WATCHING FOR CHANGE: EXAMINING DISCOURSES OF GENDER, RACE
AND SEXUALITY THROUGH PAUL WONG'S ACTIVIST/ARTIST VIDEOS

by

Sara Kathryn Young

B.A., University of Victoria, 2000

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Sociology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October, 2005

© Sara Kathryn Young, 2005
Abstract

This research involves a discourse analysis of several alternative video works produced by Paul Wong, an alternative video artist based in Vancouver, BC. Utilizing Judith Butler's "Subjects of sex/gender/desire," (1999) to comment and expand on Michel Foucault's four 'rules' for conducting discourse analysis, as laid out in *The history of sexuality volume I: An introduction*, Part Four, Chapter 2, "Method," (1978, 1990) I analyse Wong's *60 unit: Bruise* (1976), *Confused: Sexual views* (1984) and *So are you* (1994). By focusing on discourses addressing the intersections of gender, race and sexuality in Wong's work, this analysis focuses on how alternative video art can be examined as activist work from a sociological perspective.

Wong's video works reflect his engagements with intersecting queer and racialised identities and, through discourse analysis, can be shown to reflect, question and challenge mainstream queer and Chinese histories in Canada. Exploring Wong's contribution to discourses on gender, race and sexuality acts to underscore the contributions of alternative media artists to changing understandings of historical relations and to mainstream historical constructions of identity.

Postmodern perspectives inform much alternative video practice and have worked to break down the distinctions between disciplines, recognize previously ignored mediums as legitimate and important forms and also to recognize a multiplicity of narratives and engage with marginalized perspectives. Utilizing postmodern perspectives, then, this research challenges notions of historical 'truths,' in mainstream narratives and histories.
# Table of Contents

Abstract

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

**Introduction and literature review**

- Plugging in: Finding sociological space for alternative video .................................................. 1
- Changing conditions: Locating video's social and political history ........................................ 5
- Electronic Canvas?: Video as (not) art ....................................................................................... 7
- Remote similarities: Video in relation to television .................................................................... 9
- Switching seats: Video in relation to mainstream cinema ......................................................... 10
- Theoretical perspectives: Postmodern examinations of video discourses .................................. 12
- Moving texts: Creating a method of discourse analysis for video ........................................... 15
- Locating relevant discourses and relations: Critical review of primary and secondary sources ........................................................................................................... 25

**Chapter 1**

Back to the future: Paul Wong and the (his)story of activist/artist video in Vancouver ........ 38

- Making room(s) for video: Situating the emergence of Vancouver's artist-run video centres ......................................................................................................................... 39
- Intermedia's first and lasting impressions: Defining activist/artist video through funding negotiations ............................................................................................................... 41
- The International Video Exchange Directory: Advancing the exchange of information and ideas .......................................................................................................................... 46
- Continuity/Errors: Stability, evolution and video activism/art at the Satellite Video Exchange Society/Video In(n) .................................................................................................. 48
- (Re)playing video: Cataloguing, promoting and preserving video at Video Out ........ 53
- Bambi meets Godzilla: Video activist/artists challenge the mainstream media monster ................................................................................................................................. 56
- Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 62

**Chapter 2**

(Neo)colonial in(ter)jections: Colonialism, identity and the construction of the Canadian national 'family' in 60 unit: Bruise ................................................................. 65

- 60 Unit: Bruise .......................................................................................................................... 68
- Colonial In(ter)jections: 60 unit: Bruise and Chinese histories in Canada ..................... 70
- Colonial Intersections: 60 unit: Bruise and the junctures of gender, race and sexuality ................................................................................................................................. 74
- Marching on: Activism in the Canadian colonial context ..................................................... 84
- Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 91
# Chapter 3
Confessions of the dangerous kind: Challenging the censorship of sexual discourses through Confused: Sexual views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A confounding project: the creation of Confused: Sexual views</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Protecting' (?) the Public: The Vancouver Art Gallery and the cancellation of Confused: Sexual views</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border XXX-ings: Censorship and Canadian governments</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Chapter 4
Watch yourself: (Neo)colonialism, multiculturalism and examinations of identity construction in So are you

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So Are You: Media, mirrors and molds</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now is then: (Neo)colonialism and multiculturalism in Canada</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance and Racism: Multicultural funding for media arts</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-imagining multiculturalism: Decolonization and the recognition of difference</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurocentrism and the marginalization of 'Asian' art</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Anti)establishment: Artists of colour in the 1990s</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering Events: Art-based initiatives by and for people of colour</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black like you: The performance of gender and race in So are you</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Final Conclusions

- Scholarly sources: 158
- Archival sources: 170
- On-line sources: 171
- Video sources: 173
Acknowledgements

I wholeheartedly thank a number of people for their unending support throughout the long and often difficult process of producing this work. Most importantly, I thank Margaret for helping me to organize my thoughts, for providing valuable feedback and for being such a wonderful person. I thank Duncan McHugh and Anna King, Tara Westover and Tristan Winch for their encouragement, assistance and love. I thank Hywel Tuscano and Peggy LaChat for keeping me company and for sleeping on my bed. I thank my family, including my sister, Melissa, Annie, Ella, Jane, Dad and Verna and my grandmothers, and cousins Warren and Kelsey for their thoughts, phone calls and caring. I am indebted to Laura, Doug and Augustus Archibald for offering me a place to work and for keeping me awake. I am grateful to friends and colleagues, including (in no particular order) Erin Bentley, Jay Fiddler, Anna Jubilo, Jeremy Schiff, Katie Gemmell, Lee Livingston, Max Lee, Heather Wilson, David Boffa, Jenn Dolen, Jeanette LaPointe, Marilyn Burgess and Genevieve LaPointe for sharing in my frustrations and successes.

I am particularly appreciative of the guidance and support offered by Renisa Mawani and Tom Kemple, my thesis committee members. I appreciate all that I have gained from graduate courses taught by Tom Kemple, Becki Ross, Gillian Creese and Dawn Currie. I thank Rennie Warburton for his support and teachings during my undergraduate career and Aaron Devor for inspiring me to focus on issues of sexuality in my academic work. I thank everyone, including my fellow students, who have inspired me and helped me to develop my ideas. I thank Nandita Sharma, Patricia Kachuk, Jane Bryson, Libby Mason and Joe R. McCoy for teachings and experiences that extend beyond academics.

I appreciate the assistance I received from Keith, Mark, Jayne and Lauren at Video In and thank Aaron Vidaver, who I have never met, but who did a lovely job of archiving the materials at Video In.

This work is dedicated to my mother, who I continue to miss very much.
Introduction and Literature Review

Plugging in: Finding sociological space for alternative video

Examinations of both popular culture and social movements have gained purchase as areas worthy of sociological analysis; however, research in the area of popular culture tends to focus on mainstream media, particularly cinema and television, to the exclusion of marginalized media such as independently-produced video. This focus on mainstream rather than alternative forms of media fails to recognize the importance of the latter and reinforces the marginalization of non-mainstream media. That alternative video is often produced and exhibited in artistic contexts obscures its import as a medium for and instrument of social activism and contributes to the failure to recognize its significance as an area of sociological analysis. I argue, however, that non-mainstream video art is a valuable site of study, as it often reflects, subverts and challenges prevailing social relations. While mainstream media have often supported or re-presented mainstream nationalist, racialised, gendered and heteronormative discourses, video art has contributed to interrogations of mainstream discourses related to gender, race and sexuality and to the intersections of these identities.

In the following research, I examine alternative video discourses in relation to mainstream discourses of gender, race and sexuality in Canada and attempt to determine how these videos contribute something valuable and distinctive to further discourses surrounding these identities. In examining these videos, I look at how the discourses in these specific videos organize and correspond to larger discourses and relations of gender, race and sexuality. To this end, I employ examinations of historical relations and discourses in relation to the discourses presented in each video. As debates about video’s relevance as an art form have subsumed discussions about whether video can be considered a medium for social, political and cultural
activism, I also attempt to determine to what extent video can be understood as a medium for both art and activism. My focus on how video might be considered both art and activism is informed by my examinations of how the videos I examine here contribute in valuable and distinctive ways to further discourse on gender, race and sexuality. To this end, I examine the distinct perspectives and insights on historical and contemporary discourses of identity presented through these videos. For this reason, I examine each of these works in the social and political historical and contemporary contexts in which they were produced.

