

# Indexing Vancouver

## Image Bank's *International* *Image Exchange Directory*

The collective project Image Bank began in Vancouver in 1969 by Michael Morris, Gary Lee-Nova, and Vincent Trasov. Morris and Lee-Nova built upon their established reputations as painters of hard-edge abstraction when they adopted the pseudonyms Marcel Idea and Art Rat, and joined Mr. Peanut (Trasov) to engage with the postal system as a communications-based high-art medium.<sup>1</sup> They collected, collaged, and re-circulated snapshots, staged photographs, and images appropriated from such mass-market American magazines as *Fortune*, *Life*, and *National Geographic*. They gradually circulated address lists through their mailings and subsequently printed these addresses in the Toronto-based artists' magazine *FILE* as an "Artists' Directory" and "Image Bank Request List." A selection of more than 270 names and addresses was compiled in 1972 as a stand-alone publication, *International Image Exchange Directory*, published by Talonbooks. Each name and address is accompanied by a short series of statements, which function as an "image request" for pictures supposedly desired by the person named in the listing. On left-hand pages, and sometimes across double-page spreads, more than ninety black-and-white images are reproduced. This article explores two of these images as entry points into the non-linear narrative space cultivated by the *Directory*—and the urban imaginary of which it acts as a trace.

As a material object that compiles a series of references to significant figures, events, and organizations, the *Directory* constitutes a nexus, a site where artistic counter-publics were fostered, and where a sense of locality—an urban imaginary—arose for Vancouver on both national and

international registers. As such, it constitutes a significant entry in Canadian print culture histories. On one hand, the *Directory* listings suggest a regionalized localism cultivated in relation to a multi-locational associative belonging fostered within Vancouver's varied countercultures; on the other, there are national dimensions, as many addresses connect Vancouver with Toronto. Andreas Huyssen explains that a city emerges as a "cognitive and somatic image which we carry within us of places where we live, work and play" (3). Urban imaginaries arise as affective relationships accrue through everyday spatial practices that contribute to the sensation of being in a place. The circulation of mediated images generates shared imaginaries with individuals physically located elsewhere who participate in the production of a sense of place through their reception. Reading the *Directory* as a material remnant of this reticulated gaze through mediated networks allows for an appreciation of multiple experiences of Vancouver, which converged to produce this city's urban imaginaries.

Taking a non-linear approach that mirrors the constellation of people and places brought together throughout the pages of the *Directory*, this article will situate Image Bank in its local, national, and international networks of artistic and poetic community. The section "Mapping Convergences" outlines existing scholarship and introduces key figures and organizations. "Urban Preoccupations" serves as an entry point for mapping overlapping social scenes, countercultural spaces, and politics of sexual liberation in the register of the local. "National Orientations, Transnational Fascinations" considers an image depicting homoerotic rural bliss, as it places the *Directory* within the bibliographic field of a national gay press, at the same time that it elicits transnational sensations of belonging. Although ironically situated in a rural setting, this image is nonetheless connected to Image Bank's distinctly urban imaginary of Vancouver as a cross-border locus for artistic and poetic community. The article concludes that, in retrospect, it is possible to appreciate how the early phase of intermedial list-making activities gestured towards what José Esteban Muñoz has described as a state of "queer futurity" taking shape through international correspondence art networks, in which Image Bank took part. Muñoz reads the material culture of the correspondence art networks of the 1970s as a perceived utopian social space, where a sense of associative belonging arises through a performative critique of heteronormative constraints in the present, which simultaneously generate a future-oriented collective desire towards a different world (116-130). This article complicates the geography of Muñoz' queer futurity, as it is centred

on New York, by situating the Image Bank *Directory* both within the transnational space of correspondence art networks, and with regards to the national publics fostered through post-Centennial Canadian print culture.

### **Mapping Convergences**

Existing scholarship situates Image Bank at a local convergence of countercultural movements, Fluxus, and correspondence art networks. According to Scott Watson, Image Bank can be included within a generation of Vancouver artists who, in the 1970s and 1980s, overcame regional isolation by exercising broad cosmopolitan curiosity while insisting upon specific locality (“Urban Renewal”). The *Directory*’s inclusion in Canadian exhibitions of conceptual art makes it a case study of a moment when locality was experienced on a national register. The *Directory* and its address lists provoke reflection on the place of Vancouver in a post-Centennial national imaginary marked by the consolidation of “Canadian Literature” and “Canadian Art” as discursive fields through cultural funding aligned with federal labour policy. Bringing the *Directory* into conversation with the discursive field of Canadian Literature foregrounds the overlapping counter-publics fostered through intermedial exchange networks of correspondence art and visual poetry and reframes the familiar centre-periphery dynamics discussed in nationally-bound art exhibition catalogues.

