

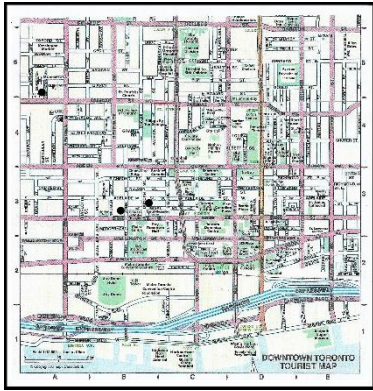
KENSINGTON MARKET HISTORICAL SOCIETY TALK BY BRUCE EVES

“CEAC and ChromaZone: Pivotal Art Movements of Kensington Market”

with Bruce Eves and Andy Fabo, October 10, 2024.

Paul Cadario Conference Centre – University College, University of Toronto.

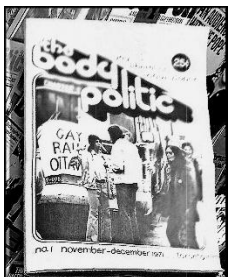
Co-Presented by the Kensington Market Historical Society and the Koffler Gallery.



I wish I had a 1970s street map of the downtown – it would have given a more precise idea of how ghostly the area was after 5 pm. This one is from 1989 and the largish black dots indict the locations of 4 Kensington Ave (where our Odessey begins), before moving on to 86 John Street, and then to our final location at 15 Duncan Street. As you can see it was really a very short walk from one to the other.

But let's begin at the beginning.

In 1970 a loose grouping of men (read commune) living in a vernacular Toronto house at 4 Kensington Avenue (steps north of Dundas Street) formed what would become the beginning of the second wave of Gay Liberation in Toronto. The Glad Day Bookshop opened in the back shed, and would go on to become the oldest continuously-operating gay bookstore in the world; and the next year saw the launch of the Body Politic newspaper, that would continue publishing monthly until 1987 (and then continue on in other forms and formats). All of this was spearheaded by Suber Corley (an American draft-dodger and teacher), his partner Amerigo Marras (a recent Italian immigrant and architectural student at the U of T) and Jearld Moldenhauer (whom I never quite understood what he did for a living). Here's Amerigo and Suber in 1972 and (4.) the first issue of the Body Politic. The Kensington Arts Association was incorporated in 1973 and began its life as an arts space immersed in many of the deconstructivist ideas surrounding conceptual art current and the relationships between language, art, and social practice. The space itself was the ground floor of the house and was (in true late-hippie fashion) decorated with burlap walls. After a falling out with Moldenhauer (and having known him somewhat, this is not surprising), Glad Day and the Body Politic relocated to separate sites. At the time I was still the starry-eyed art student so all of this was a little bit before my time; but independent of all this, gay issues were becoming more central to my art practice from around that time onward.



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Initially I got involved right after art school in 1975, partly because there was an involvement with the Gay Liberation movement, partly because

they seemed interested in things other than just slapping paintings on the wall, and frankly, the space wasn't as intimidating as the white cube galleries.

Taking all of this together, what did that actually mean in 1975? Even as late as the mid-1980s and '90s, Canadian society was very harsh in dealing with us fucking queers – there was a lack of job protection, the relationship with the police was dangerously fraught, but more interesting in this context, the art world was notoriously homophobic.

(I'd venture to say that it still is.)

So for anyone to make gay issues a central plank of their practice was very radical indeed!

What was happening at the time was a convergence of a lot of seemingly unrelated social movements: hippies/draft dodgers, conceptual artists, gay rights activists, as well as artist-run/non-commercial spaces beginning to spring up. In the early to mid-70s the Gay Liberation Movement was an extraordinarily contentious force; it seems absurd to think of it that way today, but then the hostility, especially in the art world, was palpable.

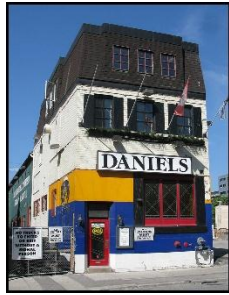
It's somewhat difficult to separate what I think and know today from what I thought and knew then, but based on the research I did on myself at the Clara Thomas Archives at York University (which houses the rescued papers of the Kensington Arts Association and the CEAC), what I came across was a twenty-two-year-old kid in 1975 struggling to connect a recently awoken sexual orientation and wanting to explore the notion of a gay sensibility. I'd realized early on that I wasn't interested in producing work within the parameters of what a gay artist was allowed or expected to do . . . and one could count on the fingers of one hand the precedents of out-gay artists making work other than porn, (not that there's anything wrong with making porn).