In beginning my research, and before I settled on the video works I examine in this thesis, I browsed through the videotape library at a local video-based collective and began viewing the earliest video works available. During this process, I found that some of the earliest works were not available on tape, as they had not yet been transferred from their original ⅛-inch reel-to-reel video format. Still other works had degraded to the point that they had to be withdrawn from the library. Based on the early video works I was able to view, I found many examined the corporeal dimensions of experience, and the identities that are associated with, or can be 'read' from, the body. While many of these early works dealt with issues of gender and sexuality, few of these works dealt with issues of race. Through these viewings, I found that one video producer in particular, Paul Wong, addressed many of the same issues concerning body and identity as his contemporaries did, but included examinations of race which were ignored in other works. Further archival and secondary source research on Wong revealed that he was an active member of video collectives in Vancouver in the early 1970s, and that he continues his work in video and video collectives in Vancouver. As Wong has continued to produce video

---

1 The tape library is located at Video In, a local video-based organisation, the history of which is important to this thesis. I discuss the organization in detail in Chapter 1.
works in Vancouver, it was possible to track the trajectory of his both his video productions and
his involvements in local video-based activism.

Born in 1955 in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Wong has produced and collaborated
on numerous video works since the early 1970s. He has created videos documenting body
movement and dance performances and has experimented extensively with narrative and visual
forms. His video installations have been exhibited widely in Canada and internationally. In
these works, Wong has addressed a broad range of topics, including issues related to sexuality,
race, drug use, murder, suicide, stereotypes, identity formation and production, and mainstream
conceptions of beauty. He has created works in Cantonese, Mandarin and English, in which he
has examined Chinese cultural practices and has documented and examined the experiences of
Chinese-Canadians. His works can be viewed as both artistic and activist and have ranged from
controversial to conventional, from apolitical to highly politicized. His best-known video works
have been critical of colonialism, homophobia and other forms of oppression, and have engaged
with the ambiguities associated with identity categories, such as gender, race and sexuality.
Informed by his experiences as a gay Chinese man, Wong has also investigated the interrelations
between gender, race and sexuality as identities and as sites of oppression. Through these
examinations, Wong has confronted the socially-constructed nature of subjectivities, has
highlighted the mutability of identities and, hence, has reflected and contributed to changing
understandings of gender, race and sexuality in Canada.

Wong has been an instrumental member of video communities in Vancouver for over 30
years. His participation in these communities helped shape the direction of video production and
discourses on video in Vancouver and around the world. Gagnon states that in the course of his
career, Wong has “creat[ed] the material resources that have supported and developed alternative
video production and audiences" (2000: 166). Wong’s recent video works reach a relatively wide audience, and even his earliest videos continue to be discussed and presented in academic, artist and activist contexts today. These early works, with their documentary style and examination of issues of identity—particularly those related to gender, race and sexuality—inform the production and discussion of video today.

In conducting my analysis, I choose to focus on three of Wong’s videos, each separated by approximately a decade; the videos were produced in 1976, 1984 and 1994, respectively. In selecting works separated by significant periods of time, I am best able to trace changes and consistencies in the employment of critical discourse in Wong’s work and in mainstream and alternative contexts in general. The works I selected are some of Wong’s best-known videos and, therefore, are each complimented by critical and theoretical writings which indicate the extent to which Wong’s videos have been engaged with by artists, audiences and video theorists. Paul Wong’s *60 unit: Bruise* (1976) addresses issues of racism and homophobia in the Canadian colonial context. *Confused: Sexual views (compilation edit)* (1984) is an edited version of a larger exhibit which offers excerpts of interviews representing a diversity of discourses on sexuality. This work is significant as it reflects discourses on sexuality and censorship that emerged in Vancouver when the larger exhibition was censored. Finally, *So are you* (1994) critically and confrontationally examines sexual and racist stereotypes, continuing Wong’s commitment to creating and critiquing discourses of gender, race and sexuality. As this video was made nearly two decades after *60 unit: Bruise*, it allows me to examine the progression of Wong’s work over time, with reference to specific themes.

Valverde (1991) writes that one must understand the social context in which discourses are created in order to fully interpret the meanings and power relations tied to those discourses.
Thus, in this research, I conduct a discourse analysis of specific videos, utilizing particular works by Michel Foucault (1990) and Judith Butler (1999) and have attempted to place Wong’s video discourses in the social, political, historical contexts in which they were made. Before expanding on my method for discourse analysis, and in order to understand how and why alternative video evolved as it did, I examine the relationships between alternative video, activism and mainstream art and media.

*Changing conditions: Locating video’s social and political history*

The 1960s and 70s were a time of great social, political and technological change in North America. The social, economic and political climate of this time was important to the history of video, as numerous overlapping conditions created an environment in which video could thrive. Arnold explains that in the mid-1970s, “the challenges to dominant cultural values mounted during the 1960s intersected with new developments in communications technology and, in the industrialised countries of the West, [with] a period of relative prosperity which accelerated the expansion of consumer culture” (1998:1). In Canada, video emerged as an accessible medium for art and social activism in the late 1960s with newly available portable video cameras. In 1965, the Sony Corporation introduced the Portapak, the first portable video camera available to those outside of the film and television industries, including artists and activists (Rush, 2003). These newly-available consumer-market video cameras were comparatively inexpensive, light and compact in relation to earlier technologies (Gale, 1995).

---

2 The Sony Portapak was a relatively small black and white video camera which was connected to a ½ inch open reel-to-reel video recorder. The camera was hand-held and the reel-to-reel recorder could be carried as a backpack, or over the shoulder. The Portapak allowed for the simultaneous recording of video and sound on a 20 minute tape (Gagnon, J. 1996).

3 In the US and Germany, these new video cameras cost approximately $1000-$3000 (USD) as compared to the $10 000-$20 000 (USD) for television cameras (Rush, 2003).
As such, the PortaPak made video art and activism a possibility for individuals and groups who would otherwise not be able to afford video technologies.

Civil rights, lesbian and gay and feminist movements continued to expand in the late 1960s in tandem with portable and accessible video technologies. In the 1960s in Canada, social and political activism was manifest in Vietnam war protests, anti-nuclear activism, youth challenges to traditional morality and understandings of acceptable sexual practice, feminist and women’s movements and gay and lesbian organizing (Warner, 2000). The importance of these vast movements for social change is reflected in much of the early activist/artist video in Canada. Zippay notes that videos are ‘time-based’, in that they record the events, observations and opinions of particular people in particular times and places. Videos, she asserts, “inevitably chart not only personal histories, but social histories as well” (1991: 6). Video works often have social and political agendas that are reflective of grassroots social and political movements. Diamond notes that artistic communities in Vancouver were highly politicized and were linked to countercultural and radical political movements in their early years (1996). Video artists connected with social, political, theoretical and artistic movements, each operating to advance the aims of the other. In this way, video not only reflected these social and political movements, it became part of the counter-cultural revolution. (In)formed by this history, activist/artist video today continues to engage with issues of gender, race and sexuality.

The newness of video was appealing to early videomakers, who were not forced to ally themselves with any particular tradition in this new medium. There were no established conventions, “no need to refute a past or establish a hegemony. There was no critical context whatever for video-as-art” (Gale, 1996: 11). While this lack of history was appealing, it also made it difficult to establish the medium in relation to other media. Since the 1970s,
videomakers and theorists in Canada have worked to understand how and why video is different from other visual arts, film, and mainstream television.

*Electronic Canvas?: Video as (not) art*

Video emerged at a time when the boundaries between traditional art forms like painting, performance, writing and sculpture were beginning to blur (Rush, 2003). Minimalism and Conceptualism were important movements in mainstream art in the 1970s, which contributed to the blurring of these boundaries. Rush observes that these movements were indicative of a shift in focus from art ‘objects’ to ‘ideas’ (Rush, 2003). Conceptual art, Gale explains, is characterized by an emphasis on the conceptual basis for the work—the artist’s intention—rather than on the technical aspects of the work. According to Gale, the goal of conceptual art was to provoke thought, rather than appeal to the visual sensibilities of the audience for these works (1995). As traditional notions of ‘beauty’ and ‘skill’ in art were being challenged, room was made for more overt popular cultural, critical and political pieces. While traditional art spaces maintained the resistance to non-traditional forms, such as video, the shift towards conceptual art contributed to the acceptance of video in some mainstream and alternative art spaces. In the early 1970s the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) opened its ‘Videospace’ gallery, which was dedicated to exhibiting video works. Local artist-run spaces in Vancouver also emerged to showcase this work.⁴

While, as Peggy Gale (1974) notes, video art can not be neatly categorised or described, it does have certain definitive qualities that distinguish it from other forms of art. Unlike art forms such as painting and sculpture, video degrades relatively quickly. Also unlike more permanent forms of art, video can be easily renewed and multiplied by copying. In this way,

---

⁴ The history of artist-run centres in Vancouver is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1.
writes Klotz, video cannot be evaluated as unique or original and, therefore, “a video’s value as a work of art eludes the traditional standards that are applied to a collector’s—or investors—object” (1996:9). Indeed, video artists did not expect financial rewards or the mass-dissemination of their work (Rush, 2003). As Abbott explains, videomakers’ marginal status is often both “self-chosen and celebrated” (2000: 11). This marginal status has provided video producers with freedom from market forces and the constraints of dominant artistic institutions, allowing them to create critical and experimental works dealing with unconventional and contentious topics (ibid.). The examination of social, political and cultural issues that is characteristic of video art and activism has “further problematized its relationship to art” (ibid.: 20).