The *Directory* is in keeping with Canadian avant-garde practices that were not bound by disciplinary areas, that engaged with advertising and popular culture as the myths of modern societies, and that deployed language from the geographic position of Canada in order to work within and against the media landscape as an ideological order (Betts, *Theory* 220-39; Betts et al. xxii). Under the editorship of Sheila Watson, Image Bank’s correspondence with the Toronto-based General Idea collective was printed in the Winter 1972 issue of *White Pelican* alongside contributions from Elizabeth McLuhan and Wilfred Watson.<sup>2</sup> While critics have frequently discussed the influence of Marshall McLuhan’s theories of media upon the activities of the Intermedia Society, Adam Welch has further observed that Image Bank’s list-making activities are in keeping with McLuhan’s belief that Canada’s artists, working from within a national media space reinforced through protectionist cultural policy, could act as a “counter-environment” to the global hegemony of American mass media (100-102). Furthermore, the homoerotic subtext of the *Directory* resonates with Peter Dickinson’s argument that national cultural expressions are preoccupied with themes of sexuality, gender, and ethnicity (4).

Scholarly discussion of Image Bank's activity on a national scale, however, is dominated by their early collaborations with the General Idea collective, as a precursor to longer histories of *FILE* magazine.<sup>3</sup> Gwen Allen further correlates the marginalized status of artists in Canada, such as Image Bank, with General Idea's appropriation of the magazine form and "queering" of the mainstream media (147-73). Image Bank and General Idea shared a tendency towards an ironic politicization of sexuality, just as their affective bonds arose from a particular sense of locality defined by activities surrounding the Intermedia Society, where they met in person—as Christina Ritchie notes (14-15). The Intermedia Society from which the Image Bank collective and their urban imaginary emerged, came into being because the Canada Council conferred an unprecedented forty-thousand-dollar grant, due to the enviable reputation that Vancouver's artists had accrued in national and international media (Arnold 88). As a hub for communications-based, technologically driven artistic activities, Intermedia was outwardly aligned with Centennial-year policies of decentralization and urbanization. For instance, the first two issues of *FILE* featured Image Bank's address lists alongside reports from a place named "Art City," announced boldly by the headline as a "collective urban fantasy" produced by artists such as Gary Lee-Nova and Mr. Peanut who reinvented Vancouver through photography. The accompanying "article" is a transcript of a Local Initiatives Project grant request. This combination of performative reinvention through photography and creative grant application writing is an example of the tendency, noted by Grant Arnold, for artists affiliated with Intermedia to understand media exposure and access to public funding as parallel systems dependent upon imposed identity categories and social roles (85-88). Scott Watson has also observed that conditions of media visibility were of keen interest to artists such as Michael Morris, who worked reflexively from a peripheral location to international art centres—and who identified with both artistic and gay subcultures ("Mirrors" 65-66).

Such multi-sensory approaches cultivated at Intermedia generated an urban imaginary that hails counter-publics who might participate in more than one type of collective identification. As Michael Warner argues, certain kinds of artistic publics can cohere as counter-publics as they self-identify with explicit expressions of sexuality which transgress the social norms separating "private" life from the public sphere (96). Other counter-publics can form through the code-switching of bilingualism. This shifting between linguistic identities will be further explored in the next section.

Image Bank's relationship to *FILE* magazine and to the shifting public status of gay culture in the early 1970s is key to understanding the *Directory* as an aesthetic project that uses a print culture form to address counter-publics attracted to urban imaginaries that are in excess of national boundaries. Minutes of a meeting for affiliates of the Intermedia Society show that both publications were conceived in relation to each other, as if the appropriated forms of directory and tabloid magazine were complementary ("Notes" 23 Feb. 1972). Letters shared between Image Bank and General Idea show Morris encouraging and advising members of General Idea on federal grant applications to bring *FILE* to fruition (*Dear Paul*).

Image Bank's *Directory* also works as a counterpart to little magazines such as *Ganglia* (1965) by bpNichol and David Aylward (later became *grOnk*, 1967-1981). Like the *Directory*, these magazines act as a "conceptual apparatus" that uses the printed page as a site of international exchange, which simultaneously connects writers on the West Coast with Eastern Canada (Bayard 105). By 1973, Image Bank address listings featured artists and writers associated with Toronto's Coach House Press (bpNichol, Steve McCaffrey) and others who were frequent visitors to Vancouver (Victor Coleman, Stan Bevington, Robert Fones, Greg Curnoe, and David Hylynski). The *Directory* also shared aesthetic and social affinities with bill bissett's *blewointment* magazine (1963-1978) and later editorial periods of *Tish* (1961-1969).

