A Canadian postmodern scene: five photographs, topped and underlined with a verbal text. The central image is a soaring view upwards of the Trans-America building in San Francisco, its formal and cultural associations probably equally divided between American-ness/modernity and phallic power/presence. A large Marlboro cigarette billboard adds to this a sign of consumer capitalism. The photograph on the left appears to represent a naked woman in a pose suggesting—especially in its contiguity with the phallic building next to it—sensual abandonment. Ironically, this is no living, flesh-and-blood sensuous woman, but a stone statue—actually part of a bench in Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto. On the other side of the central image is a representation of two more stone figures, one male and one female, captured in a pose that suggests arrested motion. But death is still present—and not only because of the proximity of that cemetery bench: this is a photograph of part of the
to see the rules of your expression become the laws of an exchange

27 Geoff Miles,
excerpt from *Foreign Relations* (1987)
Afterword

Toronto War Memorial for South Africa. Race and colonialism are covertly added to gender as implied concerns; war and death are overtly used ironically to 'frame' American capitalist power. The two outer and smaller photographs—one of a male and one of a female—act formally as quotation marks that signal sexual difference and, more significantly, sexual separation in an Americanized consumerist world of death and destruction. The texts that accompany these images are small, forcing the viewer to approach the work very closely and thus enter the space-visual and cultural—of those images. Above them is printed, in capital letters, the words 'HIGHLIGHTS - SHADOWS'. This is, on one level, a descriptive heading, sitting as it does atop photographs which show considerable play with chiaroscuro and thus foreground, on another level, the technical mechanism of black and white photography in a very self-reflexive way. Beneath the images are the oddly phrased words: 'To see the rules of your expression become the laws of an exchange.' The ironies here are acute: we can see no facial expressions full-on (all are in shadow or turned away—partially or totally—from the viewer) except that of the Marlboro man in the central advertisement image, the image of the 'laws' of American capitalist 'exchange'. The combination of the resolutely political and the self-consciously aesthetic here in the third panel of Canadian photographer Geoff Miles's pointedly entitled Foreign Relations (1987; Plate 27) is what I think best defines postmodernism today.

Roland Barthes once claimed that it is impossible to represent the political, for it resists all mimetic copying. Rather, he wrote, 'where politics begins is where imitation ceases' (Roland Barthes, 154). This is precisely where the self-reflexive, parodic art of the postmodern comes in, underlining in its ironic way the realization that all cultural forms of representation—literary, visual, aural—in high art or in the mass media are ideologically grounded, that they cannot avoid involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses (Burgin, Between, 55). It is not that postmodernist art necessarily represents politics; instead, it unavoidably foregrounds what Victor Burgin calls the 'politics of representation' (Between, 85). This is as true of the fiction of Michael Ondaatje, Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Atwood, or Timothy Findley as it is of the art of Joyce Wieland, Evergon, or Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge.

Umberto Eco considers postmodern 'the orientation of anyone who has learned the lesson of Foucault, i.e., that power is not something unitary that exists outside us' (in Rosso, 4). He might well have added to this (as others have) the lessons learned from Derrida about textuality and deferral, or from Vattimo and Lyotard about intellectual mastery and its limits. In other words, it is difficult to separate the politicizing impulse of
Standing above it all, he sensed the power of his position.

The text needs its shadow! This shadow is a bit of ideology, a bit of representation, a bit of subject.

28 Geoff Miles, excerpt from *The Trapper's Pleasure of the Text* (1985)
postmodern art from the deconstructing impulse of what we have labelled 'poststructuralist' theory. For example, Roland Barthes's playfully serious expositions of the duplicitous role of linguistic and visual codes in both mythologizing and de-mythologizing, in both controlling and subverting the *doxa-the* received opinions of cultural consensus have been important in helping artists negotiate the space between the verbal and the pictorial as well as between the political/theoretical and the aesthetic. In this book, Jane Buyers cites Barthes in her *Language/Possession* (1988), and Geoff Miles, once again, in *The Trapper's Pleasure of the Text* (1985; Plate 28), also uses the same critic's words to play off the complexities of textual language against the deceptive, seeming transparency of the photographic image. Both Buyers and Miles do this in part self-reflexively to engage the art historical memory: *Language/Possession* recalls a work by the Italian Renaissance artist Simone Martini, and *Trapper's Pleasure* invokes documentary street photography as well as Cartier Bresson's 'decisive moment' shots. Here the postmodernly ironic street scene decisively 'captures' only the shadow of the 'trapping' photographer himself.