Many early videomakers in Canada considered themselves more activists than artists. For this reason, as Jody Berland points out, conflating ‘video’ and ‘art’ risks threatening video’s autonomy, especially when it is understood as an activist medium, in relation to art (1986). Still, video in Canada can be viewed as either activist, artistic, or as both. Throughout this thesis I use the term ‘activist/artist’ to present the videos I study as both artistic and activist pieces, but also refer to elements of these pieces as predominantly either activist or artistic. Berry shows that cultural art challenges issues of essentialism, ethnocentrism, Euro-male rationality, the homogenisation of difference, technologism and so on, thus dismantling the founding values of modern life and creating counter hegemonies. Positivistic knowledge, absolute truth, modern institutions, values, ethics, and historical imaginations are all brought into crisis by the challenge from dramatic arts. This, Berry shows, provides artists with the opportunity to question, and represent histories. These new histories will include stories of race and gender which have been previously excluded (2000).
Remote similarities: Video in relation to television

Peggy Gale asserts that video is distinct from television, “but necessarily relates to [television’s] history and presence” (1974). The TV monitor on which video is displayed is, itself, imbued with the institutional authority of broadcast television; however, despite some of the similarities of appearance the two mediums share, video and television are significantly different (Gale, 1995). The apparent similarities between video and television have made it possible for video artists to appropriate, critique and subvert television discourses, allowing video to existed as an alternative to mainstream media. Klotz confirms that by “employing a commonly used technological material in a subversive way, [video artists] present a critical counterforce to entertainment and advertising, the most popular forms of communication today” (1996: 10). Thus, video artists, while working with technologies similar to those of television, have remained largely critical of that dominant medium.

In asserting video’s relation to other media, it must be emphasized that activist/artist video discourses often conflict with the discourses of dominant cultural institutions, including television. Many video artists and activists have struggled with negotiating the convergences and divergences between video and film and television. Indeed, early Canadian video often demonstrated an antagonistic relationship with television. As Peggy Gale writes, artists’ “video in Canada began as a negation of television” (1983: 34). Television pre-dated small-format video by only two decades, but it was already understood by many video artists as a dominant mode of cultural production. Beginning in the 1950s, television became a taken-for-granted fixture in most North American homes. Many early video artists recognized that television is not an innocuous piece of furniture—it influences the daily habits of its viewers (Hanhardt, 1982). At the time of its emergence, the relationship between television and its viewers was, in many
ways, unidirectional. As Hanhardt explains, "[t]he viewer's relationship to television was as a passive receiver with virtually no control over what he saw other than to change channels on a homogenous range of program choices" (1982: 92). He argues that television programming is often perceived by its audience as a mirror to 'reality'. This perception obscures the fact that television programming is determined by corporations, which present only certain versions of 'reality' (1982). Video, on the other hand, has long been employed by those whose reality is not represented in mainstream media.

Canadian television and film have often supported or re-presented dominant nationalist, political, racialised, gendered and heteronormative discourses. As a result, many activist/artists, have used video to create and reveal discourses that run counter to dominant discourses on sexuality, gender and race. Video has been employed as a means to comment on, copy and challenge television, as video artists rejected “the gross commercialism, the predictability of subject matter, format and faces” (Gale, 1995: 9) that typify much television. Artists participating in the ‘alternative media’ have helped to redefine understandings of television and the possibilities associated with the medium (Ross, 1982: 101). While videomaker’s engagements with television were particularly important to the establishment of video theory and practice, video is also tied to the history of cinema.

Switching seats: Video in relation to mainstream cinema

Cinematography was introduced at the end of the nineteenth century, preceding video by at least 60 years. As a result, video does not enjoy the same historical or cultural legitimacy that film does (Decker-Phillips, 1998). As Youngblood explains, “the boundaries of video art are circumscribed by a much larger history—that of the cinematic enterprise in all its diversity—
which contains video and defines its possibilities" (1983: 9). Cinema has long been understood as an important site for the creation and presentation of “cultural metaphor and the ‘political unconscious’” (Druckrey, 2002: xxi). In this way cinema can be understood as a site for both the production and reception of ideologies. Employing the work of Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Annika Blunck writes that “[a]nybody visiting the cinema gets caught in the trap of the cultural industry. Even if one prepares with the best of intentions, one does not seem to have a chance to escaping the cinema seat without any damage” (2002: 58). Mass media, such as film, Blunck implies, can influence even the most critical audience in often imperceptible ways. This is accomplished, in part, by the cinema’s requirement that its viewers adjust to the speed of the camera. Mainstream film generally follows a fast-paced narrative format, which makes it even more compelling to watch. Blunck explains that viewers’ thinking activity must be largely suspended in order to avoid missing “the quickly passing facts” (ibid.: 55) that structure films.

Marchessault writes that many cinema enthusiasts perceive video as the low-budget, low-quality mirror of film. For these viewers, video is “the small screen for small minds” (1995b:7). Cinema, with its high production values and the darkness and silence that accompanies screenings in movie theatres, elicits viewers’ undivided attention (Gale, 1995). Naturalistic, or ‘good’ acting, pacing, high production values and the appearance of intellectualism in film contribute to viewers’ ‘suspension of disbelief.’ Video works, characterized by “uncommon subject matter, unexpected edits or slips of sequence, [and] ‘real’ people (amateurs) rather than actors” (ibid.: 41), seldom elicit the same suspension of disbelief in their audiences. Knights accents the fact that videomakers often utilized ‘bad acting’ in their works as a “style that meant to disrupt the pleasure of the narrative and/or which resulted from artists putting themselves,
rather than actors, in front of the camera” (2000: 61). The decision to include ‘bad acting’, she explains, illuminates the artistic emphasis on other concerns (ibid.), such as political and social activism. Video audiences, then, tend to remain aware of the constructed nature and ideological underpinnings of the media they are viewing. For these reasons, video is often examined from postmodern perspectives.

*Theoretical perspectives: Postmodern examinations of video discourses.*

Kibbins writes that alternative video works have incorporated the postmodern challenge to ‘univocal’ texts; video discourses have recognized and challenged official doctrines and accounts by presenting multiple and non-dominant ideologies. Contemporary video works frequently “destabilize received ideas regarding, for example, sexual mores and meanings, and then to promote others in their place” (1997: 11). The ‘truthfulness’ and neutrality of visual representations, whether they be in film, video or photography, have been increasingly questioned and challenged. The documentary techniques of narrative continuity, logical arguments, establishing and contextual materials and shots, expert viewpoints, non-analytical testimonies which give the impression of balanced debate, and the use of music to elicit and reinforce emotion all add to the perceived veracity of the work. These techniques “sustain the authority of the image, maintaining for the viewer the illusion that he or she is being presented with an enlightened and objective position [or] point of view conducive to rational judgements” (Diamond, 1996: 163). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, postmodern theories and popular understandings gained purchase in artistic sites and informed video practices at this time (Zippay, 1991). With the emergence of postmodern ideas, Diamond notes that attempts to discover and create ‘truthful’ presentations with video were “replaced by an interest in social science, cultural
theory and self-criticism” (1996: 166). As Michèle Barrett explains, postmodern and poststructural theories critique and reject the universal claims of Canadian historical narratives and deconstruct categories of oppression that allow for the disintegration of disciplinary boundaries (1997). Thus, postmodern and poststructural frameworks allow me to examine mainstream discourses on gender, race and sexuality, while working in the areas of discourse analysis, video, art and activism simultaneously. This tradition allows me to ‘read’ video and other discourses for its use of the devices mentioned above in the creation and problematization of specific notions of gender, race and sexuality.

According to Linda Smith, “the talk’ about the colonial past is embedded in our political discourses, our humour, poetry, music, story telling and other common sense ways of passing on both a narrative of history and an attitude about history” (1999: 21). Thus, mainstream discourses around gender, race and sexuality can be found in written texts, mainstream and alternative visual media, activist/artist video, as well as in everyday communications. Activist/artist video discourses, such as those produced by Paul Wong, often conflict with the discourses of dominant Canadian political institutions and cultural establishments (including television and film), which have excluded people of colour and queer peoples and have supported or re-presented mainstream nationalist, political, gendered and heteronormative discourses. As a result, many activist/artists have used video to create and reveal counter discourses. Along with the examination of feminist issues, Kibbins argues, gay/lesbian and (post)colonial issues have provided the main focus of much video activism (1997). Fung

---

5 I use the term ‘queer’ frequently in this paper as a term which encompasses a broad range of very diverse identities related to gender, biological sex and sexuality. While I acknowledge the great diversity within ‘queer’ communities and recognize that some folks reject this label, I use it here to refer to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, two-spirited, queer, questioning and intersexed individuals. I refer to these individual identities when necessary, for example, when I am referring to individuals or groups specifically allied with a specific identity, or in order to emphasize divisions and exclusions among these groups.
explains that many video representations by people of colour include “attempts to confront and unsettle dominant systems of signification through disruptions of racial typecasting and formal devices…” (1996: 259). In these videos, “[s]tereotypes are turned on their sides, the authenticity of the images questioned and attention is called to the ways in which we have been educated into limited racial expectations” (ibid.: 259-260). There are vast absences in the historical record around issues of gender, race and sexuality. That these identities are often left unexamined negates the importance of these categories and conceals racist, homophobic and sexist practices.

