that designs “subvertisements” by appropriating the images and slick style of corporate media advertising to subvert the way that meaning is produced in society. We could coin the term ‘film product displacement’ to describe Moore’s equally subversive strategy. For example, Moore intercuts speeches from an economic conference where businessmen talk about how much money can be made in Iraq with clips from a Halliburton commercial promoting the company as the supplier of “hot meals, supplies, clean clothing and communications to our soldiers so they can be a little closer to home.”<sup>89</sup> The movie has earlier mentioned that Vice President Dick Cheney was the chief executive officer of Halliburton Industries between Bush regimes. Following the commercial clip, two elderly women, Bertha Okoskin and Evelyn Strom, express their disgust that Halliburton keeps being awarded major contracts supplying the war on Iraq, followed by an American soldier in Iraq talking about how inflated Halliburton’s Iraq wages are compared to a United States soldier’s wages. These clips are closely followed by the heart-wrenching scene of Lila Lipscomb mourning her dead soldier son outside the White House. The sequence suggests that American corporations and politicians are engaged in an unholy alliance to engineer wars for profit, a situation that ordinary folks, like Bertha Okoskin and Evelyn Strom, wisely understand and decry,

and one for which young working class men, like the underpaid soldiers in Iraq and their dead comrades, pay the price. Halliburton's attempt to appear nurturing and protective of American soldiers, to whom they deliver hot meals and clean clothing, appears monstrous in this context.

In another skilful product dis-placement, a Zytech Engineering video promoting an affordable safe room (a large metal box) suitable for the average American family scared out of their wits by drug dealers, gangs, and terrorists is intercut with Congressman Jim McDermott talking about the Bush administration's strategy to keep the population in a state of paranoia, and Rumsfeld's and Cheney's ominous warnings, "We have entered what may very well prove to be the most dangerous security environment the world's known," and "Terrorists are doing everything they can to gain even deadlier means of striking us." This is cut with two contradictory statements by Bush himself that, first, the post-9/11 world is no longer safe, and, second, that Americans should "Fly and enjoy America's great destination spots."<sup>90</sup> The absurdity is compounded by a NBC interview with the inventor of an emergency escape chute, designed to allow the wearer to quickly exit a high rise in case of terrorist attack. The ensuing botched attempt to demonstrate the apparently useless device reinforces the absurdity of a culture of fear and the tactics for both generating it and capitalizing on it. Moore's strategy is to reinscribe meaning on corporate advertising by juxtaposing commercials and promotional videos with other clips that recontextualize marketing attempts within a broader social and political field, creating a kind of cognitive dissonance, and forcing the viewer to question the intentions and activities of corporations. This produces three Brechtian theatrical effects: the spectator is made to

face something, the spectator is brought to the point of recognition, and the spectator realizes social being determines thought. The first two are obvious from my discussion; the latter, social being determines thought, I will elaborate on further.

The film's heavy use of the media products of state, corporations and news conglomerates, combined with the distancing effect produced by viewing dissonant images and messages, serves a pedagogical function reminding spectators that their thoughts, opinions and emotional responses arise from whatever media constructions to which they are exposed. The jarring cuts of montage allow gaps in the narrative for viewers to shift perspective, momentarily straddling the phenomenon, rather than being subsumed by it. The spectator, armed with a new awareness, understands how social being determines thought. This understanding is central to revolutionary leftist discourse and to a class-based analysis of society. When the spectator accepts this understanding, it arouses a capacity for action and suggests that what is alterable, the spectator is able to alter.

### **Performance and the power of the prank**

Moore does not rely only on appropriated footage and music to accomplish his political and artistic goals. Street performance, as noted when discussing his previous work, is an important component of a Moore documentary. Although in *Fahrenheit 9/11* the performative element features less often than in his previous work, it still forms a small but significant part of his narrative strategy.

Moore's performative strategies usually take the form of a prank, a political/artistic tactic that has a long and venerable history in avant garde art and the counter culture. Douglas Rushkoff reviews the history of the prank in *Media Virus*:

“Finding its roots in 1920s Dadaism, media pranking was revived by the 1960s psychedelic underground as an alternative form of antiwar protest. The prank has emerged again in the nineties, this time as a social reengineering tool for AIDS activists, feminists, environmentalists, and other media terrorists looking for more creative ways to nest their ideas in the zeitgeist.”<sup>91</sup> The infamous efforts of 1960s media activist Abbie Hoffman to levitate the Pentagon with the help of thousands of people functioned as an anti-war demonstration and street theatre performance, while successfully drawing media attention to ensure that the images spread around the world. Hoffman “refigures the media as America’s main street, the conduit of symbolic action capable of reaching the most people.”<sup>92</sup> Moore’s work has been compared to that of Hoffman and the Yippies, that 1960s brand of media activism, mainly because of their similar use of the prank.<sup>93</sup>

The two performances of *Fahrenheit 9/11* fit Hoffman’s statement “Pranks are symbolic warfare.”<sup>94</sup> In the first, Moore borrows an ice cream truck from a vendor in Washington D.C. so he can drive around Capitol Hill reading the Patriot Act on a loudspeaker. This comes after the movie has shown an erosion of civil rights in the United States since September 11, and we hear that no one in Congress actually had time to read the Act responsible for this erosion before passing it.<sup>95</sup> In the second performance, Moore elicits the help of Corporal Abdul Henderson (who has earlier expressed anti-war sentiments) to trawl Capital Hill for members of Congress who might be convinced to send their children to Iraq. (Out of 535 members of Congress, only one had an enlisted son in Iraq.<sup>96</sup>) The scene echoes an earlier one in which Marine recruiters trawl the streets and malls of Flint’s poor neighbourhoods for black youth. In Moore’s version, dumfounded congressmen react with everything from polite interest to sheer incredulity.