Although there has been much debate on this issue, I still believe that the inseparability of poststructuralist theory and postmodern art today can be seen not only in these particular works but in the more general way in which both artists and critic/theorists write about their 'discourses'. By the very choice of this term they signal their awareness of the inescapably political contexts in which they work. When 'discourse' is defined as the 'system of relations between parties engaged in communicative activity' (Sekula, 'Invention', 84), it points to such a politically un-innocent thing as the expectation of shared meaning, and it does so unavoidably within a dynamic social context that acknowledges the inevitability of the existence of power relations in any social activity-including art. As one theorist of postmodernism has put it: 'Postmodern aesthetic experimentation should be viewed as having an irreducible political dimension. It is inextricably bound up with a critique of domination' (Wellbery, 235).

Yet it must also be admitted from the start that this is a very strange kind of critique, one bound up with its own complicity with power and domination, one that acknowledges that it cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyse and even undermine: capitalism, liberal-humanism, patriarchy, or any other cultural dominant of our time and place. The ambiguities of such a position are translated into both the content and the form of postmodern art, which thus at once purveys and challenges ideology—but always self-consciously. In many contemporary art forms—painting, video, film, photography, sculpture, and so on—there are works that engage in these postmodern ambiguities largely
Remembering Postmodernism

through their problematizing of the issue of representation—that is, through their de-naturalizing of the 'natural' or what we take as 'given' in the images by which we recognize, and create, ourselves in society. These 'representational' (often figurative) arts share an aesthetic history that is firmly rooted in realist representation but that, especially since their twentieth-century reinterpretation in modernist, formalist terms, now seem to be in a position to confront both their documentary and their formalist impulses. This is the confrontation I see as postmodernist: where some form of documentary historicity meets formalist self-reflexivity and parody. At this juncture, the study of representation becomes not the study of mimetic mirroring or subjective projecting, but an exploration of the way in which images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of the self in the present and in the past. This is how postmodern memory works.

Postmodernism in Canadian art has been called 'a challenge that has displaced style by content, rejected the values and expectations of modernist art, and engaged itself directly with political and social issues, with communication, with self-identity, and the binding and divisive natures of human relationships' (Burnett and Schiff, 247). Generally speaking, the postmodern also appears to coincide with a greater cultural awareness of the existence and power of systems of representation that do not reflect society so much as grant meaning and value within a particular society. If we believe current social scientific theory, there is a paradox involved in this awareness, however. On the one hand, there is a sense that in the Western world we can never get out from under the weight of a long tradition of visual representations. On the other hand, we also seem to be losing faith in the inexhaustibility and power of these existing representations. And parody is often the postmodern form that this paradox takes. By both using and abusing the general conventions and specific forms of representation, postmodern parodic art manages to de-naturalize the 'natural' in them, giving what Rosalind Krauss has called the strange sense of 'loosening the glue by which labels used to adhere to the products of conventions' (121). I am not referring here to the kind of ahistorical kitsch seen in some Toronto restaurants or at the West Edmonton Mall; rather the postmodern—playful but serious—parody in the art of a group like General Idea is one of the important means by which our culture can express both its social and aesthetic dilemmas—and the two are not unrelated. In The Unveiling of the Cornucopia (Plate 2), General Idea both inscribes and subverts a number of our inherited notions about art and its role in society. The would-be fresco fragments conjure up a complex of ideas clustered around the Romantic aesthetic notions of origin and
originality. Here history—or cultural memory—appears to offer art as a component in some mysterious ritual, separate and separated from the social. Yet by making the figures involved into poodles, General Idea at once undercuts the desire for both mystery and Romantic authenticity and provokes a postmodern critique of art’s role in today’s society, bereft of both desires, awash in consumer capitalist values. These values are what their 1984 *Miss General Idea Pageant* and *Pavilion* projects brought to the fore so very powerfully, if playfully, as we shall see later.

The politics of representation cannot often be separated from the representation of politics (of many kinds) in postmodern art. Catharine Stimpson has noted:

> Like every great word, 'representacion/s' is a stew. A scrambled menu, it serves up several meanings at once. For a representation can be an image—visual, verbal, or aural. ... A representation can also be a narrative, a sequence of images and ideas. ... Or, a representation can be the product of ideology, that vast scheme for showing forth the world and justifying its dealings. (223)

Postmodern representation is self-consciously all of these and more—image, narrative, product (and producer) of ideology. It is a truism of sociology and cultural studies today to say that life in the postmodern world of the West is utterly mediated by representations; that our age of satellites and computers has gone well beyond Benjamin's 'Age of Mechanical Reproduction' with its particular epistemological and aesthetic consequences and moved into a state of crisis in representation (Benhabib). Nevertheless, in art critical circles there is still a tendency to see postmodern theory and practice as simply replacing representation with surface textuality or as denying our 'enmeshment in representation' (Arac, 295), even though much postmodern thought has explicitly refuted these views: for instance, Derrida's argument about the inescapability of the logic of representation and Foucault's various problematizations, though never repudiations, of our traditional modes of representation in our discourses of knowledge.