The histories of people of colour and queer peoples have been excluded from, or overwhelmed by, mainstream histories and discourses and, as such, many critical writings on video fail to address the absence (or presence) of artists of color in the 1970s and 1980s. Gagnon asserts that “dominant paradigms of unracialized historical visual and other discursive representations persist and continue to be legitimated in purportedly critical contexts” (1995: 103). She argues that an effective examination of alternative histories must include the analysis not only of those histories that have already been written but also of the “meaning in the absences, erasures, elisions and conspicuous silences” concerning these histories (ibid.: 104). Gagnon’s project, then, is to examine and document the works of artists, including Wong, in a way which challenges the exclusion and misrepresentation of certain histories in dominant discourses (2000). In compensating for absences in the historical record, it is important not only to begin to fill in these gaps, but also to interrogate the very fact of these absences, to question why certain discourses have been—and continue to be—excluded. A failure to examine why these exclusions occur is to disregard the legacy of racism, sexism and homophobia that continue to inform contemporary relations in Canada. From its beginnings, alternative video has offered
interrogations of mainstream discourses and has reflected and challenged prevailing social relations.

*Moving texts: Creating a method of discourse analysis for video*

In past research, I worked toward developing a practicable model and method of discourse analysis that can be applied to activist/artist video made in Vancouver. This model is based on Michel Foucault’s discussion of a method for discourse analysis in *The History of sexuality: An introduction (volume I)*, particularly Part IV, Chapter 1, “Method” (1990) and Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, particularly the discussions she initiates in the chapter “Subjects of sex/gender/desire” (1999). Butler’s text provides anti-essentialist critiques of discourse analysis, and refinements and expansions on Foucault’s work. Butler, for example, includes discussions of gender and race, where Foucault’s analysis was intended only to be applied to power, knowledge and discourse regarding sexuality in ‘the West’.

In this examination, Foucault claims that social phenomena are constructed within and through discourse. Discourse, he explains, is the vehicle for the transmission and production of power-knowledge. He maintains that discourse is not the sole domain of mainstream groups, however, as it allows for the transmission of both mainstream and alternative ideas. Through discourse analysis, relations of power are exposed, thus leaving existing relations of power open to challenges and change. Indeed, the object of Foucault’s analysis is to “define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world” (1990: 11). He does so by examining the history of the production of discourses, power
and knowledge as they relate to certain aspects of sexuality and how discourse, power and knowledge are transformed over time and within various contexts.

Judith Butler (1999) employs and expands on Foucault’s work. Like Foucault, she understands social identities as constructed through socially and temporally specific discourses. She observes that social identities and understandings are related to discursive practices, emphasizing the importance of discourse analysis for understanding and challenging prevailing social relations. Butler contributes a useful expansion and critique of Foucault’s work, especially with regard to the intersection of socially created identities and her anti-essentialist examination of these social identities. In this way, Butler broadens the focus of Foucault’s method in order to address a multiplicity of social identity formations.

Foucault’s ‘Method’ (1990) begins with four ‘rules’, which he advises are not to be viewed as imperative instructions in the creation of a method of discourse analysis; rather, they are ‘cautionary prescriptions’. These ‘rules’, Foucault states, should be used as guidelines or recommendations for areas of examination and ways of understanding discourse and the method employed in its analysis. While these ‘rules’ are useful approaches to creating a method of discourse analysis, they do not exhaust all useful areas of study, nor do they apply uniformly in all instances. These ‘rules’, when supplemented with anti-essentialist analyses and practical application, provide me with a useful starting point for my analysis of Wong’s video discourses, as situated within broader social and political contexts. I introduce these cautionary prescriptions here and expand on them in the analysis that follows in this thesis.

In Chapter 1, Back to the future: Paul Wong and the (his)story of activist/artist video in Vancouver, I place Paul Wong’s video works and activism in the history of alternative video production in Vancouver, BC. I begin this work, then, by tracing the history of activist/artist
video and video collectives and video production in Vancouver with emphasis on Paul Wong’s place in this history. I frame this discussion with Foucault’s ‘rule of double conditioning,’ whereby he claims that relations of power and knowledge are indivisible from ideological, pedagogical, economic, and other relations. Foucault proposes that experiences of divisions and inequalities in these relations lead to challenges to existing relations of power/knowledge (1990). This guideline provides an excellent starting point for examining how the complex and specific interplay of existing power/knowledge, ideological, economic, political and other relations led to the emergence of video-based artist-run collectives in Vancouver in the early 1970s. Importantly, I use this ‘rule’ as a starting point for my work towards showing that relations of power/knowledge can be transformed by actions initiated from marginalized positions. It is through the collectives and work I introduce here that Wong and other video activist/artists engaged in social and political actions meant to alter existing power relations. To this end, I demonstrate both the successes and failures of actions initiated by activist/artists through video collectives in Vancouver, with particular focus on the establishment of organizations where video was produced, distributed and preserved and which were sites of engagement with mainstream social and political institutions and ideologies, including government funding bodies and mainstream media institutions.

Chapter 2, (Neo)colonial in(ter)jections: Colonialism, identity and the construction of the Canadian national ‘family’ in 60 unit: Bruise, is framed by Foucault’s (1990) ‘rule of immanence’. Through this ‘rule,’ Foucault asserts that discourses emerge in ‘local centres’ through continuous and non-hierarchical exchanges between strategies of power and strategies of resistance. Analysis of discourse must start from these sites because, in them, relations of power and discourses are the most immediate. In local centres, we can see the ways in which
mainstream discourses are reiterated, challenged and changed. While Foucault’s focus on relations of power does not acknowledge certain positions as dominant over others, Butler’s (1999) examination of discourse emphasizes hegemonic power and the importance of examining how discourses and identities are constructed within differential power relations. I begin my analysis of Wong’s *60 unit: Bruise* (1976) with reference to the interplay between immanent power relations, relevant local centres, including queer and Chinese and video-based communities in Canada (specifically in Vancouver) and existing and emergent discourses in these local centres. I examine the various and hierarchical constructions of race, gender and sexuality as a justification for colonial/neo-colonial practices, such as those enacted in labour and immigration histories in Canada. I focus much of this analysis on the employment of what McClintock terms the ‘family’ metaphor (1997), which idealizes imagines the Canadian national family as both white and heterosexual. I examine how those who do not fit this ideal, particularly queer people and people of colour are insistently and violently denied the same rights and freedoms held by those who fit the idealized form. Mainstream Canadian discourses related to this metaphor are particularly complex in their application, as they impact individual experiences in diverse ways, dependent on constructions of intersecting identities, such as gender, race and sexuality. In examining the intersection of various identities, such as those tied to gender, race and sexuality, I investigate how these identities both constrain individuals and groups and also form the basis for organizing and creating new representational discourses from marginalized positions. I show that, working from marginalized positions, local queer communities and communities of colour have created representational discourses which begin to engage with mainstream understandings and which critique and challenge existing relations of power.
I use Foucault’s (1990) ‘rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses’ to frame my discussion of Confused: Sexual views (compilation edit) in Chapter 3, Confessions of the dangerous kind: Challenging the censorship of sexual discourses through Confused: Sexual views. This ‘rule’ supposes that discourses are employed in multiple, often conflicting, strategies and are transformed through this process. Depending on how they are employed, discourses have the dual effect of both shielding and undermining existing relations of power. Foucault explains that there has been an ‘institutional incitement’ to discourse on all aspects of sexuality since the 18th century in the West. This has often taken the form of the confession, through which individuals must relay every detail related to their understandings of sexuality and their sexual practices. This proliferation of discourses on sexuality has contributed to the cataloguing and pathologizing of non-mainstream sexualities and also to attempts to legitimize and empower these positions. Butler (1999) explains that mainstream discourses present binary and essentialist understandings of gender and sexuality. She asserts, however, that dominant models of gender and sexuality are undermined by the existence of identities that do not conform to these models. Guided by Foucault’s The history of sexuality: An introduction (volume 1), Part two, Chapter 1, “The incitement to discourse” (1990), I examine the censorship of certain discourses as a means of repressing particular aspects of sexuality. To facilitate this discussion, I focus on the censorship of Wong’s Confused: Sexual views (1984) by the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) through the lens of Wong’s Confused: Sexual views (compilation edit) (1984), which was produced in the context of this censorship. The interviews included in the latter work reveal a multiplicity of discourses on the intersections of gender, race and sexuality and provide a framework examining debate around art and activism in the conflict between alternative and mainstream art and institutions. Further, the debates surrounding the compilation edit are
observed in relation to discourses and events related to censorship and sexuality at the local and national levels at this time.