For me, this was the backdrop to everything that would follow . . .

It seems there were plans to raze the building at number 4 Kensington and build a structure increasing the footprint to occupy the entire site. A space with retractable walls and moveable partitions would open the spaces to multi-functional use. This plan would have been devised sometime between 1973 and 1975. The building redesign was contemporaneous with the similarly multi-functional design of Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers for the Centre Pompidou in Paris that opened in 1977. Whether or not the plan was ever filed with the city (and rejected) or not, I have no idea.

But it was around 1975 when the hunt for more commodious and flexible space seriously began . . .

86 JOHN STREET Here we have 86 John Street from the 1990s – it's the earliest photo that I could find after it became an Irish pub. Take away all the signage and the third storey and the shutters and the Mondrian paint job and then add a few decades of Victorian and Edwardian grime you'll have an approximation of our new, dismal-looking, workspace located on a deserted street in a deserted neighbourhood at the tail-end of 1975. Originally built for light industry, my guesstimate of the building size would be 30' x 100'. As is obvious here the room



on the second floor was substantial indeed; not pretty, but big. Nobody went for pretty or slick back then. This was from March 1976, and I'm pretty sure that's Peter Dudar running around. A Place where we can actually DO stuff . . .



While the public space at 4 Kensington was merely the narrow ground floor of a not very large house, John Street by comparison was two floors of quasi-industrial space that could easily accommodate large events and elaborate programming. The large space was needed because the programming demanded it.

This was when the CEAC was born.

For the sake of context, let me digress a little. I can't help thinking that the economic malaise and nihilism of the 70s in the West was both a reaction against the previous decade's utopian failure while at the same time was an interregnum to the rise of global neo-liberalism in the same equal way that the hyperinflation and nihilism of the 1920's in Germany was both a reaction to the catastrophe of World War I and a pause before the rise of political extremism in the form of Nazism and Stalinism. This is equally true of the distinctive art that was being made during the '20s and '70s. As we seem to be tiptoeing towards World War III, perhaps more metaphysical, yet awkward, questions should be raised. What is the

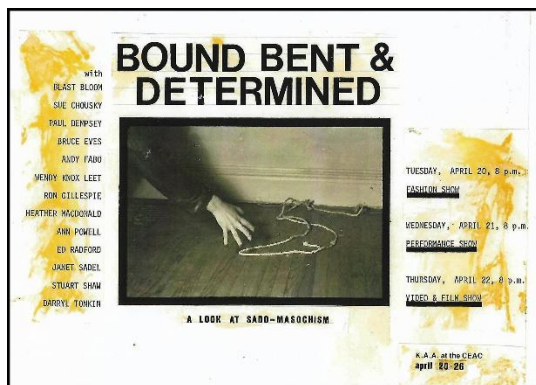
point of art during global conflict, what does it even mean to be an artist in this situation? These are questions that need constant reappraisal . . .



This is 86 John Street today, the vacant lot on the left; and tomorrow's rendition of a 17 storey very pencil-thin building facing the blank back wall of Bell Tiff Lightbox across a very narrow alley . . .



The first two events were large multi-media group exhibitions. In January 1976 there was Body Art. Here's the poster for the first big event at our new space – the Body Art Show of Performances and Films/Videos) and following in April with a programme that I curated of performances works and film and video screenings including a young, cute guy named Andy Fabo, exploring Sado-Masochism. Here's the really crappy-looking poster. (I really hope the brown smudges are rubber cement . . .)



It's the only time in memory that I'd seen a capacity audience of Leather Men in Full-Regalia in an Art Gallery!

It was SO fucking sexy!!!

The move to John Street also brought the beginning of the extensive international exchanges. The

summer of '76 launched the first (of three) European Performance Art tours. It highlighted the work of John Faichney, Ron Gillespie, Amerigo Marras, Missing Associates (Peter Dudar and Lily Eng) and was extensively documented by Heather MacDonald. Here's the gang in Sweden at the beginning of the first CEAC Performance Art tour. From left to right are Lily, Amerigo, John, Peter (and peeking sinisterly out from behind John is Ron).