Talonbooks was the *Directory*'s publisher, though histories of that press that are focused on its more conventional and business-oriented post-1975 period tend to omit the *Directory* (Scherf 138; Butling 29, 48), or list it as a mere commercial job (Walker 71). However, the social and aesthetic worlds of the press were closely related to the Intermedia Society (Scherf 132). Further, in his chronology *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada*, Donald W. McLeod includes publications by Talonbooks, Coach House Press, and their shared authors as essential moments within Canada's lesbian and gay liberation movements.<sup>4</sup> The national and transnational counter-publics generated by artistic and literary scenes in Vancouver can therefore be understood as a shared creative project with political connotations. Ultimately, the images and address lists circulated through the *Directory* and related publications helped to attract overlapping counter-publics of readers to expanded poetry scenes and sites of artist-run culture, such as the Western Front (1973) in Vancouver, as well as Coach House Press (1965) and Art Metropole (1974) in Toronto.

### Urban Preoccupations

Image Bank's *International Image Exchange Directory* features a Vancouver street scene that documents its moment of publication and thwarts attempts to periodize it for viewers without local knowledge. There is no caption on the page to situate the street in time and space, and a reader unfamiliar with the scene must flip to the "List of Illustrations" at the end of the *Directory*. No page numbers are assigned to these captions, however; only after flipping back and forth does one discover the image title: "Grin on Powell Street, Vancouver." Such suppression of authorship echoes a similar play with structural sequencing in *blewointment's* pages (Betts, "In Search of Blew" 4). Likewise, the experiential navigation through the book as a field of composition of personal correspondences resonates with the San Francisco Renaissance and Black Mountain model of poetic community, and with Charles Olson's principles of locus and proprioceptive verse adopted in the 1960s by Vancouver-based artists and writers.

In this Powell Street photograph, commercial signs juxtapose languages to produce an indeterminate sense of place. A row of storefronts recedes into the distance. Signs affixed on the perpendicular declare the purpose of the businesses along the thoroughfare. Figures mill about the broad sidewalk at the entrance to a "bakery" and a "hotel." In the foreground, a sign announces "Japanese Food, Pastry, Records, Magazines, Shimizu Shoten." A mixture of English and Kanji characters does not conform to the official French-English bilingualism of Canadian federalism heavily promoted in the post-Centennial period. The time-worn signage predates the multiculturalism policy introduced in the same moment. Readers hailed by these signs are oriented away from the symbolic bilingualism of national culture, as this linguistic policy enveloped multiculturalism, towards identification with a language of diasporic subjectivity. One of the signs is simply an empty oval frame. This gap or absence in the found text opens up a space for deviation from a linguistic order, and by extension, the strictures of social life in public spaces as shaped by the circulation of publicity forms.

This image of Powell Street encourages the formation of a counter-public through a shared failure to shape their bodies in accordance with emotional states upholding post-Centennial social norms. As Sarah Ahmed explains, the circulation of images and texts delimits emotional responses and shapes the orientation of bodies and the social and physical spaces they come to occupy (4), thereby generating a sense of affective belonging on multiple urban, national, and extra-national registers. In the last category, Ahmed

attributes “queer feelings” to bodies that are oriented away from the nation as an object of patriotic love, as structures of state governance are predicated upon a heteronormative “script” for social reproduction: “the reproduction of life—in the form of the future generation—becomes bound up with the reproduction of culture, through the stabilisation of specific arrangements for living (‘the family’)” (144). Importantly, these “queer feelings” are not a property of subjects or objects, but emerge from the process of circulation and repeated contact with images and texts that attach positive or negative affect to socially acceptable and unacceptable “ways of loving and living” (8, 145). When circulated in the multiple copies of the *Directory*, the Powell Street image supplants the abstraction of national identity and works as a visual analogue to queer orientation away from normative sexualities and family formations.

While this analogy between queerness and diasporic subjectivity may seem tenuous, it is worth considering because as part of his own exploration of identity, *Nisei* poet Roy Kiyooka penned a letter describing an urban imaginary shared among artists and writers surrounding the Intermedia Society, many of whom are also featured in the Image Bank *Directory*. In this imaginary for “Our City” of Vancouver, Kiyooka perceived “polymorphously / perverse porosities” (Kiyooka, *Transcanada* [“Dear Judy,” 4 Oct. 1971]). Kiyooka’s use of “polymorphous perversity,” a Freudian concept deployed by Herbert Marcuse to describe the politics of sexual liberation in North American countercultures, opens up the possibility for a Vancouver urban imaginary that arises through an eroticization of the body in relation to natural and mediated environments.<sup>5</sup> For Marcuse, subconscious desire could be disengaged from passive consumerism and reoriented towards new, eroticized social relations. Image Bank’s *Directory* gathers together multiple counter-publics as it performs what Jonathan Katz has termed a “politics of *eros*,” within a national public sphere and beyond (13). At a formative moment for lesbian and gay liberation politics of the 1970s, many of the artists featured in the *Directory* shared an investment in *eros* as a common psychological drive (or universalist biological trait), and refused to accede to juridically produced categories and identities. The 1968-69 Canadian Criminal Law Amendment Act (Omnibus Bill C-150), which decriminalized same-sex sexual relations between consenting adults over the age of twenty-one, resulted in a material change of status for many of the gay correspondents listed in the *Directory*. However, this limited provision for individual freedom in private life was a minor gain in comparison to