Eventually, alerted to Moore's tactics, congressmen flee before Moore can get close. Rushkoff says, "While pranks are surrounded with confusion about their veracity, they make their political or social message crystal clear on an experiential level. As Hoffman has observed, 'Pranks work best when people don't know if you're serious or not.'"<sup>97</sup> The politicians' efforts to avoid Moore's prankster recruitment attempts serve to emphasize Moore's perspective, that the rich elite control the war while primarily the working class die in it.

### **Lila Lipscomb and empathic identification**

So far I have been emphasizing Moore's tactics that are infused with humour, particularly ironic humour, to deconstruct official narratives, provoke questioning, and form a counter narrative. In the latter half of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore veers from this strategy when he allows the story of Lila Lipscomb to take center stage. Now Moore departs from a Brechtian strategy to immerse the spectator in the classic Aristotelian technique of empathic identification. The Aristotelian technique involves catharsis (building up of emotional tension that is finally released), audience identification with a character, and the experience of powerful emotions, which are explored and released in a safe place. A message can be most powerfully communicated if the emotions of the audience are engaged, which is also the way propaganda works.<sup>98</sup> Normally, revolutionary theatre attempts to avoid Aristotelian technique, even setting itself, as Brecht did in his theorizing, in direct opposition to it, mainly because it was seen as being subject to Fascist manipulation. However, Moore uses empathic identification to great advantage, primarily because it is embedded in a film that eschews it except when absolutely necessary to accomplish the overall goal.

When she is introduced mid-film, Lila Lipscomb represents the quintessential American mother. A Flint resident, she pulled herself out of unemployment by working at an office that helps the poor. Numerous of her relatives have served in the military, and she proudly encouraged her own children to do the same. A religious woman and a conservative Democrat, she hangs the American flag outside her home every day, being careful not to let it touch the ground. She reports, “My family is what I consider part of the backbone of America. It’s families like mine, and it’s not just my family, there’s hundreds of families, millions of families out there, that this country was founded on their backs.”<sup>99</sup> She hates the anti-war protestors who she feels are dishonouring her son, who signed up. This is the Lila Lipscomb we meet around the middle of the film, a powerful figure for audience identification. Later we watch her reliving the memories of fearing for her son’s safety in Iraq, and ultimately learning of his death. The largest sections of dialogue in the film are reserved for Lipscomb, whose interviews with Moore comprise an important chunk of the rest of the narrative. There is an extended emotional scene in which Lipscomb, surrounded by her entire family, reads aloud the final letter she ever received from her son. Near the end, Moore accompanies her to the White House, where she attempts to find some meaning in her suffering. She shares her grief with another mother, a protestor outside the White House, and has to bear the callous remarks of another woman who refuses to believe that Lipscomb and the protestor are for real. Lipscomb, crying, talks about the woman’s ignorance, and relates it to her own previous lack of knowing. “People think they know, but you don’t know. I thought I knew, but I didn’t know.” She then completely breaks down, physically incapacitated by grief. “I need my son,” she cries. “God, it’s tougher than I thought it was gonna be to be here, but

it's freeing also, because I finally have a place to put all my pain and all my anger and to release it." The cathartic moment has arrived, and it is against the United States government that the built emotions must be released. Moore has left the most powerful part of *Fahrenheit 9/11* to this woman, with whose grief and disillusionment we totally identify.

With the inclusion of Lipscomb, Moore departs from the distancing effects of his other tactics, and from the appeal to reason. During this appeal to emotion, the spectator is reminded of what is at stake. A combination of Brechtian distancing, Boalian performative, and Aristotelian empathic identification techniques is, I would argue, the reason behind the unparalleled cultural impact of the film. The film engages the whole person, emotionally (through Lipscomb), physically (through visual shocks) and intellectually (through deconstructing the hegemonic American post-9/11 narrative and presenting alternative narratives).

### **The counter narrative**

In his second last narrative passage, Moore editorializes on the meaning of the latter part of the film:

I've always been amazed that the very people forced to live in the worst parts of town, go to the worst schools, and who have it the hardest, are always the first to step up to defend that very system. They serve so that we don't have to. They offer to give up their lives so that we can be free. It is, remarkably, their gift to us. And all they ask for in return is that we never send them into harm's way unless it's absolutely necessary. Will they ever trust us again?<sup>100</sup>

Moore's class analysis is an important part of how he frames, or rather reframes, events in American's recent past, the repercussions of which are still occurring.

Moore is undertaking an enterprise similar to that which American academics Noam Chomsky and Edward Said have pursued in their writings: critiquing the official

narrative, reassembling history, and constructing an alternative narrative. No counter narrative can claim objective truth or non-bias. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out, “One cannot of course ‘choose’ to step out of ideology.”<sup>101</sup> I have tried to show that Moore’s ideology is within an American tradition of leftist libertarianism, and his work draws on left-leaning cultural artistic practices. He is presenting a working class perspective on events occurring within late 20<sup>th</sup>- and early 21<sup>st</sup>-century United States capitalist society. Moore has also made no secret of the fact that he wants George W. Bush out of office.<sup>102</sup> Edward Said has pointed out that the contemporary American ideological system’s unspoken rule is that ideology should be ignored.<sup>103</sup> It is those who choose to frame events within an openly ideological understanding who are marginalized; a trend that culminated during the McCarthy era and from which the United States has not recovered.

In the 1930s, director Orson Welles and writer Marc Blitzstein tried to mount a play, funded by the Roosevelt Administration’s Federal Theatre Project, that dealt with the topic of steel strikes from a working class perspective. *Cradle Will Rock* was cancelled by the government days before its opening and the theatre doors padlocked. The American film about the subject, written and directed by Tim Robbins (*Cradle Will Rock*, 1999), concludes with a surreal funeral march into present day America, presenting the view that events occurring during this era signalled the end to government-funded politically-charged artistic creation in the United States.