The tour represented a watershed moment for cutting-edge Canadian artists and was the first time that something beyond traditional forms (ballet etc.) demanded and received international attention. The first tour had stops in Lund, Sweden; London; Edinburgh; Dusseldorf; Antwerp; Ferrara, Venice, and Milan.

The move to Duncan Street was a ground-breaking event – it was the first time in history that an artist-run centre in Canada purchased a permanent home. (Although maybe Western Front in Vancouver got there first). This was made possible thanks to a \$55,000 grant from Wintario. (Today that's about the cost of a down-payment on a shoe-boxed sized condo – but back then fifty-five of the big ones was an absolute fortune!)

It was a very contentious time, and when I look back I see quite a bit of synchronicity between what was happening then and what is happening now. There was always this tension and dialogue about the relationship between art and current events – or bluntly, between art and politics. Overall the artworld at the time (in Toronto) had zero interest in such a relationship, and it's interesting I think that that issue has now come to the fore again now that the world is (again) beginning to spin completely out of control. Again, it raises a question – what exactly is the point of being an artist working in an environment that is so fraught with danger?



Stylistically things have changed, but the difference between then and now is that the 1970s was, in my opinion, the last gasp of artistic freedom. Here are a couple of pieces I did shortly after leaving art school that were

made in 1976 and I think illustrate my point. The first is “Work # 39: Critique of Oligarchical Patronage”. This one I’d completely forgotten about until I stumbled across it in the Archives up at York University

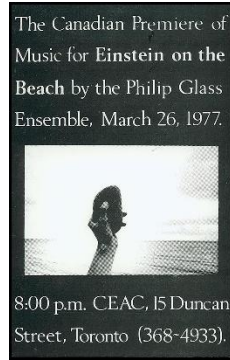
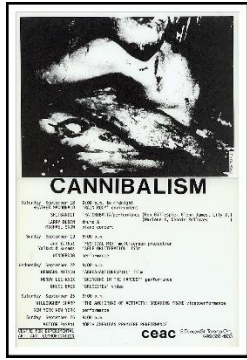
and is a nine-part assault on the givens of Canadian cultural policy as expounded in the pages of *Artscanada* magazine that is both breathtakingly vapid and chillingly bureaucratic – I still agree with about 80% of my scribbles; and the second, “Work #59: Semen Floor” is a room-sized installation constructed from toilet paper, cheesecloth, and the title says all. I was 24 years old and not afraid to throw down a few gauntlets.

15 DUNCAN STREET Luckily this one is still standing and in good shape.

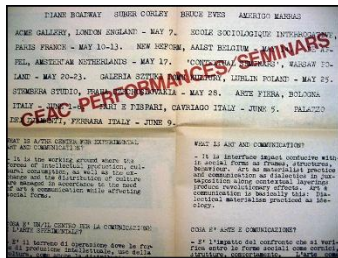


It was the opening of the CEAC flagship – a four storey, heritage, neo-Renaissance building as it looks today, albeit cleaned up quite a bit, but virtually unchanged from when we occupied the place beginning in September 1976 when we signalled to the Canadian art establishment that we were more than your quaint, little, easy-to-ignore, artist-run centre. We had expansive plans that involved the world. The opening salvo was “Cannibal-

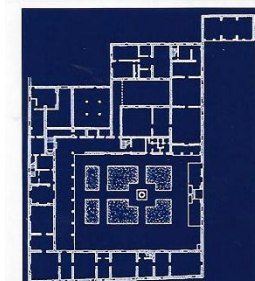
ism,” a week-long film and performance festival – an avant-garde League of Nations if you will – including featuring Heather Macdonald, Shit Bandit, Larry Durbin and Michael Snow, Yayoi Kusama, Hermann Nitsch, Wendy Knox-Leet, Willoughby Sharp and me.



There was almost a different event every day with a schedule that was infinitely flexible. These events were from near and far, such as the Canadian premiere in March 1977 of the Philip Glass Ensemble performing the music from Einstein on the Beach; The invitation was extended with great trepidation after the disastrous (and near-bankrupting) performance here at the U of T by Steve Reich in 1975.



One of my duties, aside from mopping the floors and doing paste-ups, was helping to organize the European tours – there were four in total including a presence at Documenta VI – as well as being on the road locally and to the States. Now remember this was before websites, email, texting etc. . . it was all done by snail mail, and surprisingly wasn't that onerous. Very soon we'd



often be going out on the road. Here's the itinerary for the second tour, although two never happened: We couldn't get visas to visit Prague, and I don't remember why the event in London never came to pass.