calls for revolutionary sexual liberation in public spaces in the pages of magazines such as *The Georgia Straight* or *The Body Politic* (1971-1987). Canadian readers of materials advocating for sexual liberation experienced contradictions because the articulation of public gay identities conflicted with freedoms newly afforded to them in private life (Goldie 16). Following this logic, the *Directory* doubly-indexes Vancouver as a site that figures in transnational extra-legal geographies, while simultaneously working to produce a sense of belonging for a cohort of “Canadian” correspondents, who, as Sharla Sava argues, circulated materials that produced a shared imaginary based in gay signifiers (“Determining” 22).

Furthermore, Image Bank’s literary counterparts, such as bill bissett, bpNichol, and Victor Coleman, shared a creative investment in libido, and arguably called forth counter-publics who disidentified with the representation of “straight” existence in mass media without anchoring sexual identity in a particular orientation. As Katz has observed, also with reference to Marcuse, the opposite of “straight” citizenship in this moment may have been “polymorphous perversity, bohemian libertinism or even simply sex,” but the radicality of this position was circumscribed by a persistent “dominant masculinity” (13). Scott Watson has noted specific instances of homophobia that delimit the permissiveness of the social milieu from which the Image Bank *International Image Exchange Directory* emerges (Watson, “Mirrors” 74-75; *Hand* 21-23). Maxine Gadd has also explicitly articulated oppressive conditions limiting women’s full participation in Intermedia circles (Gadd 3:10). Virginia Solomon has further noted tensions arising from the “disdain for sexual liberation” in groups using New Left organizing strategies, as these groups viewed shifts in consciousness and culture as secondary to the reinvention of economic substructures (94). Nonetheless, Vancouver’s neo-avant-garde is recognized as having created spaces of libidinal permissiveness, at least for a limited time, before the first issue of *FILE* magazine and the *Directory* were published. Watson has described this avant-garde social scene as one fuelled by curiosity for new experience, where distinctions between “gay” and “straight” sexualities were dissolved in favour of countercultural ways of life (*Hand* 21). Shifts between registers of publicness and tolerance in the city’s neo-avant-garde are mirrored in the *Directory*’s multiple registers of coding and list-making activities that emerged from the city’s gay culture.

To return to “Grin on Powell Street, Vancouver;” as an example of ambiguous coding within the *Directory*, this image indexes an important



site for the creative practices and social life affiliated with the Intermedia Society. The flattened picture plane provokes a reading of the signs as a continuous text. Punctuation is provided by an unkempt black-and-white dog lying on the sidewalk, redirecting the pedestrian flow. The colophon for the *Directory* lists an address for Image Bank at 358 Powell Street: the same address is also listed for several residents of the “New Era Social Club.” That name was taken from existing signage on the door that referenced an earlier “members only” meeting place for *Issei*, *Nisei*, and further generations of Japanese Canadians; artists, including Glenn Lewis, Gary Lee-Nova, Michael de Courcy, Gerry Gilbert, Dave Rimmer, and Taki Bluesinger, were the late-1960s occupants of the site as a live/work studio environment (Sava, “Roy Kiyooka” 26-32). Notably, the street scene appearing in the *Directory* bears a striking resemblance to *Background/Vancouver*, a documentary photo series produced by de Courcy, Gilbert, Lewis, and Bluesinger as they walked through the city on a single day in the fall of 1972. The New Era also served as interim housing or studio space for artists, including Morris and Trasov of Image Bank, forced out of their West End apartment by encroaching urban development (Wallace 36).