I mention *Crade Will Rock* because similar events transpired as *Fahrenheit 9/11* prepared for distribution. Although honoured by a Palme D’Or at France’s Cannes Film Festival, the film came close to being shelved after the Walt Disney Company forbid

distribution by its company, Miramax, which was a principal investor in the film.<sup>104</sup>

Within a month, the film was able to find alternative distributors in Lions Gate Films (a Canadian Company) and IFC Films in time for a June 25th opening. The list of subsequent efforts to stymie the film include, according to Moore, “right-wingers harassing theater owners who showed *Fahrenheit 9/11*, conservative action groups trying to get the FEC [Federal Election Commission] to kick our film ads off the air, the unnecessary restrictive R-rating that forced teenagers to sneak in to see it, and all the stupid, crazy attacks on me and my movie... And when all that failed, five different Republican groups made five different attack dog tapes (oops, 'documentaries'!) against me in a period of about six weeks... a sad waste of good videotape.” The Michigan Republican Party filed a criminal complaint against him with prosecutors in four counties where Moore spoke on his “Slacker Uprising Tour” for offering silly gifts like underwear and instant noodles to youth who register to vote in the November election. Moore took to travelling on book tours with uniformed security guards, a situation he disliked and attributed to liability concerns from his book publisher.<sup>105</sup>

So what is the counter narrative Moore constructs that so infuriates right wing politicians, corporations and media pundits? *Fahrenheit 9/11* breaks the unspoken rules in American culture and politics since the McCarthy era that capitalist ideology should be invisible within cultural products and that an openly class analysis is forbidden. While dissenting cultural production has taken place, within a mainstream context it has had to camouflage itself. In the 1990s, Rushkoff talked about the rise of a subversive cadre of writers and producers, products of the media age, who learned to code subversive information within mainstream television: “This mainstream media subversion is

accomplished through careful and clever packaging. Commercial television activism means hiding subversive agendas in palatable candy shells. Most of us do not suspect that children's programs like 'Pee-Wee's Playhouse' or 'The Ren & Stimpy Show' comment on gay lifestyles or that 'The Simpsons' and 'Liquid Television' express a psychedelic world view.<sup>106</sup> Moore eschews the candy shell for a direct hit, attacking not primarily social targets (as in Rushkoff's examples), but political and economic targets. In other words, he takes on capitalism directly through a choice of media and set of practises that, in contrast to Chomsky's or Said's work, is highly accessible to ordinary people and youth.

Moore brings to the fore a long-standing and long-suppressed conflict within American thought between the liberal view--that political and economic power must reside with a limited group of people who are handed authority to exercise on behalf of the ignorant masses--and the libertarian view that maintains power resides with the common man/woman. The uneasy strain between these two views has influenced much of American culture and society, but it is rarely ever confronted head on as it is in Moore's work. In fact, much of Hollywood cinema functions as propaganda for the former view by creating illusionistic dramas that represent the latter view within an Aristotelian cathartic tradition. The hero (think of Arnold Schwarzenegger films) battles dark and powerful foes, which might be either shady, renegade United States government departments or foreign terrorists, and triumphs on behalf of American freedom and justice. Particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, the fear of an authoritarian, imperialistic power appeared in mainstream television and cinema camouflaged as the battle against a colonizing extra-terrestrial threat, either veiled and embedded within the state and

corporate world, as in *X-Files*, or overt and external as in *Independence Day*. The disease which ominously haunts the American psyche was, through popular culture, transferred and cathartically released to fictional heroes fighting a wholly fictional threat.

As Natter and Jones pointed out when discussing *Roger and Me*, Moore denies his audience a victorious hero with whom they can identify. There is no notion presented that there are good and clever people working successfully to ameliorate the problems presented. The ending is dark and Orwellian. The film's ending is the intellectual summation of its ideological perspective: "The war is waged by the ruling group against its own subjects and its object is not the victory over either Eurasia or East Asia, but to keep the very structure of society intact."<sup>107</sup> *Fahrenheit 9/11* is *X-Files* decoded. The threat against the American people is unveiled as the American political and economic system. *Fahrenheit 9/11* therefore is revolutionary theatre.

### **The movie theatre as a democratic arena**

The reaction against *Fahrenheit 9/11* merely hyped the film's opening and it went on to break all documentary film records and inaugurate a new era for openly subjective documentary films to be presented in mainstream movie theatres. The efforts to have it stopped and the subsequent media attention and popularity of the film exemplify the gaps in the democratic-capitalist system that can and do allow dissenting voices. The film's influential status caused opposition to Moore's counter narrative to emerge, for example, in the documentary *Fahrenhype 9/11*. That film attempts to restore the official narrative through interviews with right wing commentators (including the notorious Ann Coulte, whose views include the belief that women should not be allowed to vote and juvenile

delinquents should be publicly flogged),<sup>108</sup> Moore debunkers such as Dave Kopel,<sup>109</sup> and individuals or their families whose images were used in Moore's film without their consent. *Fahrenheit 9/11* criticizes the divisiveness of Moore's film at a time when the nation needs to be unified. The movie's theme is summed up in the final words, a plea to those who have seen *Fahrenheit 9/11* to believe that the United States is better motivated than the movie portrays and does not fight wars for oil or money: "We are not an imperialist country... Don't lose faith in yourself, because if you lose faith in yourself and your own country, the United States, you've undermined the only really consistent force for good in the world."<sup>110</sup> The film restates the grand narrative of imperialism in its final moments while the camera pans over the Statue of Liberty.