In Chapter 4, Watch yourself: (Neo)colonialism, multiculturalism and examinations of identity construction in So are you, I use Foucault’s ‘rules of continual variations,’ (1990), which emphasize that discourses and relations of power-knowledge are constantly shifting and, therefore, individual and group access to discourses and relations of power-knowledge are also always in flux. Here, Foucault asserts that a method for analysing discourse must focus on the ever-changing nature of discourse and of relations of power-knowledge. Butler, however, stresses the importance of considering inequalities in relations of power and knowledge and points to the material realities tied to these inequalities. In particular, Butler writes that expressions and understandings of gender and sexuality are determined to a great degree from hegemonic positions (1999). While Butler claims that despite the limits imposed from dominant positions, marginalized individuals and groups can appropriate (re)present and transform prevailing understandings of gender, sexuality and race, resulting in challenges to established relations of power and knowledge (1997). I utilize Foucault and Butler’s claims through my analysis of Wong’s 1994 work So are you, wherein Wong examines dominant stereotypes related to intersecting identities of gender, race and sexuality through interviews and fictionalized scenes in which stereotypes are performed and challenged. Wong’s work places mainstream understandings of gender, race and sexuality in the (neo)colonial Canadian context and points to the role of official multiculturalism and mainstream media in (re)creating inequalities based on these identities. My analysis, then, includes an interrogation of multicultural arts funding in Canada and the role that Wong and other artists have played in challenging and subverting official multiculturalism and working against the constraining ideals of mainstream Western art
practice. To this end, I appraise the importance of exhibitions and other initiatives originated by and for activist/artists of colour and queer activists/artists in Canada.

While combining the particular works of Foucault and Butler as I do here provides a useful overarching theory and method for discourse analysis, I add the work of Roland Barthes in describing the process of interpreting visual discourses. The volume of essays titled *The Responsibility of Forms* (1985) compiles several of Roland Barthes' most important writings on analyzing visual images. From this text, I use Barthes' "The photographic message" (1985a), "Rhetoric of the image" (1985b), and "The third meaning: Research notes on several Eisenstein stills" (1985c) in forming a method for 'reading' visual images. In the first of these essays, Barthes asserts that viewers can read into an image a 'first meaning', which is the literal, denoted image. The film (or video, in the case of this thesis) goes beyond simply presenting a literal message, and offers a 'second meaning', which is the connoted message. In order effectively describe a film, he claims, one must examine the relationship between the denoted and connoted meanings presented. Part of this process involves the examination of the techniques employed in producing the videos I examine here. As Barthes explains, certain procedures add a connoted meaning to an image by modifying the denoted message; that is, the 'reality' presented in the image. These procedures include 'trick effects', including superimposition, which alter the way an image is perceived as well as how it is related to other images. He writes that the 'syntax' evident in a sequence of images influences how the images are received and interpreted. Thus, the images presented in the videos here must be examined with respect to the editing decisions that place them in a particular relationship to each other (1985a).

In his examination of photographic messages, Barthes notes that the meanings attached to an image are influenced by the way it is produced, transmitted and received. The production,
transmission and reception of the ‘second meaning’ is culturally and historically dependent. He explains that images are “read, attached, more or less consciously by the public which consumes it—to a traditional stock of signs” (ibid.: 7). In determining this ‘stock of signs’ it has been necessary for me to place the videos I examine in the historical, social and political contexts in which they were created. The code of connotation, he writes, is not ‘natural’, but is ‘cultural’. I refer to the meanings attached to these signs, including gestures, attitudes, expressions, colours, and so on, and describe how these are “endowed with certain meanings by virtue of the practices of a certain society” (ibid.: 16)—in this case, the Canadian nation-state. In examining video, then, one must take account of the way in which an image is read and interpreted will change with time and place. As Barthes claims, the study of the emission and reception of photographic messages necessitates “studying human groups, defining motives, attitudes, and trying to link the behaviour of these groups to the total society to which they belong” (ibid.: 4).

Images must also be examined apropos of how they interact with concomitant structures, such as the text which may accompany them. With film, video and other moving image/text combinations, this is a particularly important aspect to analyze. In “Rhetoric of the image,” Barthes writes that although “[r]are in the fixed image, the word-as-relay becomes very important in cinema, where dialogue does not have a simple elucidative function but actually advances the action by inserting, in the sequence of messages, certain meanings which are not to be found in the image” (1985b: 30). In this way, the film dialogue guides the audience to certain interpretations over others. Regardless of how the images and texts present in moving visual images may guide viewers, he asserts, the way in which an image is read and understood also “depends on the reader’s ‘knowledge,’” (1985a: 16-17). Thus, he emphasizes that every image has multiple meanings, as its signifiers have multiple underlying signifieds, “of which the reader
can select some and ignore the rest" (1985b: 28). Barthes notes that a multiplicity of readings are possible for any given image, resulting in the "surprises' of meaning" (ibid.: 36) that arise out of individual interpretations.

In “The third meaning: Research notes on several Eisenstein stills” Barthes expands his analysis of visual images in general and describes a means of reading images which is specific to moving visual images. In this work, he identifies three levels of meaning through examinations of static images from Eisenstein films. First, he identifies an informational level, or the level of ‘communication’, which he explains is all that can be learned "from the setting, the costumes, the characters, their relationships," which are familiar to viewers (1985c: 41). Second, he identifies a symbolic level, which is the level of signification and involves a more expanded semiotic analysis than the first (informational) level requires. The second level must be studied with regard to symbolism, rather than simply with respect to the literal message. This level, Barthes explains, is ‘stratified’, as the symbolism present may refer to history, other narratives, or be characteristic of the work’s creator. At this level, he notes, the symbolic meaning is intentional on the part of the author and is meant to be understood by the audience. Barthes refers to this second level as the ‘obvious meaning’ in the message (ibid.).

In the film stills that Barthes examines, he analyses certain aspects of the images as symbolizing certain emotions or actions of the characters in that scene. He also contextualizes these stills within the broader motion picture and determines how they relate to the overall themes and meanings in the film. This analysis begins by finding the obvious meaning, but Barthes goes on to note that the signification of the obvious meaning may be “encroached on by the obtuse meaning, [but] not thereby denied or blurred” (ibid.: 45). The obvious meaning
includes what can be read from gestural and costuming and decorative accentuations which are typical of certain meanings and therefore encourage certain readings.

Thus, along with the 'obvious meaning', Barthes finds a third level of meaning, which is composed 'signifying accidents,' and which he terms the 'obtuse meaning' (ibid.: 42). Barthes explains that it is difficult to establish the obtuse meaning as intentional on the part of the image's creator and that it is also difficult for viewers to identify it explicitly. The obtuse meaning, he writes, appears as something "intellection cannot quite absorb, a meaning both persistent and fugitive, apparent and evasive" (ibid.: 44). This meaning, he adds, is characterized by infinite possibilities, as it "seems to extend beyond culture, knowledge, information" (ibid.: 44). The obtuse meaning is not explicitly articulated in the image, but can be observed in any aspect of the image that can not be readily identified, but which causes a reaction in viewers. Although Barthes does not identify it as such, perhaps the obtuse meaning can best be described as the meaning viewers may intuit from the image. It is the obtuse meaning, he hypothesizes, which differentiates the film from other texts and images because "the third [obtuse] meaning structures the film differently, without subverting the story....Everything we can say about [a film] can be said about a written text..., except this—which is the obtuse meaning" (ibid.: 58).

The obtuse meaning is not continuous and does not depend on the narrative structure, nor does the narrative depend on the obtuse meaning to progress.

The identification of the 'obtuse meaning', advocates Barthes, is best achieved through the examination of film 'stills', the frozen frame of the visual image, which separates the narrative structure from this third meaning. While I certainly did not examine each individual frame of the videos I analyze here, I occasionally found it useful to pause the video and to reflect on details in a scene that I might have otherwise missed. More importantly, this allowed me to
consider my own reaction to the scene and, thus, to identify any obtuse meaning in the image. The possibility of an obtuse meaning was liberating to my analysis, as it validates the nuances of my particular reaction to, and reading of, an image. The possibility of an obtuse meaning freed my analysis from focusing entirely on the videomaker’s intentions and, instead, allowed me to acknowledge the ineffable meanings—the feelings—that the videos evoked for me. Before conducting a discourse analysis of Wong’s works, I introduce the literature I have employed in this research.