In one sense the very word 'representation' unavoidably suggests some given which the act of representing in some way duplicates. This is normally considered the realm of mimesis. Yet by simply making representation into an issue once again, postmodernism challenges our mimetic assumptions about representation (in any of its "scrambled menu" of meanings), especially assumptions about its transparency and common-sense naturalness. In the background is Louis Althusser’s much-cited notion of ideology as a system of representation and as an
unavoidable part of every social totality (231-2). In the foreground is Jean Baudrillard’s theory of the 'simulacrum'. In Simulations Baudrillard argues that today the mass media have neutralized reality in stages: first reflecting it; then masking and perverting it; next, masking its absence; and finally producing in its stead the simulacrum of the real, the destruction of meaning and of all relation to reality. Baudrillard's model has come under attack for the metaphysical idealism of its view of the 'real', for its nostalgia for a pre-mass-media authenticity, and for its apocalyptic nihilism. But there is an even more basic objection to his assumption that it is (or was) ever possible to have unmediated access to reality: have we ever known the 'real' except through representations? We can certainly see, hear, feel, smell and touch it, but do we know it - in the sense that we give meaning to it? In Lisa Tickner's succinct terms, the real is 'enabled to mean through systems of signs organized into discourses in the world' (19). This is where the politics of representation enters for, according to Althusser, ideology is a production of representations (231-2). Our common-sense presuppositions about the 'real' depend upon how that 'real' is described, how it is put into discourse and interpreted. There is nothing natural about the 'real' - even before the existence of the mass media.

This said, it is also the case that - however naive his views that innocent, stable representation was once possible - Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum has been immensely influential in the debates on postmodernism. Witness the unacknowledged but no less evident debt to it in Fredric Jameson's own version of pre-mass-media nostalgia: 'In the form of the logic of the image or the spectacle of the simulacrum, everything has become "cultural" in some sense. A whole new house of mirrors of visual replication and of textual reproduction has replaced the older stable reality of reference and of the non-cultural "real"' (42). What postmodern theory and practice together suggest is that everything always was 'cultural', at least in the sense that everything always was - and is - mediated by representations. They suggest too that notions of truth, reference, and the non-cultural 'real' have not 'ceased to exist' (Baudrillard, 6) but that they are no longer unproblematic issues, assumed to be self-evident and self-justifying. The postmodern, as I have been defining it here, is not a degeneration into 'hyperreality' but a questioning of what reality can mean and how we can come to know it. It is not that representation now dominates or effaces the referent, but that it now self-consciously acknowledges its existence as representation - that is, as interpreting (and indeed, as creating) its referent, not as offering direct and immediate access to it.

This is not to say that what Jameson calls the 'older logic of the referent (or realism)' (43) is not historically important to postmodernist represen-
In fact, many postmodern strategies are premised on a challenge to the realist notion of representation that presumes the transparency of the medium and thus the direct and 'natural' link between sign and referent. Of course, modernist art (in all its forms) challenged this notion as well, but it did so deliberately to the detriment of the referent, that is, by emphasizing the opacity of the medium and the self-sufficiency of the signifying system. What postmodernism does is to de-naturalize both realism's transparency and modernism's reflexive response, while retaining (in its complicitously critical way) the historically attested power of both. This is the ambivalent politics of postmodern representation that Allyson Clay's *Lure* (plate 7) deploys so effectively in relation to the purism of modernism.

With the problematizing and de-naturalizing of both realist reference and modernist autonomy, postmodern representation opens up other possible relations between art and the world. Gone is what Benjamin called the 'aura' of art as original, authentic, unique, and with it go all the taboos against textual strategies that rely on the appropriation and parody of already existing representations. Think of what happens when a contemporary Canadian artist parodically inserts his own face within the representation of a famous modernist, as does Chris Cran in *Self-Portrait as Max Beckmann*. What happens is that memory is at work, and at work effectively; the history of representation itself becomes a valid subject of art—and not just its history as high art. The borders between high art and mass or popular culture and those between the discourses of art and the discourses of the world are regularly crossed in postmodern theory and practice. But it must be admitted that this crossing is rarely undertaken without considerable border tensions.