When the public flocked to see Moore's film in record breaking numbers the theatre itself was transformed into a public arena of democratic discourse. Moore reported that some theatres had to book the screenings further apart because audiences were staying after the credits to discuss the movie. In a community in Wisconsin, the local newspaper reported that an anonymous benefactor had rented the local theatre to subsidize free showings of the film so that those who otherwise could not afford tickets could attend.<sup>111</sup> Anecdotal information suggests that a transformation in the function of the theatre was subtly occurring. The film did not succeed in altering the outcome of the presidential election held in November that year, although voting patterns did change among youth aged 18 to 29. There is no way to establish a link with the film, but Moore points out that a record-setting 21 million youth voted in the 2000 election, with the majority (54 per cent) voting for the Democratic Party's candidate, John Kerry. In every other age group, the majority voted for Bush.<sup>112</sup>

While impossible to state definitively what, if any, effect *Fahrenheit 9/11* had on politics, documentary filmmakers acknowledge the effect it has had on similar cultural production. *The Corporation*, a 2004 Canadian production that takes a critical and humorous look at the power of corporations, and in which Michael Moore and Noam Chomsky are interviewed, fared well at the box office. Naomi Klein credited *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *The Corporation* with the box office success of her and Avi Lewis's documentary, *The Take*, documenting the workers' self-management movement in Argentina.<sup>113</sup> More high quality documentaries followed, among them *Control Room*, *Super Size Me*, *Bush's Brain*, and *The Fog of War*.<sup>114</sup> Moore's film has had, then, an important impact on cultural production in the United States. Its unprecedented economic success as a documentary encourages financial backing for similar types of productions and guarantees that we will continue to see a proliferation of such films in the future. That Moore did not succumb to a McCarthy-esque fate makes it more permissible for cultural producers and intellectuals to be openly ideological and work from a class-based analysis. (This might seem to contradict my earlier discussion regarding Critical Art Ensemble's fate, but it merely shows that within the contradictions of United States society a careful strategy of revolutionary media can be successful. Perhaps a comparison of the two cases shows that mainstream media producers are better situated, because they are more in the public eye, than avant garde artists to "get away" with subversive production.) Moore's tactical expansion of the documentary film mode reforms and revitalizes the genre, allowing for more creative experimentation within the mainstream.

Some other potential positive outcomes for which I have no evidence, but upon which I would like to speculate, include a movement towards better reporting by news

outlets, who will need to improve their own practises to compete with independent documentaries and to avoid becoming irrelevant. In the long term, such cultural production will have an impact on a generation of youth who will not be growing up in the same world as did their parents. As Rushkoff succinctly puts it, “These children of the fifties, sixties, and seventies were willing participants in a great social experiment in which the world behind the television screen was presented as a depiction of reality--or at least a reality to which they should aspire.”<sup>115</sup> Instead, the children of the new millennium will be participants in an experiment in which media productions can openly counter official depictions of reality and create opportunities for independent thought and democratic discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> Indexicality refers to documentary images as signs based on cause and effect, just as a footprint in the sand leaves the trace of a presence. The other two signs referred to in semiotic discourse are iconic (based in resemblance) and symbolic.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) 4.

<sup>3</sup> Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994) 99-100.

<sup>4</sup> Said, 100.

<sup>5</sup> From a quotation in Renov, xxiv.

<sup>6</sup> Diana Emery Hulick and Joseph Marshall, *Photography 1900 to the present* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Joyce Nelson, *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988) 166.

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<sup>8</sup> Nelson, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Nelson, 35-36.

<sup>10</sup> Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Framer Framed* (London: Routledge, 1992) 172.

<sup>11</sup> Minh-Ha, 119.

<sup>12</sup> John Berger, "The Beginning of History," printed in the *Guardian* (24 August 2004) and reprinted as the introduction to Michael Moore's *The Official Fahrenheit 9/11 Reader* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Mick LaSalle, "Persuasive and Passionate. *Fahrenheit 9/11* is Both. It's Also Michael Moore's Best Film," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 June 2004, reprinted in Moore, *The Official Fahrenheit 9/11 Reader*, 238.

<sup>14</sup> See for example, Dave Kopel, *Fifty-nine Deceits in Fahrenheit 9/11*, Independence Institute, 2004 <http://www.davekopel.com/Terror/Fiftysix-Deceits-in-Fahrenheit-911.htm>; *Fahrenheit 9/11: Unraveling the Truth About Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11*, dir. Alan Peterson, prod. Michael Fox, Steve Haugen, and David Greenlaw Sapp, Michael and Me, LP, 2004; and *MooreWatch.com*.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Donnelly, *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategies, Forces, and Resources for a New Century*, A Report of the Project for the New American Century (Washington, D.C.: Project for the New American Century, September 2000). Available at <http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> *Project for the New American Century*, [www.newamericancentury.org](http://www.newamericancentury.org).

<sup>17</sup> Donnelly, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Donnelly, ii.

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<sup>19</sup> “Project for the New American Century,” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project\\_for\\_the\\_New\\_American\\_Century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_for_the_New_American_Century) [accessed 18 Aug. 2005].

<sup>20</sup> See for example, Michael Elliot and James Carney, “First Stop, Iraq,” Special Report, *Time* (Online Edition), 23 March 2003. <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101030331/wroad.html>.

<sup>21</sup> “Massive Art Auction will Support Indicted Artist Steven Kurtz as Bioterrorism Charge Threat Returns,” Press Release, 13 April 2005 (see <http://www.caedefensefund.org> for more details).

<sup>22</sup> Steven Kurtz, email interview with the author, 22 July 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Dery, “Interview with Critical Art Ensemble,” <http://levity.com/markdery/cae.html> [accessed 22 July 2003]

<sup>24</sup> Hans Haacke, Richard Serra, Cindy Sherman, Martha Rosler, Sol LeWitt, Kiki Smith, Lorna Simpson and others. “Massive Art Auction will Support Indicted Artist Steven Kurtz as Bioterrorism Charge Threat Returns,” Press Release, 13 April 2005.

<sup>25</sup> A number of cultural producers discussed the current climate of fear and harrassment on CBC Newsworld, “Play,” 3 April 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Amy Goodman, “Introduction,” *Censored: The Top 25 Censored Stories*, Peter Phillips and Project Censored (Toronto: Seven Stories Press, 2003) 25.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Phillips, et al., “The Top Censored Stories of 2002 and 2003,” *Censored: The Top 25 Censored Stories*, Peter Phillips and Project Censored (Toronto: Seven Stories Press, 2003) 32.