By reproducing this photograph, the *Directory* points to the New Era Social Club and its neighbourhood as a physical and conceptual site of administrative processes, community displacement, and renewal in an urban context. Tacit details help in mapping out this imaginary geography. “Grin” is the name of the dog in the photograph, whose canine contribution is evinced in Intermedia meeting minutes recorded at this address: “Grin completely chewed up a *Georgia Straight*” (“Notes” 27 Oct. 1971). The offices of the countercultural newspaper *The Georgia Straight* were situated three blocks away at 56A Powell Street. Irregular meetings during the fourth editorial period of *Tish* also took place at the New Era (Sava, “Roy Kiyooka” 26-32). Under the co-editorial direction of Dan McLeod, *Tish* poetics of locus and proprioception had evolved by that period to make textual space for sexually explicit content. When McLeod left *Tish* to publish *The Georgia Straight* (1967), Stan Persky became co-editor, and gay authors and content gained prominence within the publication, including contributions from Robin Blaser, Jack Spicer, and George Stanley (Aubin, “Reintroducing”). Talonbooks, located at 1019 East Cordova, was only a fifteen-minute walk away from this site.

In the overlap between photographic conceptualism and process-based poetics, “locus” is a sensibility derived from socially imposed ideological

structures (Arnold 98; Tayler 146). Kinship and, by extension, the relationship between sexual identity, urban social scenes, and nationhood, can be structurally altered through collagist strategies that intervene in a media-saturated world. These interpenetrating dynamics of identity formation, which define a sense of locality or locus, can be traced in the *Directory* listings, as they point to other publications and exhibitions appearing in this period. Local Vancouver critic Joan Lowndes slyly observed that the exhibition *The Collage Show* (1971) made visible the libidinal pulsations of “intermedial penetration” in “a mysterious substructure that has existed in Vancouver for about five years in the form of mailings between artists, or private showings.” Image Bank was featured in this exhibition, and their *Directory* subsequently includes listings for their co-exhibitors—Gerry Gilbert, Edwin Varney, and bill bissett, among others—whose shared locus bridged *blewointment* magazine and the Intermedia Society.<sup>6</sup>

This hidden social structure perceived by Lowndes had earlier been situated within international networks of concrete and visual poetry when the same contributors were featured in *The Concrete Poetry Show: An Exhibition in Four Parts* (1969). Lee-Nova and Morris were both exhibiting artists, and Morris acted as co-curator alongside Alvin Balkind. The catalogue for *The Concrete Poetry Show* was conceptualized as an unbound collection of letter-sized contributions from concrete poets and participants in correspondence art networks. Michael Turner has noted this moment of overlapping missives, and its similarity in form to later unbound mailings circulated by Image Bank (136). New York-based artist Ray Johnson and the local contributors named above were later included in the *Directory* address listings.

Johnson’s New York Correspondence School was a complex system of sending letters and collages through the mail, linking artists (who did not previously know one another) according to his own personal identification with some aspect of their lives or practice. This preoccupation with mechanisms determining who had status, or who was “in” or “out” of the group, reflected Johnson’s ambivalent relationships to peer artists of the American neo-avant-garde at Black Mountain College or in New York’s Greenwich Village. Many artists who arrived in Vancouver throughout the 1960s and 70s, including Robert Rauschenberg, Ray Johnson, Yvonne Rainer, John Dowd, and General Idea, feature in Katz’s and Muñoz’s accounts of this era’s politics of *eros*. These artists also feature in the *Directory*. Importantly, the *Directory* is modelled upon a list of international gay bars sent by Johnson to Image Bank’s Michael Morris in 1968 (Trasov, Personal interview).<sup>7</sup>

This mimeographed list is an example of pre-Stonewall print culture that addressed a covert public, which cohered both on the page and in “real” life places (e.g., bars and other cruising grounds) through a shared understanding of coded references. Once they found each other, members of this covert public conceived of their local experience as participation in an extra-national community existing outside the law. Within such a model of a covert transnational community, the ambiguous coding of the *Directory* resonates with the delayed reception in Vancouver of Stonewall and related activism communicated through US-based alternative media channels (T. Warner 66).

Lee-Nova disengaged from Image Bank about the time that the *Directory* was published amidst conflict regarding the role for sexual identity, inter-medial aesthetics, and collective practices in the formation of new social realities (Wallace 46 n. 1). A letter dated March 1972 by Intermedia member Gary Hovind notes a change in attitude in the local alternative press. A list of fifty community organizations had been compiled which positioned Image Bank’s correspondence network as equivalent to the Woman’s Centre, the *Progressive Worker* newspaper, and the Vancouver Welfare Rights Organization. But, as Hovind reports, it was impossible to get the New Left newspaper, *The Grape*, to print this listing. In May 1972, an anonymous letter was printed in *The Grape* launching an incendiary critique of the early issues of *FILE* magazine and Image Bank’s list-making for allegedly replicating oppressive power structures and for not acknowledging the political dimension of their ironic play with normative gender and sexualities.<sup>8</sup> This controversy over list-making in countercultural media marks a poignant rupture for Image Bank’s urban imaginary in a moment of high cultural nationalism.