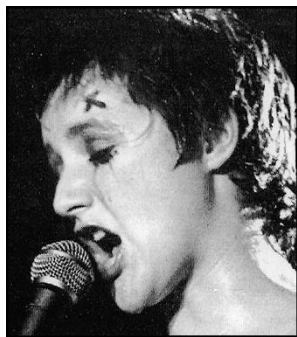
Here's three posters written in Dutch, Polish, and Serbo-Croatian from the second and third performance tours. This image was the first of twenty used as supporting material for the 2018 Governor-General's Award. Here we have the Palazzo dei Diamante in Ferrara, where we did a two-day event, and the magnificent building was typical of the venues we worked out of.

But I'd like to single out two particularly controversial (and in retrospect, amusing) events during the second tour – the performance works in Amsterdam and Lublin, Poland. The tenor of this series of works from first to last is best illustrated by the one I presented at De Appel in Amsterdam – then one of the premiere performance art spaces in Europe (all the huge names in performance art got there start there or had close relations) – on May 17, 1977, I declared Performance Art to be finished, kaput, something for the history books. In Dot Tuer's words, I received "a less-than civil response." In the name of honest opinion and healthy debate I'm not afraid of controversy.

Years later I heard from an actor friend living in the Netherlands that in the early 1980s the gallery had dropped Performance Art completely in favour of traditional theatre . . . now I'm not so arrogant as to claim credit, it's just that I had sensed that the form had reached it's sell-by date in 1977. 47 years later I still maintain the same position.

I had never been to Europe before and frankly I felt like a hayseed. One particular anecdote illustrates my naivete and provincialism – the Galleria Labirynt in the eastern Polish city of Lublin occupied a historic house famous for being wall to wall frescos from attic to basement (but the current custodians don't really talk about the basement, because it was the site of a 17th century brothel and the walls are covered with the filthiest murals I'd ever seen in my life so far . . . naked men with big lace ruffs butt-fucking whores) – this was the site of our performance. We were SO out-performed by those walls!! And of course, this was the moment I didn't have a camera!!!!

CRASH 'N BURN Coinciding with the second tour was Toronto's Summer of Punk. Mythologized beyond belief and documented with varying degrees of accuracy on film and in oral histories, the Crash 'n Burn took up residence for a short time in the underused basement of CEAC. Given that many of the bands being formed that spring were made up of art students and their friends, we felt that the [faux] angry personae and [faux] alienation complimented what was happening upstairs. So when approached by Ralph Alfonso, manager of the Diodes, about using the (underused) basement as a weekly music venue he was given



the go-ahead. The Diodes booked the bands and ensured that the weekly permits were in place; the bar was an old door, the beer fridge was a discarded bathtub. Here's we have various shots of the Crash 'n Burn in full swing. The two bands that I recognize are the Diodes and the Dead Boys and here's the wonderful Mickey Skin (aka Margarita Vos) lead singer of the Curse. I'll get back to her in a minute.

Interestingly, a disconnect developed between the worlds of upstairs and downstairs.



There's a revealing collage of voices in Liz Worth's "Treat Me Like Dirt" that (perhaps inadvertently) sheds light on the origin of much of the ill-will directed toward us from certain segments of the Toronto art-world . . . "Crash 'n Burn represented proletarian performance to them . . ." "The people who owned the building . . . had tons of government money. It was this rich Italian guy, and the

family bought the building and it was all very cutting-edge and weird.” “The first thing that happened was the guys that owned the place, or the guys that ran CEAC, took off for Europe for the summer, leaving, like, an accountant in charge.”

Aside from the implied Mafia connection, where does one begin to unravel these fantasies of aristocratic wealth and leisure all the while unnecessarily bilking the government out of hard-earned proletarian tax dollars? There was no accountant, and I forget who was mind-ing the shop while we were theoretically whooping it up on the Riviera; or better yet, to avoid the Mediterranean heat – the presumption I guess was that we were breakfasting in London, lunching in Paris, followed-up by sex-parties in Berlin . . . such a lux lifestyle would have been pretty difficult on my \$75 a week paycheque.



Here's me and Amerigo in the office, and I can date the photo on the left to July 1977 based on the little pin I'm wearing – Karl Marx – that I picked up at a little newsstand in Bologna, at that moment, being operated by a little girl surrounded by political kitsch like my pin, political newspapers ranging from the ultra-left to the ultra-right, and porn! . . .