<sup>28</sup> Phillips, 31.

<sup>29</sup> Robert W. McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in*

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*Dubious times* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999) 281.

<sup>30</sup> McChesney, 281.

<sup>31</sup> Simon Hattenstone, "Guerrilla in the Ritz," *Guardian Unlimited*, 14 November 2002, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/features/story/0,11710,839520,00.html> [accessed 11 January 2004]

<sup>32</sup> Much of this biographical information gleaned from Larissa MacFarquhar, "The Populist," *The New Yorker*, Feb. 16 & 23, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> MacFarquhar, 135.

<sup>34</sup> John Berger, "The Beginning of History," printed in the *Guardian* (24 August 2004) and reprinted as the introduction to Moore's *The Official Fahrenheit 9/11 Reader*.

<sup>35</sup> Chapter on LeSeur, in Robert Schulman, *The Power of Political Art: The 1930s Literary Left Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 46.

<sup>36</sup> Schulman, 41.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Wright, *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-presentation* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 37.

<sup>38</sup> Wolfgang Natter and John Paul Jones, III, "Pets or Meat: Class, Ideology, and Space in *Roger and Me*," *Antipode* 25:2, 1993, 141.

<sup>39</sup> Moore says, "Why would kids do this?... Dad goes off to the factory to build weapons of mass destruction. What's the difference?" McCollum responds, "I don't see the connection."

<sup>40</sup> Augusto Boal, "Invisible Theatre," in *Radical Street Performance: an International Anthology*, ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz (New York: Routledge, 1998) 121.

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<sup>41</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism," trans. Rachel Bloul, <http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-1-0111/msg00083.html> [accessed 29 March 2004] originally printed in *Le Monde* 2/11/01.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Moore and Kathleen Glynn, *Adventures in a T.V. Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998) x.

<sup>43</sup> MacFarquhar, 134.

<sup>44</sup> From Jan Cohen-Cruz's introduction to Dubravka Knezevic, "Marked with Red," in *Radical Street Performance*, 52. The article is discussing contemporary political street theatre in the former Yugoslavia.

<sup>45</sup> Natter and Jones, 141.

<sup>46</sup> In the film we learn that eleven GM factories in the United States are being closed while eleven new ones are opening in Mexico, where workers are paid 70 cents per hour.

<sup>47</sup> Natter and Jones, 152.

<sup>48</sup> Natter and Jones, 152.

<sup>49</sup> Ian Young, "Moore Film Shows 'US Iraqi Abuse'," *BBC News*, 17 May 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/entertainment/film/3720569.stm> [accessed 28 July 2004]

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Collins, "Michael Moore," *Guardian Unlimited*, 11 November 2002, <http://film.guardian.co.uk/interview/interviewpages/0,6737,841083,00.html> [accessed 11 January 2004]

<sup>51</sup> Michael Moore, "Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay," in *The Official Fahrenheit 9/11 Reader* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2004) 130.

<sup>52</sup> "Michael Moore talks to Kirsty Wark," 20 December 2002. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cgi->

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bin/educatin/betsie/parser.pl [accessed 28 July 2004]

<sup>53</sup> “Buzzflash Interviews Michael Moore,” *Buzzflash.com*, 13 March 2002.  
[http://www.buzzflash.com/interviews/2002/03/Michael\\_Moore\\_031302.html](http://www.buzzflash.com/interviews/2002/03/Michael_Moore_031302.html) [accessed 11 January 2004]

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776, USHistory.org,  
<http://www.ushistory.org/paine/commonsense/sense2.htm> [accessed 8 June 2005]

<sup>55</sup> USHistory.org, <http://www.ushistory.org/paine/> [accessed 8 June 2005]

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason*, 1794, 1796, USHistory.org,  
<http://www.ushistory.org/paine/reason/reason1.htm> [accessed 8 June 2005]

<sup>57</sup> Andrew Collins, “Michael Moore,” *Guardian Unlimited*, 11 November 2002,  
<http://film.guardian.co.uk/interview/interviewpages/0,6737,841083,00.html> [accessed 11 January 2004]

<sup>58</sup> From Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964)  
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/m.p.thompson/brecht.htm>

<sup>59</sup> Berger in Moore, *Reader*, x.

<sup>60</sup> Collins.

<sup>61</sup> Collins.

<sup>62</sup> Brecht used the example of the accident eyewitness - the ideal character who can narrate what happened while remaining free to comment on what he knows. Andrew Moore, *Studying Bertolt Brecht*, 2001,  
<http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/drama/brecht.htm>

<sup>63</sup> Renov, xxiv.

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<sup>64</sup> “Poles Call 9/11 Film ‘Propaganda’,” *BBC News*, 24 July 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/entertainment/film/3923385.stm> [accessed 28 July 2004]

<sup>65</sup> “Moore Hopes Fahrenheit Influences People,” *MSN Entertainment Movie News*, 17 May 2004, <http://entertainment.msn.com/movies/articles.aspx?news=158579> [accessed 18 May 2004]

<sup>66</sup> Walter Fox, *Writing the News: A Guide for Print Journalists*, 2nd Edition, Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1993, 12. The five W’s of reporting: who, what, when, where why. The traditional inverted pyramid style of news writing requires these questions be answered in the first few sentences with further information provided in descending order of importance.

<sup>67</sup> Fox, 12.

<sup>68</sup> Minh-Ha, 183.

<sup>69</sup> Natter and Jones, 151.

<sup>70</sup> Collins.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Moore, “Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay,” *The Official Fahrenheit 9/11 Reader*, 36.

<sup>72</sup> Moore, “Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay,” *Reader*, 112.

<sup>73</sup> Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith, “Introduction,” in Antonio Gramsci, “The Intellectuals,” *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. by Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 3. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/editions/spn/problems/intellectuals.htm> [accessed 26 Feb 2004].