Locating relevant discourses and relations: Critical review of primary and secondary sources

I employ a broad range of academic and non-academic primary and secondary sources to supplement my examination of Paul Wong’s videos in this research. These sources include writings on the technical, practical and ideological histories of video art and activism, including works which document video-based initiatives in Vancouver. I have found that catalogues from video exhibitions contain important information regarding the theory, motivations and practices which inform activist/artist video works and collective formation. These catalogues often include short critical essays which examine or explain video activism/art from artists’ perspectives. Other writings critique and comment on specific video works and exhibitions, including those examined in detail in the following chapters. I also make use of works which examine and document the history of colonialism, racism, homophobia, multiculturalism and social/political activism related to these histories in Canada. I utilize works which examine the construction of and the intersections between identities, particularly gender, race and sexuality and social/political activism related to these identities.
Central to the application of Foucault’s work in this thesis is the examination of the history of the discourses and events I address. The following are among the most useful of these:

The Satellite Video Exchange Society has an extensive print archive, consisting of textual records, as well as photographs, prints, posters, video and audio material. The archives contain materials dated between 1971 and 2000. The archival fonds are organized into the categories of “general administrative files, programming and exhibition files, education and workshop files, Video Out Distribution files, equipment and facilities files, Resource Centre files, Video Guide [magazine] production files and external relations files”. The archive includes various reports from both Video In and Video Out, which provide information on internal issues, conflicts, and achievements, as well as internal observations about relations with other organizations, including funding agencies.

In reconstructing the history of video activism/art in Vancouver, I use information from archived handbills and pamphlets advertising various exhibitions, discussions and other events, as well as writings documenting these proceedings at these events. Materials, such as archived Video Out distribution files, help me to construct a view of the extent to which Wong’s videos are accessed by individuals and organizations. I look to funding proposals and other correspondences between Video In/Video Out and institutions, such as the Canada Council for the Arts in order to understand mainstream assumptions and goals around multiculturalism and attempts to assert these goals and ideals in artistic spaces. Documents such as the Coalition for

---

6 One requires permission and supervision in accessing the SVES archives. To this end, I met with Keith Higgins, Video In’s Administrator on several occasions so that I could access this material. I was provided with a guide to the archives, from which I chose the information I wished to examine. Keith retrieved the material I requested, loosely supervised my use of the material and then reshelved the archive boxes when I was finished with them. This meant that I was only able to view archived materials when Keith was available to supervise me, or if we were able to arrange for another staff member to help me if he was unavailable. Given the limited staffing of the centre, this meant that I could only access the archives on certain days at specific times.

the Right to View “Statement of purpose,” (SVES archives, (c)), for example, provide information about the local and national social and political events which motivated the formation of this anti-censorship coalition in Vancouver. This document is useful in my examination of the cancellation of Confused: Sexual views, censorship legislation in BC and Canada and on the anti-censorship goals and actions of the coalition.

Along with this primary source archival material, I supplemented my examination of 60 unit: Bruise, Confused: Sexual views (compilation edit), and So are you with secondary sources. For example, Nancy Shaw’s “Cultural democracy and institutionalised difference: Intermedia, Metro Media” (1995), documents the history, ideological goals and video-based initiatives of early artist-run media collectives in Vancouver. Shaw writes that ideas of surveillance and freedom of expression linked to government control and mass media were established as important and enduring themes in Vancouver activist/artist video beginning in the early 1970s (1995). Kevin Dowler’s “Interstitial aesthetics and the politics of video at the Canada Council” relates the history of the Canada Council video programme, which is the primary federal government funding body for video in Canada. He follows the exchange of knowledge and power between activist/artists and government funding agencies, commenting on the significance of specific developments in this history.

The text Video re/view: The (best) source for critical writings on Canadian artists’ video, edited by Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele (1996), \(^8\) includes Sara Diamond’s \(^9\) “Daring documents: the practical aesthetics of early Vancouver video” (1996), which has proved to be the most useful

---

\(^8\) Notably, both of these women have been active in activist/artist video in Canada since the 1970s.

\(^9\) Sara Diamond shows up frequently in materials addressing local video, both as an artist and as a writer documenting and critically engaging with video works, artists and communities. Her own video works Diamond participated in events etc. at Video In, including participating in feminist initiatives and groups in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Diamond also shows up as an interview subject in Confused: Sexual Views and is included in Wong’s compilation edit.
article in this volume. Diamond points out that many of the early Vancouver videos had a distinct documentary style specific to the city. She also discusses the early commitment to challenging dominant media in Vancouver. She confirms and repeats much of the available information regarding the emergence of video collectives in Vancouver. Like Diamond, I have dealt with the limited and somewhat repetitive primary source documents available on video collectives and production in Vancouver. What Diamond adds to this history is the claim that anti-mass media activism and sentiment was present in local video collectives at least until the early 1990s when Wong produced *So are you*.

In conducting this research, I have employed numerous articles, essays, and other texts produced by Canadian video activist/artists. Peggy Gale is often acknowledged as one of the most important figures in the emergence and evolution of video art in Canada. Her extensive writings on video have appeared in both academic and non-academic forums and are widely referenced in other writings on video. Gale’s earliest works, including her essay “A new medium,” (1974) from the Art Gallery of Ontario’s *Videoscape* exhibition catalogue detail video’s relationship to television and mainstream art, describing the convergences and divergences between these mediums. In her more recent works, including *Videotexts* (1995), Gale expands upon earlier documents surrounding the emergence of video art in Canada in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Looking back, she details the social, political and technological situations, as well as the artistic methods which influenced the evolution of video art and video collectives in Canada as distinct from other media and movements. Gale chronicles the changing relationship between video art and television over the years, as well as the oppositional positioning of artists’ video in relation to mainstream cinema.

---

10 See the Primary Sources section of this chapter
Other writings, such as Gene Youngblood's "A medium matures: Video and the cinematic enterprise," (1983), document the early history of Canadian video and point to the influence of the history of cinema and other mainstream media on the production and development of early alternative video. More specific accounts, including René Blouin's *Western Front Video* (1984), offer detailed documentation of the emergence of artist-run centres across Canada with specific reference to the Vancouver-based collectives that figure prominently in Wong's history. Lori Zippay's edited volume *Artists' video: An international guide* (1991) points to the importance of video for charting social and political histories. This work establishes video production as an alternative to mainstream media which offers critiques of mainstream presentations and stereotypes of gender, race and sexuality. Zippay follows the history of video beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s with emphasis on the influence of postmodern theory and artistic practice on the medium's evolution. Similarly, Michael Rush's *Video art* (2000), broadly examines the history of video art in North America and describes the ideals which informed early video practice. Rush also documents some early attempts by video artists to engage with television media. I have utilized these sources by way of placing video in relation to art, television and cinema in my thesis introduction. Further, I have expanded the usefulness of these works to my study by pairing them with archival research in Chapter 1, placing Wong's art and activism in relation to the histories and practices they document.

Central to my discourse analysis are interrogations of the history of race and racism in Canada. I draw on sources which introduce the construction of race in relation to other identities as well as the material realities associated with discourses of race. In "Race, racism and racialization: Contested concepts," in his edited volume, *Racism and social inequality in Canada: Concepts, controversies and strategies of resistance* (1998), Vic Satzewich examines the
construction of race in the Canadian context. In this work, Satzewich recognizes racialization as
the creation and reinforcement of stereotypes about people based on essentialist assumptions
regarding inherent beliefs and abilities. He examines how various indicators of race have been
deployed historically and continue to inform understandings and experiences of race today.
Particularly, he examines the ways in which racist assumptions continue to be enacted in
discussions of cultural difference, cultural diversity and multiculturalism in Canada. Despite
vociferous denials of its existence, Satzewich shows that racism remains an important topic of
research because of its continued impact on political and social relations in Canada. Included in
Satzewich’s volume is Alan Simmons’ “Racism and immigration policy” (1998), which
examines the racism inherent in Canada’s immigration policies, pointing out that contemporary
policies are influenced by the history of racism in Canada and by neoracist principles.

An examination of the intersection of race with identities of gender and sexuality in local
centres is central to my work in Chapter 2. Here, I use Kay Anderson’s Vancouver’s Chinatown:
Racial discourse in Canada, 1875-1980 (1991) to illuminate the construction of identities of race,
gender and sexuality, particular to Chinese communities in Canada. This work includes an
assessment of specific historical practices and discourses in Vancouver and examines the process
of social, political and cultural community formation in Vancouver’s Chinatown. As Anderson’s
historiography encompasses the period in which 60 Unit: Bruise was produced and ends just
prior to the production of Confused: Sexual views, it is useful to my understanding of both the
historical and contemporary discourses I examine.