I felt like such a hick.

I now believe we didn't shut the C 'n B down soon enough – not because it was attracting limousines – but because it was attracting psychopaths. The violence was ramping up, and to quote Ralph Alfonso, “the ex-con out on parole that smashed the glass front door on the Duncan Street [main entrance] was probably the last straw.”

It was.

After the closure the space was rejigged as The Funnel experimental film theatre. I had zero involvement there, so I'll leave their story to someone else.

From September 1976 onward there was a monthly publishing venture chronicling the activities at the flagship location and those on the road. Blandly titled *Art Communication Edition*, the content pretty much detailed the day-to-day activities of the Centre; initially simple listings and short descriptions of upcoming events and screenings plus archival lists of publications and film/videos entering the Centre's growing library collection. Gradually meatier and more theoretical pieces began to appear, plus a four-page centerfold set aside for the Crash 'n Burn. The drumbeat at the back of all the issues we were dealing with at the time was the dawning realization that the historical avant-garde was coming to an



end. Here's several issues – and the reason I include them here is because there is one final note about our musical interlude – a more or less happy one.

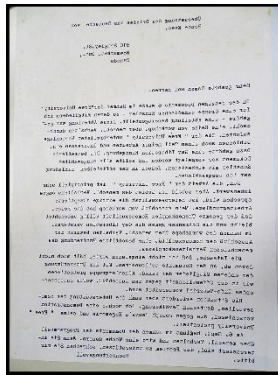
We cut a record.

(24.) “Raw/War” was a 45-rpm collaboration between me, Amerigo, Mickey Skin, and the Diodes . . . It remains the most sought-after relic from that period and (inexplicably) has gone on to find homes in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Madrid’s Reina Sofia Museum, and the library of the University of Bologna . . . and I don’t even have a copy. With the inclusion of a little booklet the record became Issue # 8 of Art Communication Edition because we simply didn’t have enough time to put together a proper issue of the paper as we were about to fly off to Germany to work here! The Fridericianum Museum. Built by Frederick II, Landgrave (or Count) of Hesse-Kassel, he used the riches amassed from renting soldiers to the British in 1775 to build the world's first public art museum. Documenta has used the building for each of its iterations since its founding in 1955.

But our visit didn’t come about without a glitch.

In the early Spring of 1977 the CEAC – represented by Lily Eng, Ron Gillespie, Amerigo Marras, and me; (and others from around the world) were invited to attend Documenta VI in Kassel, Germany and participate in Joseph Beuys Free International University. Beuys was at that point one of the most famous artists in Europe (if not the West). My proposal was to hold a demonstration in front of the event’s venue against the continuing existence of Paragraph 175 – Germany’s notoriously anti-gay law and the only law enacted during the Hitler period to remain on the books after the fall of the Third Reich. This got me disinvited. (Along with an “All of us or None of us” stance from CEAC) I wrote threatening the museum organizers that I would make their censorship public and call for a NATIONAL protest against Paragraph 175, and that I was going to Kassel whether they liked it or not.

I never received a reply.



In November 2020, I received an email from Johanna Adam, a curator at Germany's Federal Exhibition Hall located in Bonn, who was "preparing an extensive exhibition about Joseph Beuys and Wilhelm Lehmbruck . . . During my research in the archive, I came across the German translation of a letter from you in which you described how the Free University impeded your participation and missed out the homosexual perspective during the workshop on violence and social behaviour." In response I stated that "perhaps the threat of a demonstration against Beuys and his hypocrisy was enough to correct the

situation (deep down bullies usually turn out to be cowards)." It is perhaps necessary to point out that 1977 was the apex of power and influence for the Gay Liberation movement all across the West, and threats against credibility and hypocrisy were very, very effective tools.

In the name of saving face, I think I made them cave.