List-making has been acknowledged as a post-Stonewall strategy: to “feel historical” by tracing kinship relations through lineages of non-normative desire (Nealon 177). Although comparable to tracing ancestry through genealogical charts, such list-making, when oriented away from the heteronormative family structures that uphold national culture, draws on an understanding of identity as socially produced, rather than biologically determined. The sense of transnational belonging solicited through Image Bank’s list-making activity was predicated upon the historical knowledge that men who could be publicly identified as “homosexual” were perceived as a moral threat to the security of the nation in both Canada and the US (Tomaszewska 72; Kinsman and Gentile). In this sense, the publicness enacted through the *Directory* listings is comparable to that of the little magazine *Pacific Nation* (1969) edited by Robin Blaser and Stan Persky,

which used the affective field of projective verse to orient readers away from identification with established nations and towards a shared imaginary among transnational counter-publics on the West Coast (Tomaszewska 1-2). Morris' contribution of a cover image to the second issue, an excerpt from the later series "Mechanix Illustrated" (1972), co-publishes his forays into concretism with contributions from Jess Collins and Charles Olson.<sup>9</sup> The contributor biographies describe Morris as a "martini glass," a wink towards the homosocial scene surrounding poets who relocated from California to Vancouver.

Image Bank's list of addresses is a "directory" in ironizing quotation marks. Their appropriation of a directory as a "non-art" form of print media transforms the banal into high art. Counter-publics generated by the *Directory* shared an appreciation for camp taste, famously described by Susan Sontag as an in-group enjoyment of cultural forms considered in "bad taste" according to the tenets of high culture (279). Several images in the *Directory* depict camp-friendly characters from Hollywood movies, including Marilyn Monroe and James Dean, as well as portraits of gender-bending or drag queen glamour. Other images reproduced in the *Directory* transform male nudes into fetish objects, offer homoerotic or ejaculatory puns, and upend mother-child relations. The visual and textual coding in these images, as in "Grin on Powell Street, Vancouver," can be read as an expression of consciousness shaped by the shifting boundaries of public and private expressions of sexual identity across North America, as the conditions of everyday life remained overwhelmingly discriminatory. The implications of these shifts on a local and national scale will be explored in the following section, with reference to a photograph that infuses the national genre of landscape imagery with homoerotic subtext.

### **National Orientations, Transnational Fascinations**

When positioned within the circulatory space of a Canadian national public sphere, the *Directory* becomes legible alongside the print culture forms and counter-publics fostered by the tabloids and paperbacks of a national gay press. A final photograph included in the *Directory* shows a male nude surrounded by lush thickets of ferns. His buttocks are caressed by sunlight. Though the scene is pastoral, a compositional emphasis is placed upon the image as an artificial construction. An imposing plank of wood extends to the right of his hip, humorously alluding to the size of his penis. A grey-scale pattern has been painted onto the plank, serving as visual reminder of the photographic processes involved in creating this image-as-media-environment.

The title, "Light-On Babeland," references a series of joint projects undertaken with General Idea in which mirrors, light beams, and cameras act as metaphors for mutual recognition. *Colour Bar Research* (1972-1974) and *On the Set at Babyland* (1972-74) are similar photo series produced at "Babyland," a communally owned piece of property in Robert's Creek, BC. The homoeroticism of these images subverts the persistent West Coast motif of landscape in visual art to produce what Grant Arnold has called a genre of "nature boy eroticism," in which a utopian yearning for an alternate social reality can be felt (94).

Much like "Grin on Powell Street, Vancouver," "Light-On Babeland" indexes a real site in Image Bank's social world. Despite its location adjacent to a very small town on the Sunshine Coast, these artists inhabited this place as an extension of their libidinally-charged Vancouver urban imaginary. Before Morris and Trasov became co-owners of Babyland, it had been the site of Intermedia-related activity, such as the Mushroom Festival (1969), when the presence of several pregnant women inspired the name. Carole Itter, who bought shares in Babyland at the same time as Image Bank, sought a writing retreat, and an antidote to her crushing experience of "the city, this foul asshole that we live in . . ." as she raised her daughter (Itter).<sup>10</sup> Alternately, Image Bank conceived of their inhabitation of this place as a parody of the countercultural retreat from the social pressures of "straight" city life. They hoped to cultivate avant-garde community at this site following the model of Black Mountain College; further, the rural surroundings served as a film and photo set, where gay desire could be acted out and then transmitted as images through transnational correspondence networks (Wallace 36).