I employ Anne McClintock’s “‘No longer in a future heaven’: Gender, race and
nationalism” (1997) in addressing the deployment of particular discourses related to gender,
sexuality and race in the creation and reinforcement of specific national characters. To this end,
I apply this work in Chapter 2 to guide my discussion of the creation of Canada as a white, heteronormative national ‘family’. I connect the history of discourses supporting particular conceptions of the Canadian nation-state to contemporary social relations of gender, race and sexuality and show that, despite emerging discourses on equality, racism, sexism and homophobia persist. Likewise, Elspeth Sage’s Video guide article, “Lip service: Multi/trans/cross/anti-racist/cultural funding” (1991), confirms the persistence of oppression and addresses the history of government-initiated multicultural initiatives in Canada. Sage writes that these initiatives are often aimed at protecting ‘Euro-Canadian’ culture, rather than improving the experiences and encouraging cultural sharing by non-European immigrant populations.

An examination of multiculturalism is necessary to my discussion of (neo)colonialism, racism and the funding and production of activist/artist video in Canada. Critiques of official multicultural policies by video activist/artists provide important insights into the relationship between mainstream ideologies and activist/artists’ experiences and endeavours. For example, Richard Fung’s “Multiculturalism reconsidered” (1990) criticizes official multiculturalism in Canada for concealing the persistence of systemic racism and, thereby, undermining anti-racist initiatives. Fung attributes the lack of Asian involvement in all aspects of art production and criticism to systemic racism in the Canadian art world. To this analysis, Fung adds that examining the ways in which gender and sexuality intersect with race is imperative, as these intersections complicate the experiences of artists of colour. Expanding on Fung’s analysis, I use “A displaced view: What are we reconsidering about the ‘yellow peril’” (1990), in which artist and writer Midi Onodera examines how official multiculturalism in Canada has both limited and facilitated the production of art by people of colour. Onodera observes that works supported by government funding agencies tend to be apolitical and reflective of very particular
understandings of diversity. In response, she shows, some artists of colour have resisted these requirements through artistic endeavours which do not examine issues of race, culture or diversity. These works are important to my analysis of So are you in Chapter 4, wherein I track discourses and activism emerging in local activist/artist communities. Here, I relate Wong’s role in the evolution of anti-racist artistic practice in the mid-1990s.

Robert Stam’s work, “Multiculturalism and the neoconservatives” (1997), offers a critical analysis of multiculturalism in (neo)colonial nations. He writes about the history of race and colonialism and the role of mainstream media in disseminating and reinforcing colonial practice. In this work, Stam critiques mainstream multiculturalism in Canada as a tokenistic endeavour aimed at placating minorities rather than encouraging meaningful and effective ideological change. In Chapter 4, I employ Stam’s promotion of alternative models and ideologies of multiculturalism which require the deconstruction of current Eurocentric and racist relations of culture and power. His emphasis on the deconstruction of mainstream constructions of difference is a useful framework for my examination of Wong’s video and related organizing efforts, which work toward such changes. In “Belonging in exclusion,” a short essay included in the Yellow peril exhibition catalogue (1990), Monika Kin Gagnon discusses the history and continuation of Anti-Chinese racism in Canada. She discusses enduring stereotypes of Chinese Canadians and continuing attempts to patrol racial boundaries in Canada. Informed by Gagnon’s claims, I examine works which engage with issues of cultural appropriation and representing the ‘other’ in Canadian artistic contexts.

In “Colouring the screen: Four strategies in anti-racist film and video” (1996) in Video re/view: the (best) source for critical writings on Canadian artists’ video, Fung notes that people of colour have been largely absent from video art communities. As a result, issues important to
people of colour have not been adequately represented in Canadian video art. Fung writes that representations of race by marginalized peoples destabilize mainstream representations and stereotypes surrounding these identities. Through this examination, he emphasizes the significance of video works which address issues of gender, race and sexuality from marginalized perspectives. After establishing the importance of such projects, I consider the importance of Wong’s involvement in such initiatives.

Wong’s own writing in the *Yellow peril reconsidered: Photo, film, video* exhibition catalogue (1990a; 1990b) describes his motivations for curating of this exhibition. Wong writes that his project was to counteract the lack of support for Asian art in Canada with art initiatives created by and for Asian peoples. Through this exhibit, Wong works to counter the racism he observes and experiences in mainstream artistic spaces. He uses this exhibit as a forum through which to examine mainstream constructions and stereotypes of Asian peoples in North America. In so doing, Wong emphasizes that communities of people of colour are incredibly diverse and are, therefore, Asian identities and communities are neither cohesive nor generalizable. He writes that communities of colour, for example, are often divided along axes of gender and sexuality, a fact made evident through the work of the many gay or lesbian artists included in the exhibit.

The construction of race and the experiences of people of colour, explains Wong, are influenced by issues of gender and sexuality. In examining Wong’s involvements in anti-racist art and activism, I also look to Sage’s “Asian New World Video” (1987), and several of Wong’s writings, including “Asian New World: Video art and documentary” (1987b), and “Jim Wong-Chu: Paper son” (1987c). These works discuss the *Asian New World* exhibit, curated by Wong, explaining that the exhibit aimed to address issues of racialised stereotypes and difference and
worked to establish Asian artists in mainstream and alternative art spaces. I apply these works in Chapter 4 in order to identify the importance and influence of Wong’s continuing activism in artistic contexts. Other works confirm the importance of Wong’s efforts. In “Mirroring identities: Two decades of video art in English-Canada,” (1995) for example, Dot Tuer briefly discusses Wong’s video So are you and establishes that examinations of Asian identity and issues of cultural displacement are important aspects of many of Wong’s video works.

Janine Marchessault’s edited text, Mirror machine: Video and identity (1995), points to the value of documenting activist/artist works addressing discourses of identity. Included in this volume is Gagnon’s “How to search for signs of (East) Asian life in the video world,” (1995), in which she addresses the lack of recognition and analysis of race in critical literature on video. It is her project, she explains, to interrogate these absences and to begin documenting the histories of race and racism as significant aspects of video works by Wong and other local activist/artists.

Other conundrums: race, culture and Canadian art (2002) is a collection of essays addressing issues of race in Canadian art, including video. In this work, Gagnon examines the organisation and self-identification of gendered and racialised peoples into communities “with the goals of making interventions in the larger Canadian cultural domain” (ibid.: 22-23). Gagnon examines the potential for such interventions to challenge stereotypes and prevailing relations related to race in artistic contexts. Gagnon’s text is also useful for its critiques of other examinations of video, which fail to recognise race as a central aspect in Wong’s work. I use these texts to support my own interrogation of discourses of race in Wong’s art and activism, but acknowledge the importance of intersecting identities of gender and sexuality in Wong’s work as well. This is a particularly important aspect of my research, as these identities and Wong’s examination and re-presentation of discourses related to these have gone largely unexamined in existing literature.
Several works are particularly important to my discussions of sexuality and its intersections with gender and race in this research. Foremost among these is Tom Warner’s (2002) historiography of queer Canada, *Never going back: The history of queer activism in Canada*. This work is useful as it establishes the roots of homophobia in mainstream institutions, representations and ideologies and examines the history of social, political, legal and moral management of homosexuality in Canada. Warner observes changing definitions, movements and commitments within queer communities and activist organizations in Canada, and charts the divisions within and among these communities over time. He writes, for example, about the failure of many queer organizations to adequately represent women and people of colour. Warner also tracks the influence of the ‘AIDS crisis’ on queer communities and on mainstream understandings of homosexuality and pornography in both mainstream and alternative social and political spaces. I apply this work throughout my research to situate Wong’s videos in relation to historical and contemporary queer experiences and activism.

In my analysis of Wong’s 60 unit: *Bruise* in Chapter 2, I use Joan Sangster’s 1996 article, “Incarcerating ‘bad girls’: The regulation of sexuality through the Female Refuges Act in Ontario.” Here, Sangster documents the incarceration of young, primarily white, women in Ontario in the interwar period as a means of controlling what was commonly viewed as inappropriate sexual behaviour. This history of incarcerations, she shows, was informed by mainstream understandings of gender, race and sexuality and the intersections between these identities and the ideal Canadian (national and nuclear) family. She briefly discusses stereotypes of Chinese men’s gender and sexuality which, along with stereotypes depicting Chinese men as pimps and drug pushers or addicts, informed mainstream fears surrounding their interactions.
with white women. My examination of 60 unit: Bruise in relation to this work reveals the legacy of the discourses and material realities Sangster presents.