<sup>74</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “The Intellectuals,” *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and

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ed. by Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 8.  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/editions/spn/problems/intellectuals.htm>  
[accessed 26 Feb 2004].

<sup>75</sup> “Michael Moore talks to Kirsty Wark,” 20 December 2002. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cgi-bin/educatin/betsie/parser.pl> [accessed 28 July 2004]

<sup>76</sup> “Woodward Shares War Secrets,” 18 April 2004, *60 Minutes*, *CBS News Online*  
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/04/15/60minutes/main612067.shtml> [accessed 24 Aug. 2005].

“Prince Bandar enjoys easy access to the Oval Office. His family and the Bush family are close. And Woodward told *60 Minutes* that Bandar has promised the president that Saudi Arabia will lower oil prices in the months before the election - to ensure the United States economy is strong on election day.”

<sup>77</sup> My summary of montage is derived from Jacques Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, trans. Lee Hildreth, Constance Penley, Andrew Ross (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>78</sup> Eisenstein, quoted in *Montage Eisenstein*, 146.

<sup>79</sup> Moore refers to Rafferty as his mentor, and says he taught him how to make films, in Michael Moore, *Stupid White Men* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001) 30-31. Moore is discussing the irony that Rafferty is George W. Bush’s cousin.

<sup>80</sup> Moore, “Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay,” *Reader*, 84-85.

<sup>81</sup> Moore, “Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay,” *Reader*, 79.

<sup>82</sup> This quote is found in the script directions to describe a montage of clips near the end of Fahrenheit 9/11. Moore, “Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay,” *Reader*, 130.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew Moore, *Studying Bertolt Brecht*, 2001,  
<http://www.universalteacher.org.uk/drama/brecht.htm>

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<sup>84</sup> Moore, "Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay," *Reader*, 36-37.

<sup>85</sup> MacFarquhar, 133.

<sup>86</sup> Abram Sauer, "Brandsploitation: A New Genre in Film," 27 September 2004  
[http://www.brandchannel.com/print\\_page.asp?ar\\_id=231&section=main](http://www.brandchannel.com/print_page.asp?ar_id=231&section=main) [accessed 27 September 2004]

<sup>87</sup> Sauer.

<sup>88</sup> *Brandcameo*, from Brandchannel.com [accessed 27 September 2004]

<sup>89</sup> Moore, "Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay," *Reader*, 120.

<sup>90</sup> Moore, "Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay," *Reader*, 52-53.

<sup>91</sup> Rushkoff, 258.

<sup>92</sup> *Radical Street Performance*, 190.

<sup>93</sup> MacFarquhar, 139.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Rushkoff, *Media Virus*, 263.

<sup>95</sup> Moore, "Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay," *Reader*, 66.

<sup>96</sup> Moore, "Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay," *Reader*, 125.

<sup>97</sup> Rushkoff, 263.

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<sup>98</sup> This list of implications of Aristotelian theatre found at [http://www.ccr.buffalo.edu/anstey/TEACHING/259\\_S05/theatregames.html](http://www.ccr.buffalo.edu/anstey/TEACHING/259_S05/theatregames.html) [accessed 8 June 2005]

<sup>99</sup> Moore, "Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay," *Reader*, 107.

<sup>100</sup> Moore, "Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay," *Reader*, 129.

<sup>101</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Interpretations," *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 120.

<sup>102</sup> "Tens of thousands denounce Bush in New York," *CTV.ca*, 29 August 2004, <http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/print?brand=generic&archive=CTVNews&date=2> [accessed 29 August 2004]

<sup>103</sup> Discussed in Spivak, "The Politics of Interpretations," *In Other Worlds*, 120-121.

<sup>104</sup> Jim Rutenberg, "Disney Forbidding Distribution of Film That Criticizes Bush," *The New York Times*, 5 May 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com> [accessed 6 May 2004]

<sup>105</sup> MacFarquhar, 138.

<sup>106</sup> Rushkoff, 7.

<sup>107</sup> Moore, "Fahrenheit 9/11--The Screenplay," *Reader*, 130.

<sup>108</sup> "Ann Coulter," Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ann\\_Coulter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ann_Coulter) [accessed 18 July 2005]

<sup>109</sup> Dave Kopel, *Fifty-nine Deceits in Fahrenheit 9/11*, Independence Institute, 2004 <http://www.davekopel.com/Terror/Fiftysix-Deceits-in-Fahrenheit-911.htm> [accessed 18 July 2005]

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<sup>110</sup> Dir. Alan Peterson, *Fahrenhype 9/11: Unraveling the Truth About Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11*, prod. Michael Fox, Steve Haugen, and David Greenlaw Sapp, Michael and Me, LP, 2004.

<sup>111</sup> This information was provided to me by Louise Barak, who read the article in the *Waukesha Freeman Newspaper* in July 2004.

<sup>112</sup> Michael Moore, in a letter sent to his mailing list, 7 November 2004.

<sup>113</sup> David Spaner, "Documentaries 'filling a gap'," *The Vancouver Province*, 29 October 2004, <http://www.onf.ca/thetake/flash/viewPress.php?id=63> [accessed 8 December 2004]

<sup>114</sup> Gina McIntyre, "Moore Leading the Filmmakers' Charge," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 12 July 2004, <http://entertainment.sympatico.msn.ca/Movies/Feature/Article/Moore> [accessed 12 July 2004]

<sup>115</sup> Rushkoff, 6.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have attempted to raise some questions concerning how art might serve a democratizing function in contemporary society. My questioning, and my choice of the two case studies, “Bridges” and *Fahrenheit 9/11*, have been influenced by my own experiences as a print journalist who turned to an education in art in part through a frustration with journalism’s expectations of neutrality and the limits of the written word in an increasingly visual society. News works to stabilize chaotic issues through the use of expected modes of journalistic discourse, which can, and increasingly do, serve to conceal a bias in favour of the status quo. Fox News’s “Fair and Balanced” trademark makes unfulfilled promises impossible for a media empire whose dependence on corporate advertising renders it incapable of fundamental criticism of American political-economic culture. “Bridges” and *Fahrenheit 9/11* work to create interruptions in contexts marked by ongoing legacies of colonialism and new forms of imperialism. To the extent that the projects succeed, they do so by creating discursive gaps in official narratives, proposing counter narratives that are indeterminate rather than prescriptive and that invite the audience to participate in the process of meaning making. The projects employ formal and conceptual strategies that function as a process of opening up psychic space in which independent thinking can occur. The process requires the spectator to struggle to make meaning, rather than to accept non-critically the official narratives that normalize unequal power relations.