The schedule that was sent out included me on three different dates! My premiere was a lecture on homoeroticism and violence in punk and S&M. Here's an archival document that includes a

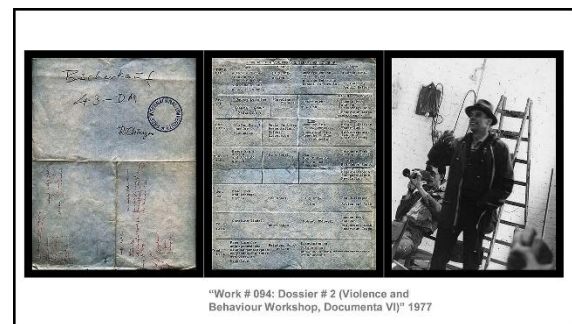
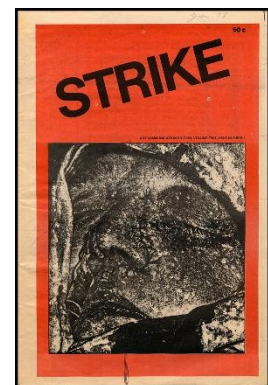


photo me videotaping something (at this late date I've no idea what or whom) sitting beside Joseph Beuys shooting his mouth off (about what I could care less).

Beuys himself was simply a HORRIBLE man, and at the party after all the events finished up he launched into a series of demeaning and contemptuous impersonations of his invited guests – yet another avant-garde League of Nations – and ended his thanks by sticking his tongue down my throat . . . all I can say is that I'm probably one of a dwindling number of men to have been sexually assaulted by an actual card-carrying Nazi. (And as far as I know he had never shown any contrition for his wartime adventures.) And to make matters even worse – as a kisser, he REALLY sucked.

Shamefully, Paragraph 175 was not rescinded until 1994.

... AND IN THE END It's important to point out that there was in general a para-Marxist gloss over the entire period – it was a decade that began with Leonhard Bernstein's benefit cocktail party for the Black Panthers and ended with the publications *Bomb* and *Fuse*. In January of 1978 the publication was re-branded as *Strike*. It's been said over and over that this was a major break. This is completely incorrect. As



the designer of the Centre's publications, the content impacted the look (and vice versa). The beginning of the end came with the second issue of *Strike*, in which we'd shown some (somewhat muddled) sympathy for the ultra-left – a movement which had received the endorsement of individuals as diverse as Jean-Paul Sartre and Rainer Werner Fassbinder – and the scandal that ensued was a complete set-up. The printer sent a copy to the *Toronto Sun* before anyone had even seen it. I've come to believe that the scandal itself was a fabrication by Peter Worthington, the *Sun*'s editor in chief throughout the '70s, and notorious for his hatred of both arts funding and the Liberal government. Were we doing anything that was necessarily, consciously provocative? What we were doing was what was current.

Our attitude was – it was the *Toronto Sun*!!! No one took them seriously, did they? The arts council's freaked-out, but we had another European tour coming up. *Strike* was an art magazine being attacked by a repulsively right-wing rag. If we'd felt in serious danger the tour would have been cancelled. But cowardice on the part of the Councils and self-interest from the art-world prevailed.

One thing that's important to stress is how different the art-world in Toronto was in the mid-to-late 1970s from how it manifests itself today. We're talking almost fifty years ago, but what must be remembered is that most of the commentary about the CEAC today (both Pro and Con) comes from people who were either too young to have had any first-hand experience, or from those who claimed knowledge of the period under discussion but I had never actually met until decades later – an odd situation given that I was *always* at Duncan Street. (And for a time I actually lived there). The opinions expressed by those people are to be understood as third-hand accounts, gossip, educated guesses based on historical research, or agenda-driven uninformed opinion.

The art-world back then consisted of a handful of galleries, mostly secondary-market, in and around Yorkville and a burgeoning artist-run sector. Almost everything in operation today came later. So the scene was very small, incestuous, and fraught with conflict and jealousies. It needs to be pointed out that all were vying for the same small pot of government funds.

There was jealousy about the building, the tours, the video equipment, the imagined wealth of financing, and of programming that was completely of-the-moment. But there was no competition between us and (the collective) them – we viewed the institution as inhabiting a higher plane. Our competition was with the Art Gallery of Ontario.

And in the end, with a frisson of down-market chic and presumed exclusivity, the CEAC was firmly planted in the social, political, and cultural here-and-now. That the art world was be-

coming international and the tendencies and tenor of the time had become increasingly fraught was a given – not embracing that would have been just so much navel-gazing.

It would be interesting to know how things would have turned out if the CEAC had managed to survive. My gut-sense is that the sudden shift to the right came as a surprise with the neo-liberalism of Reagan, Thatcher, Mulroney, et al; the art-world followed suit by shifting away from the more provocative (and in my opinion, more interesting) stances into commercial retreads. It wouldn't have survived the 1980s (which is perhaps a blessing in that those places that did survive are sad, tired, boring shadows of their former selves).