The appropriation of various forms of mass-media representation by postmodern artists like Bruce Barber has come under attack by the (still largely modernist) art establishment. Yet others see this as a necessary strategy of 'regenerative iconography' (Peterson, 7), as a recycling—in the ecological sense of breaking down and recasting images to address; contemporary society that is in danger of losing its cultural memory in its drive toward novelty. This conjunction of the political/social and the self reflexively aesthetic—of the outward- and the inward-directed—define the postmodern as operating both against and within the sphere of influence of the realist, romantic, and modernist pasts. And Andy Fabo's *Craft of the Contaminated*, as Mark Cheetham has discussed it, is a good example of how such parodic recycling can actually make memory into a political tool. The fact that the parodied work—Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa*—has been interpreted allegorically as both a historical reminder and a politic,
statement alerts the viewer of Fabo's painting to seek historico-political allegory as well. And indeed the items on this crafty raft do suggest such a reading: a Canadian flag, a teepee, a landscape by Lawren Harris of the Group of Seven. Part of Fabo's 'craft' as a Canadian painter, perhaps, is to come to terms not only with European high art (Gericault) but with Canadian cultural representations as well—no matter how historically repressed (that of the native peoples), no matter how clichéd (the flag) or aesthetically burdensome (the Group of Seven's legacy). Does the Canadian content here also 'contaminate' European high-art representation? But it is not always nationality that Fabo's postmodern parody allegorizes. His Laocoon Revisited (1981) is a painted parody of that famous Roman statue, inspired by Greek sculpture—as well as of Lessing's Romantic fascination with it. The men represented, however, bear certain specific semiotic signs of 'gayness' in their appearance. The implied sexuality of the original statue is made overt in two of the males' erect members. The entwining snake here takes on complex and diverse meanings: it is unmistakably phallic, thereby giving a new interpretation to the forbidden knowledge of Eden's serpent; but it also comes to allegorize the binding forces—legal and moral—that society uses to constrain gay men.

This issue of the representation of gay males takes us back to The Craft of the Contaminated, for, in our society today, the notion of 'contamination' is difficult to disassociate from AIDS. Certainly Fabo's recent work would support such an interpretation. Significantly, however, perhaps in order to address our society more directly and more powerfully, Fabo has moved from painted parodies of European high art to paintings used in video form: his 1989 Survival of the Delirious, a video about those who live with and die from AIDS, is a piece made in collaboration with Toronto video artist Michael Balser. Fabo represents AIDS through the painted metaphor of the Cree demon, the Windigo. Canadian native art and narrative here replace the art of the European past in a complicated political statement about both Canadian post-colonialism and the shared oppression of natives and gays in this society.

This complexity of political message, deriving directly from aesthetic parody operating on every level from that of titles to composition and content, often means that postmodern representational strategies refuse to stay neatly within accepted generic conventions and traditions. This art frequently deploys hybrid forms and seemingly mutually contradictory tactics, and therefore always frustrates critical attempts (including this one) to systematize them, to order them with an eye to control and mastery—that is, to totalize them. Roland Barthes once asked: 'Is it not the characteristic of reality to be unmasterable? And is it not the characteris-
tistic of system to *master* it? What then, confronting reality, can one do who rejects mastery?* (Roland Barthes, 172). Postmodern representation itself contests mastery and totalization, often by unmasking both their powers and their limitations. We watch the process of what Foucault once called the interrogating of limits that is now replacing the search for totality. On the level of representation, this postmodern questioning overlaps with similarly pointed challenges by those working, for example, in post-colonial or feminist or Marxist contexts. How is the 'other' represented in, say, imperialist or patriarchal or capitalist discourses? However represented, it differs from its portrayal in works like those of Fabo or Barber. Postmodern thought 'refuses to turn the Other into the Same' (During, 33).