Both projects perform best when they are intervening in hegemonic discourses, unsettling “common sense” notions<sup>1</sup>, and disturbing the status quo. Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* intervenes in a hegemonic discourse that normalizes the conditions of

advanced United States capitalism, which requires an imperialistic militarism and a culture of fear to maintain itself. He disturbs the status quo by throwing into doubt the audience's trust in political and economic leaders and their intentions, the veracity of official rationales for war and domestic repressions, and the morality of the political-economic system itself. He appropriates the media and strategies of the mainstream news and public relations industries, while retooling them with approaches already tested by leftist activist artists from the past. In doing so, he retools the kind of documentary filmmaking that historically, through the influence of John Grierson, served to cultivate the audience as spectators of action rather than active participants in radical social change. He asserts the primacy of the subjective as a political stance, perhaps echoing Edward W. Said's position: "In the end, I am moved by causes and ideas that I can actually choose to support because they conform to values and principles that I believe in."<sup>2</sup> Unlike a typical journalist, who enters a community from outside to become an instant expert capable of reporting events and moving on, Moore, with his ideological allegiance to the working class and repeated return to his hometown of Flint, situates himself from within his own community as a self-appointed spokesperson for working-class America, a kind of Gramscian organic intellectual whose grounding in the concrete conditions of life and whose active participation in the ideological sphere can foster a critical awareness that could help to undermine the social relations of advanced capitalism. While Moore's critique is not unique--intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky and Edward W. Said are ideological kin, and journalistic works like Bob Woodward's *Plan of Attack*<sup>3</sup> and CBC *The Fifth Estate*'s "Conspiracy Theories"<sup>4</sup> deal with the same factual material--the way in which he applies culture to the issues is, I would say, unique.

*Fahrenheit 9/11* is also, predictably, controversial both in its strategies and its contents, resulting in counter counter-discursive projects such as *Fahrenhype 9/11*, which attempts to restore faith in the status quo and restabilize the hegemonic discourse.

Liz Canner's "Bridges" public art project intervenes in the hegemonic discourse that historically emerged to support British colonial expansion and is reproduced through neo-colonial institutions such as museums, the education system, and the justice system. A prevailing racist consciousness is internalized by such a significant proportion of the non-Aboriginal population that, when acts of violence are committed against Aboriginal men on the outskirts of Saskatoon, the situation fails to conclude in anything resembling justice (i.e. the perpetrators being held to account). As a political activist project attempting to build bridges between local police and the Aboriginal community, encouraging dialogue and civic engagement, "Bridges" straddles an uneasy line between wanting to disturb the status quo, through a Krzysztof Wodiczko-influenced architectural projection designed to unmask and reveal the building as a medium of power, and wanting to facilitate the conjoining of a divided community.

I was drawn to both projects as political activist works dealing with contemporary issues and utilizing the documentary form with its connection to journalism. By pushing two similar projects together, I anticipated some insights would emerge about which strategies are effective and which are problematic. There are a number of differences between the two projects. While Moore's work makes frequent use of satire, Canner's is generally serious in tone. Moore's use of montage is essential to his strategy; Canner's editing constructs a linear narrative. Moore's material is consciously manipulated to convey Moore's perspective; Canner's material is cut in a kind of illusionist "reality

television” manner. Moore’s film can be seen repeatedly in multiple contexts; Canner’s project was a one-night only event (although several copies of the video are available for borrowing from *paved* Art + New Media and through some of the key participants). Moore’s performance is within the movie; the screening of “Bridges” constituted the performance. Moore’s film deals with issues that are global in significance; Canner’s project does not venture beyond the local issue. Moore’s film generated publicity and controversy internationally even before its theatrical release; Canner’s project did not yield public discussion even in local media. Moore situates himself within a constituency of which he is a part; Canner parachuted in from a different locale and background. Moore consciously adopts a subjective stance, while Canner tries to avoid the subjectivity of authorship by offering her subjects a first-person narrative role. It should be noted also that the projects did not have equal resources: Moore’s project was financially backed by Miramax while Canner’s had the far more modest resources provided by public funds from *paved* Art + New Media, Canada Council for the Arts, SaskCulture, the City of Saskatoon, and the Saskatchewan Motion Picture Association. A consideration of unequal resources is significant when comparing the effectiveness of the two works, given the two to three years *Fahrenheit 9/11* took to produce and the three-week residency available for Canner’s project.