After Dot Tuer published her masterful “CEAC Was Banned in Canada” in C Magazine in 1986 (?) she told me personally that she was routinely verbally assaulted by members of that demographic with accusations of “How Dare You! – They’re Not Us!” Well duh . . . It's fairly widely known that a certain demographic had organized a coordinated effort to bury us – to write us out of history. If I knew the names I'm almost sure they're mostly the forgotten ones.

Here's a bullet-point overview of the CEAC's prolific activities. It should be pointed out that all these activities, with the exception of two, happened over the course of a three-and-a-half-year period from January of 1975 to the middle of 1978. (This was roughly the lifespan of Andy Warhol's Silver Factory).

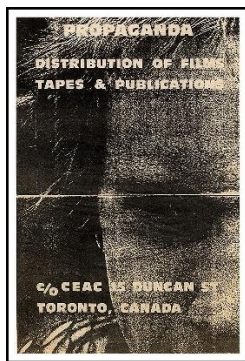
As a cultural Incubator, CEAC was directly responsible for:

- > Three international performance art tours;
- > Facilitation of independently organized tours by CEAC-related artists;
- > Visiting international guests, emphasizing Europeans brought to Canada for the first time;
- > Mixed programs of both Canadian and international artists, both here and abroad;
- > Participation in international seminars in Buenos Aires, Paris, Warsaw, Mexico City, Zagreb, as well as international conferences organized and presented at the homebase in Toronto;
- > Publishing a monthly tabloid periodical “Art Communication Edition” that transitioned into “Strike”;
- > A presence at Documenta VI;
- > Production of artist's videos and films which included an in-house post-production facility;
- > Regular off-site CEAC sponsored shows and concerts.

Projects born at either CEAC or its corporate parent and predecessor (The Kensington Arts Association – 1973-78):

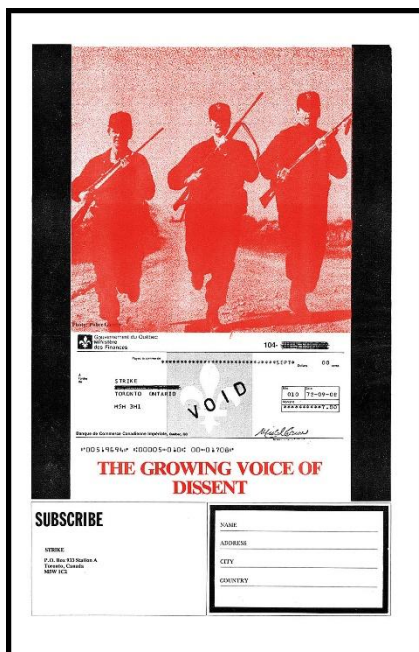
- > The Body Politic Newspaper;
- > Glad Day Bookshop;
- > Super 8 Distribution Centre;
- > The Crash 'n Burn punk rock club;
- > The Funnel Experimental Film Theatre.

Ventures in the early stages at the time of the CEAC shutdown include:



- > A Toronto branch of Joseph Beuys Free International University;
- > "Propaganda" (For the production and distribution of artist books, periodicals, films, and videos: modelled after Castelli Films and Tapes, but with a much trendier name).
- > Crash 'n Burn Records (for the production and distribution of artist's music and audio works) One title produced – "Raw/War" 45 rpm by Eves/Marras;

- > Commercial video production and studio rental (to finance art production);
- > Commercial photocopying (to finance art production).



The winter 2020 issue of Canadian Art ran an article titled "Free Radicals" about the CEAC by Bryne McLaughlin, and I want to close with one last image – one that I had completely forgotten about – and image that the magazine used to illustrate its article. I can't think of anything that succinctly describes the weirdness of the late 1970s; while the entire operation was collapsing around our shoulders and opportunists were swooping in, we received a subscription to Strike from the Rene Levesque separatist Government of Quebec. It was promptly used as a subscription promo in the very last issue.

I can't see anything like that happening today.

The Centre's accomplishments should be viewed as the benchmark by which artist-run centres should aim for –

but refuse to because they either can't, or more likely because they won't because it's too much work, (and let me point out that all of this was accomplished with just 3 ½ full-time employees).

I'm very proud of the work we did and feel honoured to have been a part of it. It is long overdue that the CEAC receive the recognition it deserves, right from the beginning at that small mud-ugly house on Kensington Avenue.

October 7, 2024