It is this kind of refusal that has contributed to the now standard view of the postmodern as being too dispersed, too appreciative of difference, or as lacking an ordered or coherent vision of 'truth': 'To the postmodernist mind, everything is empty at the center. Our vision is not integrated-and it lacks form and definition' (Gablik, 17). Actually that centre is not so much empty as called into question, interrogated as to its power and its politics. And if the notion of centre-be it seen in terms of 'Man' (as in Alice Mansell's punning *Manoeuvre*, Plate 14) or 'Truth' or whatever-is challenged in postmodernism, what happens to the idea of the 'centred' subjectivity, the subject of representation? In Stimpson's terms, 'the theory that representational machineries were reality's synonyms, not a window (often cracked) onto reality, eroded the immediate security of another lovely gift of Western humanism: the belief in a conscious self that generates texts, meanings, and a substantial identity' (236). That sense of the coherent, continuous, autonomous and free subject, as Foucault suggested in *The Order of Things*, is a historically conditioned and historically determined construct—and this is what the art in the second chapter of this book calls to our attention. Representational self-consciousness in works like Janice Gurney's *Screen* (plate 13) points to a very postmodern awareness of both the nature and the historicity of our various discursive representations of the self. And it is not only the obvious psychoanalytic and poststructural theories that have helped engender this complex awareness. As we can see here, feminist theory and practice have problematized even poststructuralism's (unconsciously, perhaps, phallocentric) tendency to see the subject in apocalyptic terms of loss or dispersal: instead, they refuse to foreclose the question of identity. This refusal is undertaken in the name of the (different) histories of women: 'Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production, that men have had, women have not, I think, (collectively) felt burdened by *too* much Self, Ego, Cogito, etc.' (N. Miller,
It is the feminist need to inscribe first—and only then to subvert—that I think has influenced most the complicitously critical postmodern stand of underlining and undermining received notions of the subject.

In postmodern art, subjectivity is represented as something in process, never fixed, never autonomous or outside history. It is always a gendered subjectivity, but it also cannot be considered apart from class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. And it is usually textual self-reflexivity that paradoxically calls these 'worldly' particularities to our attention by foregrounding the politics behind the dominant representations of the self—and the 'other'-in visual images. To give an example from a related medium, R. Murray Schafer's Patria I: The Characteristics Man is a theatrical/operatic/rock/performance work that thematizes and actualizes the problematic nature of postmodern subjectivity. A silent, anonymous immigrant ('D.p.'), introduced to the audience as 'victim' (a large sign with this word and an arrow follows him about the stage), seeks to define a self in a new and hostile Canadian world that denies him his (non-English) speech, leaving him only with the symbolic voice of the (ethnically coded) accordion. A strategically placed wall of mirrors faces the audience at one point, preventing any self-distancing and any denial of complicity on our part.

While most art forms today can show this same kind of awareness of the politics of representation, photography often seems to have chosen to do so more blatantly than others. As a visual medium, it has a long history of being both politically useful and politically suspect: think of Brecht, of Benjamin, or of Heartfield's anti-Nazi photomontages. A recent show of three Vancouver photographers (Arni Runar Haraldsson, Harold Ursuliak and Michael Lawlor), called A Linear Narration: Post Phallocentrism, offered examples of sophisticated satirical socio-political analyses of dominant cultural representations (E. Miller). Lawlor's media-derived photomontages are most reminiscent of Heartfield's in technique, if not in virulence: Two Queens appropriates two already existing and familiar images, placing together roughly torn-out pictures of Warhol's Marilyn Monroe and a newspaper photo of Queen Elizabeth II. This conjunction suggests a particularly Canadian irony directed against our double colonialization: historical (British royalty) and present-day (American media).

Photography today is one of the major forms of discourse 'through which we are shown and show ourselves' (Corrigan, 13). Frequently, what I would call postmodern photography foregrounds the notion of ideology as representation (Althusser, 231) by appropriating recognizable images from that particular omnipresent visual discourse, almost as an act of retaliation for its (unacknowledged) politics (Burgin, Between, 54), its (unacknowledged) constructing of our images of self and world. Photography today is one of the major forms of discourse 'through which we are shown and show ourselves' (Corrigan, 13). Frequently, what I would call postmodern photography foregrounds the notion of ideology as representation (Althusser, 231) by appropriating recognizable images from that particular omnipresent visual discourse, almost as an act of retaliation for its (unacknowledged) politics (Burgin, Between, 54), its (unacknowledged) constructing of our images of self and world. Photography today is one of the major forms of discourse 'through which we are shown and show ourselves' (Corrigan, 13). Frequently, what I would call postmodern photography foregrounds the notion of ideology as representation (Althusser, 231) by appropriating recognizable images from that particular omnipresent visual discourse, almost as an act of retaliation for its (unacknowledged) politics (Burgin, Between, 54), its (unacknowledged) constructing of our images of self and world.
raphy, precisely because of its mass-media ubiquity, allows what are considered high-art representations—like those of Nigel Scott or Jeff Wall—to speak to and against those of the more visible vernacular, to ‘catch the seduction’ (Foster, 68) of those conventional images.