As such images circulated, the "Artists' Directory" pages, which Image Bank provided to *FILE*, look much like the classified listings found at the back of tabloid newspapers. Small advertisements are inserted between the address listings for artists, many of which include innuendo or offerings of sexual services. Whereas it was anticipated by Image Bank that the *Directory* would point to international addresses and images as artifacts, *FILE* would print "Canadian addresses" alongside "gossip of ongoing: rumours, fake events, etc., classifieds, personal columns" ("Notes" 23 Feb. 1972). In this way, *FILE* magazine mirrors the gossip columns of Canadian tabloids such as *Hush Free Press* (1927-1974) or *TAB Confidential* (1956-1959), pre-Stonewall print culture formats that used coded language to communicate covertly with gay and lesbian readerships (Churchill 828). According to Donald W. McLeod, the sense of belonging accorded to a marginalized secret public was cultivated

in these tabloids' readers through the coded celebration of non-normative pleasure, which ran parallel to content that attracted a wider readership (and greater profits) through sensationalized exposé of “perverts”—that is, anyone engaged in sexual activity deviating from heterosexual norms (“Publishing” 326).

The *Directory* cross-references relationships between Vancouver (sixty-five entries), Toronto (thirty-six entries), New York (forty-three entries), and Los Angeles and San Francisco (thirty-two entries, combined).<sup>11</sup> These listings suggest that the international imaginary of these Vancouver artists is not only defined in terms of their peripheral relationship to art worlds in New York, Los Angeles, or London (Watson, “Mirrors” 66) but also that Toronto figures as a cultural centre of some importance to them in the early 1970s. This peripheral feeling can also be discussed in terms of the conceptual and legal limits for gay life in Canadian cities prior to the 1970s, and the tendency to look to international destinations for community—New York's Greenwich Village or Black Mountain College—due, in part, to imported media representations arriving via American-dominated distribution chains. As a result, Terry Goldie explains that after Stonewall, “the reworking of American trash as a vehicle for Canadian sophistication” was one of the ways by which a broad spectrum of sexualities was sorted out in relation to the shifting limits of Canadian identity (16). For a neo-avant-garde actively engaged in reimagining Vancouver as a multi-nodal site of transnational relations, the local adaptation of international modernisms, both poetic and visual, was a parallel strategy to the collagist appropriation of imported Hollywood imagery and lifestyle magazines by visual artists.

However, contributors to Image Bank's networks, and to *FILE*, rejected the social role of an “artist” if it meant upholding official national culture. In a parody of trade publisher catalogues, the editors of *FILE* define these national media stereotypes (“Catalogue” 57). Most major art book and magazine publishers are located in Toronto and cover topics such as Tom Thomson, Lawren Harris, and The Group of Seven, which the anonymous reviewer believes are “guaranteed to cause insomnia.” Magazines are described as “conservative” and “dull.” In stark contrast to their overwhelming ennui, Joyce Wieland's conceptual bookwork, *True Patriot Love/Véritable amour patriotique*, an erotically charged take on mediation and national icons, is praised as “our very favourite.” Other positive mentions go to offerings from small presses such as Intermedia Press and Coach House Press, with special appreciation shown for the American publisher Grove Press' “pornographic style.”

These positive reviews attest to Image Bank and General Idea's shared interest in a transnational media space that persistently tests regulatory boundaries at a national level, through a reflexive engagement with artificially imposed genre distinctions between pornography and high culture. William Burroughs, a Grove Press author listed in the *Directory*, inspired their subversive collage aesthetic; and his novels served as examples of inconsistent international censorship. Through the 1960s in Canada, Burroughs' novels were subjected to obscenity laws that regulated homoerotic content as "pornography" in mass culture; yet these novels passed as "literature" when approved by a censorship review board based in Toronto (Carefoote). Alternatively, an extra-legal counter-public who shared similar camp sensibilities might consider these representations of sexualities to have a refined aesthetic value.

Wieland's *True Patriot Love* offered an example of an erotic subversion of patriotic feelings. Wieland's work reinterpreted Canadian iconography, especially the visual conventions of the landscape genre, to present an image of Canada as a nationally-defined utopian space that rejected American corporate and militaristic interests (Sloan 78). At the same time that Image Bank produced landscape images such as "Light-On Babeland" discussed above, they pointed to Wieland's inversion of these pictorial conventions in their production of a networked space named "Canadada"—the publishing location for Talonbooks listed on the title page of their *Directory*. Virginia Solomon has described "Canadada" as a space where identity is understood as a socially constructed aesthetic phenomenon, and sexuality as politicized relationships that extended beyond bedroom practices relegated to the realm of private life (84-85, 147-173). Listed in the *Directory* at a New York address, Wieland supposedly makes a request for "Made in Canada, Canadada contents, true patriot love images." Like many other listings in the *Directory*, Wieland's image request was invented by Image Bank (Trasov, Personal interview).<sup>12</sup> That act of female impersonation creates a projected relationship through which these artists could shape their affective sense of group belonging on both national and extra-national registers.