None of these differences, in themselves, constitutes a definitive point of superiority of one approach over another, although each strategy has its strengths and pitfalls. “Bridges” is least effective when it obeys the unspoken rules of “legitimate” discourse and fails to break free of the limits of discourse, a problem that I link to an ambivalency between building bridges and disturbing the status quo. Moore, by opting to

disturb the status quo unequivocally, creates a more powerful project, yet incurs more criticism and opposition because of his assertion of political subjectivity as a legitimate and radical mode of knowledge production. His willingness to apply Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov's grand statement made at the beginning of film's history--"My path leads to the creation of a fresh perception of the world. I decipher in a new way a world unknown to you"<sup>5</sup>--to a politically activist work makes him both a modernist in the sense of valuing a unique creator-self constructing a grand vision with universalistic implications, and, at the same time, thoroughly post-modern in his re-centering of the subjective and his adoption of many post-modernist strategies. Moore, therefore, is an heir to Bertolt Brecht who, according to Brecht scholar Elizabeth Wright in a post-modern re-evaluation of the playwright, "revolutionized the modern theatre, even if not society" and whose "work disturbed any kind of rigid polarization." Wright continues, "Yet it is becoming plain that much of what he proposed and carried out qualifies him to be regarded as a deconstructionist *avant la lettre*."<sup>6</sup> Canner's goal of building bridges was at odds with the limitations of the project, particularly its short time span and its use of an artist unfamiliar with the local situation. Her approach resembles the outsider journalist-as-instant-expert, whereas what such a project needed was a committed local artist with the sensitivities of a journalist and a deep knowledge of the local social environment.

Whether deconstructing, in Moore's approach, or building bridges, in Canner's approach, both Moore and Canner function as organic intellectuals, envisioned by Gramsci as the intellectual who opens up the transformative possibilities in society by building up a counter hegemony to the hegemony of the ruling class.<sup>7</sup> An examination of the case studies presented here would suggest that for artists to act on behalf of their own

class (as Moore does) rather than intervening on behalf of another constituency (as Canner does) is more powerful and less rife with pitfalls. The process of trying to find methods to transfer representational power to members of a different class, ethnic group, and country produces tendencies towards convolutions and contradictory premises (e.g. wearcam participants controlled the video technology, but Canner controlled the edit).

Gramsci concluded that the vital role played by hegemonic ideology in advanced capitalism means that the class struggle is cultural and not just political and economic. While Gramsci emphasized the role of educators as a means to build a counter hegemony, artists, who can emerge from any class, have skills and training that ideally suit them as well to the task of the organic intellectual. The visual artist as social change agent assumes the role of activist whose intellectual critique of society takes visual form partly as a response to the importance that visual culture has in the perpetuation of political/economic structures. Artists who are adept at appropriating the technologies, forms and content of the mass media can utilize them to encourage changes in mass consciousness. The two case studies point to the potential for activist art to revitalize the public sphere as an arena of democratic discourse in sites such as everyday public spaces and movie theatres. The kind of consciousness raising taking place on the street among the small group attending the “Bridges” screening and in theatres among the millions who attended theatrical screenings of *Fahrenheit 9/11* contributes to a potential cultural shift preceding social and political change.

As a result of the case studies, a few problems with activist artmaking can be highlighted. As can be seen by the response to each project, overcoming societal consensus is not easy when the majority of the population accepts what is happening in

society as “common sense.” Questioning the legitimacy of power and de-normalizing it triggers reactions ranging from non-participation, to discomfort with and rejection of the content or form, to active attempts to refute or suppress it. The artist’s trying to avoid these reactions can only result in accepting limits on discourse, which weakens the work’s effectiveness. Embracing it requires a calculated risk and having no wish to downplay this danger I included a brief discussion of the fate of Critical Art Ensemble. The role for the audience in activist art as collaborators in the meaning-making process highlights the difficulties of constructing willing participatory publics, a problem exemplified by the “Bridges” project. Moore’s unprecedented success at creating new audiences for politically charged documentaries shows that it is possible to construct such publics, although they are perhaps temporary and conditional. It has yet to be shown whether contemporary activist art can ever successfully construct permanent new publics as self-sustaining forces mobilizing for social change. This is certainly the ultimate goal of activist art: to shift audience from its traditional role as spectators of action to agents of social change.

Practical exigencies, such as access to funding, technology, and presentation sites, can limit the ability of cultural producers to make activist work and the effectiveness of the work that is made. My own experience making a short documentary while working on this thesis demonstrated to me the importance in this regard of artist-run media centres, with their training and production support programs, access to technology, and potential to facilitate critical discussion among producers around relevant intellectual/aesthetic concerns. Independent media websites and the DIY<sup>8</sup> culture of production sustaining them is also crucial (“Don’t hate the media, become the media.”<sup>9</sup>).

Access is a key concern and raises the issue of media reform, a goal undertaken by organizations such as Adbusters Media Foundation and Canada's New Democratic Party, whose platform calls for breaking up corporate media chains and expanding the CBC.<sup>10</sup> A single intervention, however successful, is less hopeful than a proliferation of cultural producers multiplying the opportunities for raising critical awareness.

My attempts to connect the artists' work to formative political and artistic influences are designed to make clear that artists do not function entirely as independent voices but as part of discourse communities, which include other like-minded artists, writers, thinkers and activists. Artists do not stand outside of ideology nor do they have an ability to speak an objective or universal truth. They do, however, have the ability to speak their own truth, which is how they can be said to interject an independent voice into a culture dominated by corporate and state interests. When the artist's point of view is that greater popular control is needed over the conditions of life, then the artist is struggling towards the conditions that make democratic debate, and hence genuine democracy, possible.

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<sup>1</sup> "To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalized by the population it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling class comes to appear as the natural order of things." A reference to Gramsci's theories of ideological hegemony in B. Burke, "Antonio Gramsci and Informal Education," *the encyclopedia of informal education*, <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-gram.htm> [accessed 14 July 2005].

<sup>2</sup> Said, 88.

<sup>3</sup> Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (London: Simon and Schuster UK Limited, 2004).

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<sup>4</sup> “Conspiracy Theories,” *Fifth Estate*, CBC-TV, 29 Oct. 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Renov, xxiv.

<sup>6</sup> Wright, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Discussion of Gramsci derived from Burke and from Antonio Gramsci, “The Intellectuals,” in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. by Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (New York: International Publishers) 3-23 Available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/editions/spn/problems/intellectuals.htm> [accessed 26 February 2004].

<sup>8</sup> The term means ‘Do it yourself.’

<sup>9</sup> [www.Indymedia.org](http://www.Indymedia.org)

<sup>10</sup> McChesney, 315.

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