What is common to all postmodern challenges to convention is their exploitation of the power of that convention and their reliance on the viewers’ knowledge of its particulars. In most cases, this reliance does not necessarily lead to elitist exclusion because the convention being evoked has usually become part of the common representational vocabulary of newspapers, magazines, or advertising—even if its history is more extensive. For example, *Maillot Nair et Blanc* (1986; Plate 29), by Nigel Scott, offers a model in a bathing suit, striking a pose that suggests she is ready to dive, though a bathrobe hangs from her arms, which stretch out behind her. She stands on a pedestal against a (self-reflexively) ill-hung canvas backdrop. In this one image Scott openly contests a number of prevailing and obvious (male) representations of women: as inactive pin-up bathing beauty (this one is prepared to dive, wears a utilitarian bathing cap, and refuses the gaze of the viewer, looking and facing, instead, off to the left); as idealized passive female figuratively set on a pedestal; as capitalist symbol (the Rolls Royce Winged Victory’s silhouette appears as a bathrobe-dropping swimmer). Photographs like this address their viewers’ memory and knowledge of the common visual vernacular of twentieth-century Canadian life.

In the work of Bruce Barber, existing photographic representations—such as those of the Vietnam war—are appropriated and are effective precisely because they are loaded with pre-existing meaning. They are placed in new and ironic contexts to bring about that typically postmodern complicitous critique: while exploiting the power of familiar images, this art also works to de-naturalize them, making ‘visible the invisible mechanisms whereby these images secure their putative transparency’ (Owens, 21), and bringing to the fore their politics, that is, the interests in which they operate and the power they wield—or fail to wield through cultural amnesia (Folland, 60). Both any (realist) documentary value and any formalist (modernist) pleasure such an appropriating practice might invoke in Nam are inscribed, even as they are undercut. So too is any Romantic notion of individuality or authenticity—for the work or the artist. But this particular notion has always been somewhat problematic for photography as a mechanically reproductive medium (Solomon-Godeau, ‘Photography’, 80), and this technological aspect has other implications as well. Commentators as diverse as Annette Kuhn (26–7), Roland Barthes (Camera, 87–8), and Susan Sontag (179) have remarked on photography’s ambivalences: it is...
29 Nigel Scott,
*Maillot Noir et Blanc* (1986)
in no way innocent of cultural formation (or offorming culture), yet it is in a very physical sense technically tied to the real, or at least to the visual and the actual. And this paradox is what the postmodern use of this medium exposes: even as it exploits the ideology of the 'visible as evidence' (Kuhn, 27), it unmasks what might be the major photographic code—the one that pretends to look uncoded and 'natural'.

The postmodern photographer is, in Hal Foster's terms of reference, more the manipulator of signs than the producer of an art object; the viewer is the active decoder of a message, not the passive consumer or even the rapt contemplator of artistic beauty. The difference is one of the politics of representation. However, postmodern photographs are often also overtly about the representation of politics. Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge's *No Immediate Threat* (1986; Plate 30) is a photo-textual narrative series telling the story of the exposure to radiation hazards of Ontario nuclear power plant workers. No attempt is made here to achieve the traditional documentary illusion of transparency or of objectivity or even neutrality of representation. Nor is this an example of the passive 'victim photography' of the American documentary work commissioned in the 1930s by the Farm Securities Administration. The point of view here is that of the workers and the aim is not really to record working conditions but to agitate for their change. Instead of images of real workers on the job, Conde and Beveridge present photographs of manifestly 'staged' tableaux with artificial-looking props and actors stiffly posed like mannekins, in order to re-enact scenes recounted by the workers themselves (in interviews). Texts drawn from these accounts accompany the pictured scenes, in stark and ironic contrast to other incorporated texts and images presenting official government and industry statements about nuclear safety. This series has been shown not only in galleries (it has been purchased by the Art Gallery of Ontario) but in union halls, community centres, and libraries—in other words, in public sites that signal its social and political intent. The series' intense self-consciousness about its own constructing of images of historical actuality through flagrant artifice is what actually enables—not inhibits—such a politicization of representation. There is no transparency to either the images or the stories; there is only the clash of different representations and their politics.

As some commentators have argued, photography may legitimize and normalize existing power relations, in one sense, but it can clearly also be used against itself to de-naturalize that authority and power and to reveal how its representational strategies construct an 'imaginary economy' (Sekula, 'Reading', 115) that might warrant deconstructing. Of course, it is not only photography that both does and undoes this 'economy'. For
30 Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge, one element from *No Immediate Threat* (1986)
instance, Stan Douglas uses multi-media installations to study representa-
tion in terms of the relations of culture to technology, especially film
technology. He disassembles film into its constituent parts (sounds; stills
projected as slides) in order to make opaque the supposed ability of film to
be a transparent recording representing of reality. As we have seen, Gen-
eral Idea has taken a different tack but one that also looks to this kind of
politics of representation. Their 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant made the
high-art world into a beauty pageant, literalizing art’s relation to what we
today like to call ‘displaced desire’ and ‘commodity acquisition.’ In the
process, they also managed to problematize our culture’s patriarchal
notions of the erotic and of sexual ‘possession” in relation to capitalist
values.