### **Future Art Cities**

"Grin On Powell Street, Vancouver" and "Light-On Babeland" are a small sample of the vast materials circulated through Image Bank's address lists and mailings. Both images point to an urban imaginary for "Vancouver, Canadada" as it is located within and exceeds national culture. Unlike

heteronormative forms of social reproduction, which perpetually put off an engagement in the present through an investment in child-rearing, in this social space of queer futurity, “every genealogy is a fiction” that can be altered in the present tense by aesthetic means (Muñoz 121). The counter-publics fostered through the *Directory* have indeterminate temporalities— affective relationships and sensations of locality are formed, and then dissolve, as the address list opens up the potential to reach out to future influences, friends, and lovers. Rather than depicting their sense of place as a landscape with vanishing point perspective illusory depth (as per the Group of Seven), the *Directory* listings use the performative effects of text and image to link bodies together in space. Ultimately, the *Directory* opens up a possibility for their reader-correspondents to imagine a present and future for Vancouver, their “art city,” on whatever perceptual plane it might be socially produced.

## NOTES

- 1 Trasov’s practice developed when he met Morris, and is influenced by a familial tradition of utopian socialism. A descendant of Doukhobor settlers to Canada, he met Morris while canvassing for his father, a federal New Democratic Party candidate. Morris and Trasov were lovers at the time the *Directory* was published (Trasov, “Email,” 16 Dec. 2013).
- 2 See “Michael Morris and the Image Bank.” *White Pelican*, vol. 2, no. 1, Winter 1972, pp. 18-34.
- 3 General Idea is a collective of three artists, Michael Tims (AA Bronson), Slobodan Saia-Levy (Jorge Zontal), and Ron Gabe (Felix Partz). Formed in 1969, the collective initially included other people also involved in Toronto’s Theatre Passe Muraille, Coach House Press, and Rochdale College.
- 4 The imprint statement gives design credit to both David Robinson and Gordon Fidler. Talonbooks paid for the production of the book, though Image Bank did most of the production work (Trasov, “Email,” 2 Dec. 2013).
- 5 See Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*. Beacon Press, 1969, for ideas he transmitted in a lecture at Simon Fraser University, and in the full transcription printed in the issue of *The Georgia Straight* vol. 3, no. 51, 28 Mar./3 Apr. 1969. Kiyooka cites this reference in his *Transcanada Letters*.
- 6 Gary Lee-Nova contributed a series of collages using geometric forms and celestial charts to *blewointment*, vol. 5, no. 2, June 1967. The *Directory* image request listed for bissett and blewointment press references this magazine as an assemblage of materials: “Images of 8½ x 11 paintings, drawings, photos, anything.”
- 7 See checklist entry 63 in Sharla Sava’s *Ray Johnson: How Sad I Am Today*. . . . (145).
- 8 See “FILE: The Great Art Tragedy,” *The Grape*, May 1972, pp. 24-30. The author of this article is widely acknowledged to be Dennis Wheeler, editor of *The Georgia Straight Writing Supplement*, a poetry imprint that split from *The Georgia Straight* newspaper, at the same time that *The Grape* was founded in 1972. For more details on this incident see Watson, “Hand” 22-23; Solomon, 99; and Allen, 171.



- 9 Michael Morris works in multiple series, as the repetition of tropes creates slippages in time. While Morris has explained that this cover image was designed in 1969, and later printed in a silkscreen edition titled “Mechanix Illustrated” (1972), a version of this graphic icon appears in *Image* (1968), produced the same year as a related series of drawings, “Untitled (Mechanics Illustrated).” This phallic icon also later featured on the cover of Victor Coleman’s book of poems *Stranger* (Coach House, 1974) (Morris, “Email,” 12 Nov. 2012).
- 10 See Itter’s conceptual bookworks *The Log’s Log* (Intermedia Press, 1972) and *Location—Shack* (1986) for an idea of her vision for a “free” space where she and her daughter could escape from city life.
- 11 European locations have the next highest frequency, with a smattering of addresses listed across Latin America and Asia.
- 12 Though responses to image requests were a voluntary act, the address lists soliciting these responses were compiled from pre-existing sources. As Image Bank “relied on friends’ address lists,” these borrowed addresses functioned as “wish lists” for future correspondents (Morris, “Email,” 16 Mar. 2018). For an account of the pre-existing sources compiled in the “Artists’ Directory” and “Image Request List,” see Trasov, “An Early History.”

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