It has frequently been women artists, however, who have most point-
edly engaged in the politicized critique of gender representations. Sheila
Ayarst’s Three Minutes (plate 1) uses an ironic but reverential parody of a
famous Rembrandt painting to lay bare the patriarchal discourses that
determine the representation of the human body—and brain—in history:
science (Dr Deijman’s anatomy lesson to male students), medicine (the
autopsy report), art (Rembrandt). Joanne Tod’s Self Portrait (1982) deploys
a series of multiple ironies to tease out a political message about feminine
subjectivity as represented in North American culture. The first subvert-
ing irony of the work is that this is nota self-portrait of Joanne Tod; it is an
image copied from an ad in a fashion magazine of an elegant woman in an
evening dress, standing in a dramatic, if stagy, pose. The setting is not
Canadian, but ur-American: the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC,
with the phallic Washington Monument asserting its presence strongly.
Yet in another sense this is an ironically pointed portrait of how the
gendered self is portrayed—and constructed—for and by women (and
Canadians?) themselves. As in advertising copy, there is a text inscribed
here on the image, but this one appears strangely incongruous: ‘neath my
arm / is the color of Russell’s Subaru.’ Is this an anti-Yuppie, anti-
consumerist irony against people who define themselves by their posses-
sions? Are the Japanese car and the American setting signals of the ‘global
village’ of advertising—and therefore of the aptly termed ‘multinational’
capitalism of today? This very same painting is later reproduced in an even
more obviously ironic context, hanging on a dining-room wall in Self
Portrait as Prostitute (1983; Plate 31). Here the table is set for dinner, but no
one is present: perhaps guests have not yet arrived; more likely, the absent
woman is cooking it in the kitchen. The title here suggests that women
have been ‘prostituted’ not only to fashion and advertising but to
domesticity—all manifestations of patriarchal power and ideology.
31 Joanne Tod,
*Self Portrait as Prostitute* (1983)
Gay artists like Fabo address the structures and strictures of dominant representations of the male and the masculine in ways that recall feminist work on the social construction of Woman. Evergon is a Canadian photographer whose identity as a gay male is central to his work. For example, *Boy with Ingrown Tattoo* (1971) offers multiple parodic echoes of the art-historical tradition of male nudes—but with an ironic twist or two. Here is a youthful, well-built male posing in a natural setting in a way that recalls classical and Baroque portrayals of, for instance, *St Sebastian* (Hanna, 6). But ironic incongruencies at once both inscribe and disrupt this work of memory and also encode other signs of a homoerotic sexuality left only implicit in those theoretically religious representations. First, there is the tattoo—‘ingrown’, according to the title. Second, there is the facial expression of the young man: either sensual or sullen, or both. The third incongruent item is the underwear worn by the youth (pulled down around his thighs). Two very different iconographic memories come into play here: the conventions of soft-core pornography and—ironically modernized—the modesty-protecting loin-cloths that usually covered male genitals in high-art representations of otherwise naked men. Here the underwear serves no such purpose, as it is lowered to reveal all. Another level of sexual suggestiveness enters with the parodic recalling of *Caravaggio’s Flagellation* in the boy’s pose. Given the importance of that painter—in terms of both his sexuality and his lushly coloured and textured rendering of male figures—to Evergon’s later large-format Polaroid photographs, this connection is not a gratuitous working of visual memory.

Gender and sexuality are two important politicized issues explicitly raised by postmodern Canadian art and by current feminist and gay criticism and theory. Class and race/ethnicity have also become prominent, if problematic, social notions addressed by postmodernism. Joanne Tod’s *Reds on Green* (Plate 8) parodies colour field painting in particular and modernist formalism in general. But there is perhaps another politics operating here as well: a politics, literally, of colour. The Chinese communists are figured not only to engage the title’s punning play on ‘Reds’ (on a green background), but also to raise the issue of race and colour in politics. In some other work, representations of Asians and blacks replace women as symbols of ‘otherness’, in what is often considered Canada’s generally homogeneous white (and patriarchal, capitalist) society. In *Allegro Furioso Ma Sterotypissimo* (1985), nine oriental female musicians are dwarfed by a giant pair of (male) hands bearing drumsticks. The unrealistic scale in an otherwise realist representation alerts viewers to allegorical and ironic possibilities. The ‘allegro’ of the title is obviously a musical term for a certain speed of playing, but its conjunction with ‘furioso’ may well be
meant to suggest Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, the comic Renaissance epic of male- and Caucasian-chivalry. But this 'allegro furiosa' is said to be 'but most stereotypical', likely in both gendered and racial terms: Asians play Western musical instruments and do so these days with great accomplishment and flair; women play strings, woodwinds, and keyboard—relatively gentle and genteel instruments—while martial males stereotypically play loud drums, whose drumsticks resemble clubs about to beat the women players' heads. In works like *Infiltration* (1988), installed in the Pump Building of Toronto's Harris Water Filtration Plant for the 1988 *WaterWorks* show, a black male takes on the role of symbolic 'other', here trying to block out (with his hands over his ears) both the noise of the capitalist water-purifying industry (this is the noisiest room in the plant) and the represented notes of Handel's *Water Music*—both perhaps equally (and punningly) 'white noise'. This site-specific work plays iconographically in complex and often confusing ways with notions of social and racial infiltration. Similarly, in *Research and Development* (1986), Tod represents black men in a racially unmixed, black bar, drinking Black Label beer. The semiotic overdetermination of 'blackness' here is juxtaposed to two oddly inserted, separate paintings: one (on the upper left) portrays six white, middle-aged men in what appears to be a corporate boardroom where 'research and development' may not include thinking about racial equality of opportunity; the other (on the upper right) is a representation of New York's Guggenheim Museum. Have modern art and big business connived in marginalizing certain groups?

'Iod's works are never simple and almost never provoke unambiguous interpretations. Is *FivetoTwelve* (1988) a parody of the academic still life? It certainly represents, on one level, a legitimized (in both aesthetic and capitalist terms) image of beauty: a silver *objet d'art* featuring two female angels holding up a large silver bowl. But on the upper right third of the painting are four circles, acting almost as cut-outs, through which we see the eyes and lips of a black face. As Robert Mycroft asks, what are we to make of what he calls this 'Third World Presence' (87)? Is this 'a critique of commodification or a celebration of it?' Is it 'a silver samovar or a Molotov Cocktail' (87)? While clearly confusing, the work might suggest certain interpretive possibilities. The women portrayed on the silver *objet* are idealized beautiful images of winged womanhood, identical each to the other and thus symbolically unindividuated. Motionless and burdened with the bowl's weight, they are turned away from the viewer (at a 45-degree angle). While the viewer's eyes may safely and voyeuristically enjoy these female forms, the eyes of the black-likely male—showing through those four holes look back at the viewer, not at the art object or its...
figured females at all. This confrontational staring back/staring down foregrounds both sexual and racial differences that were often ignored in art historical commentary before postmodernism.

This kind of art asks its viewers to question the processes by which we represent 'others' as well as our selves and our world, and to become aware of the means by which we literally make sense and construct order out of experience in our particular culture. We cannot avoid representation. We can try to avoid fixing our notions of it and assuming it to be transhistorical and transcultural. We can also study how representation legitimizes or privileges certain kinds of representation and knowledge, both today and in the past. We can put memory to work. The past for the postmodern is something with which we must come to terms, even if our resources for doing so may be limited. Postmodernism tries to understand present culture as the product of previous codings and representations. The representation of history becomes the history of representation too. Postmodern art acknowledges and accepts the challenge of tradition, however ironically: the history of representation cannot be escaped, but it can be both exploited and commented upon critically, often by means of parody. This kind of ironic recycling is one mode of problematizing and denaturalizing the conventions of representation in such a way that the politics of that act of representing is made manifest.

The work of Joanne Tod, Bruce Barber, and many other Canadian artists represented in this book moves outside the 'hermeneutic enclave of aesthetic self-referencing' (Solomon-Godeau, 'Winning', 98) and into the social and cultural world, a world in which we are bombarded with images daily. They manage to point at once to the contingency of art and the primacy of social codes. They make the invisible become visible, the 'natural'-whether either modernist/formalist or realist/documentary-denaturalized. In Canadian art today, the documentary impulse of realism meets head-on the problematizing of reference begun by self-reflexive modernism. And the result is a new focus on the way in which art 'intersects and interacts with the social system in all its varied aspects' (paoletti, 54), present and past. All representation has a politics; it also has a history. The conjunction of these two concerns in what some have called the New Art History (Rees and Borzello) has meant that issues such as gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation are now part of the discourse of the visual arts, as they are also of the literary ones today. Social history cannot be separated from the history of art: in both, memory is at work. There is no value-neutral, much less value-free place from which to represent-in any art form. And there never was.


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Remembering Postmodernism


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