Additionally, local magazines and newspapers provide me with information about video in Vancouver, as well as activist issues in the city. These sources are particularly important to my work in Chapter 3 on Confused: Sexual views, in which I rely heavily on popular press writings addressing the cancellation of this work by the Vancouver Art Gallery and the organization of anti-censorship events in the wake of the cancellation. For example, Angles, billed as “news and commentary for Vancouver’s gay and lesbian community,” and published between 1983 and 1998, included news reports on the cancellation from gay and lesbian perspectives (MacKillop, 1984). As well, Vanguard, a publication of the Vancouver Art Gallery, offers information and reviews related to local art and cultural events. I employ Carol Williams’ 1987 Vanguard article, “Sites of intervention: Visual Evidence,” which examines issues of pornography, state and local censorship and discourses of ‘artistic merit’ and the effects of these issues and debates in local artistic communities. Another useful source of background information for this chapter is Diamond’s March 1984 article “Clear about confused” in Video Guide, in which she discusses Confused: Sexual Views, documenting the artists’ intentions in creating this work, their creative process, the controversial cancellation of this installation and the actions taken and planned as a result. Through research into censorship discourses and activities at the federal and provincial governmental levels, I place these articles and the events I examine in Chapter 3 in the broader context of prevailing discourses on sexuality.

I rely on writings informed by queer theories which address queer film and video. Works such as Fung’s essay, “Shortcomings: Questions about pornography as pedagogy” in John Greyson, Pratibha Parmar and Martha Gever’s edited volume Queer looks: Perspectives on
lesbian and gay film and video (1993) addresses mainstream and queer perceptions and constructions of race in relation to pornography. Additionally, Anneke Smelik’s, "Gay and lesbian criticism" in John Hill and Pamela Gibson’s Film studies: Critical approaches (2000), are useful to my research in that they provide queer perspectives on popular film. Smelik documents gay and lesbian film criticism and points to the role that this work has played in criticizing homophobic stereotypes in mainstream media, including those related to gay men and HIV. Along with queer perspectives on film and video, these articles inform my analysis of the intersections between race, gender and sexuality in both queer and heteronormative sexual spaces.
Chapter 1
Back to the future: Paul Wong and the (his)story of activist/artist video in Vancouver

In The History of sexuality: An introduction (volume 1), Part IV, Chapter 1, “Method” (1978, 1990), Foucault’s method of discourse analysis does not conceive of power relations as a system of controls exerted by dominant groups over subjugated groups. Rather, through the ‘rule of double conditioning,’ he argues that power is ubiquitous, relational and in constant flux; therefore, instead of examining power as a static entity employed only by certain groups, he investigates multivariate ‘relations of power.’ Relations of power, he explains, are immanent, or intrinsic, in other relations, such as “economic processes [and] knowledge relationships” (1990: 94). He shows that power relations are the direct outcomes of what he terms ‘divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums’ in economic, ideological and other relations. At the same time, he writes, relations of power lead to the divisions, inequalities and disequilibriums that occur in other relations. In this way, Foucault shows that power, knowledge and other relations are not outside of or separate from one another: they are enmeshed (ibid.). This complex interplay of relations of power and knowledge is evident in the history of video art and the emergence of artist-run collectives in Vancouver. In the early years of video art and activism in Vancouver, artists and their communities engaged in dialogues around mainstream media and funding agencies, with a particular focus on attempts to democratize television. In forming collectives, video artists in Vancouver also worked to establish video as a medium for social and political action through engagements with mainstream and alternative social and political discourses and movements.

Since the early 1960s, Paul Wong has been an important and active figure in the evolution of video collectives and the production of video art and activism in Vancouver. The artist-run collectives Wong has participated in have been important departure points for the
social and political activism that has come to characterize Wong’s work and local video art in
general. These collectives have been imperative to the funding, production, distribution and
preservation of video works and have forged strong alliances between artists. With these
systems in place, activist/artists were empowered in their critiques of dominant media and made
(varyingly successful) attempts at accessing and challenging the institution of television. Among
the members of these collectives, access to cable television was seen as particularly important for
maintaining ties and disseminating information within marginalised communities. Working
within artist-run centres, Wong and other Canadian video artists and activists have advanced
marginalised histories and non-dominant discourses through video production and activist
endeavours. This history of collective action, critical engagement with dominant discourses and
commitment to advancing marginalized positions are each essential to Wong’s development as
an activist/artist.

Making room(s) for video: Situating the emergence of Vancouver’s artist-run video centres

In the social, economic and political climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s in
Vancouver, numerous artists’ collectives emerged. Knights points to a situation where a
“Liberal government program of federal make-work and community project grants coincided
with an apparent desire among some artists to ‘settle down’, that is, to establish collectives of
similarly interested individuals who could work, and often live, together” (2000: 46). At the
same time, videomakers were being denied access to mainstream systems for the production,
distribution and exhibition of their works. Given this situation, videomakers had no choice but
to create their own networks for supporting video practice (Wong, 2000). The formation of
artist-run centres in Canada was influenced by the desire for systems of art production and
distribution that were removed from "the commercial market and the legitimating authority of the art museum" (Arnold, 1998:1). Faced with the high cost of producing video outside of traditional art institutions, and faced with few prospects for achieving commercial success outside of this system, many video artists elected to participate in the formation of artist-run collectives. The formation of these collectives was facilitated by the presence of government funding for such initiatives at the time (Kibbins, 1997). As artist-run centres often relied on funding from government bodies, including the National Film Board (NFB) and the Canada Council for the Arts, artists working in these collectives were not able to extricate themselves entirely from the ideological concerns of these mainstream institutions. As a result, the social and political works and organizing efforts of Wong and other artists have been negotiated in relation to mainstream discourses and institutions.

According to Blouin (1984), the formation of artist-run centres across Canada in the early 1970s had a significant effect on the direction of contemporary art in this country. The formation of these centres was partly a result of transformations in the goals and practices of video-making, which were not adequately supported or addressed in mainstream artistic contexts, such as galleries. Further, writes Blouin, although video technologies were becoming more affordable in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the costs associated with making video were still largely prohibitive to videomakers. In order to make these costs more manageable, artists began working toward a new model of user collectives for the production and dissemination of video art and activism. These alternative centres were inspired by cooperative movements and were directed and administered by their members. Blouin notes that between 1972 and 1984 over 75 artist-run centres emerged in Canada and "generated, with the help of ridiculously modest budgets, an impressive wealth of activities" (ibid.: 46). In Vancouver, Diamond observes, local
artists were variously involved with different artist-run centres, and many local artist-run centres have converged and diverged over the years (1996). The networks that formed between these centres resulted in “conditions of distribution without precedent in the history of Canadian art,” (Blouin 1984: 46), as the work of neophyte artists was showcased through the network of artist-run centres across the country (ibid.). Owing to the networks artist-run centres formed, works by activist/artists, including Wong, have been distributed throughout the country where they otherwise might not have been. This expanded distribution contributed to local and national dialogues around video art and activism. As Wong was one of the most prolific early video producers in Canada, his works in particular have contributed significantly to these dialogues. Wong’s current involvement in local video-based communities, including Vancouver’s Video In, shows a continued commitment to the system of artist-run centres that he helped initiate over 30 years ago.

Intermedia’s first and lasting impressions: Defining activist/artist video through funding negotiations

The Intermedia Society emerged in 1967 as Vancouver’s first video-focused artist-run center. This collective was composed of theorists, architects, artists and other individuals, including Michael Goldberg (who would become a permanent fixture in Canada’s video art communities), and a burgeoning video-maker named Paul Wong. Intermedia, inspired by Marshall McLuhan’s ideals around the democratization of electronic media, was conceived as a collaborative organization working with a range of forms, including video and performance (Balkind, 1974). Intermedia fashioned itself as “an umbrella organization interested in

---

11 Including established local architect Arthur Erickson.
12 Including Jack Shadbolt, who has become one of Canada’s best-known painters.
13 McLuhan promoted the idea of dialogue between viewers and electronic media in order to counteract the manipulative influences of these technologies (Rush, 2003).
multimedia, multidisciplinary artistic practice and technological experimentation; it was also a complex expression of liberal cultural initiatives [and] an alternative to the status quo” (Shaw, 1995: 29). Similar commitments came to characterize the ideals of numerous artist-run centres in Vancouver and throughout Canada and have characterized Paul Wong’s approach to producing video works. Maintaining these commitments has been difficult given the monetary constraints Wong and his contemporaries encountered in forming collectives and producing video works.

Funding for video production is available through public institutions, such as the Canada Council for the Arts, and provincial and municipal funding bodies. Given the costs associated with collective organizing and video production video artists and collectives in Canada often depend on these public funding institutions. As a result, even in its beginnings, video art was “enmeshed in the cultural policy and funding apparatus in Canada” (Dowler, 1995: 35). Much of Intermedia’s funding was secured through the federal government’s Canada Council for the Arts. That Intermedia was able to access this funding was due, in part, to the Canada Council’s decision to recognize cinema and photography as distinct artistic disciplines in the late 1960s. In the early 1970s the Canada Council publicly recognized the economic hardships which accompanied the marginal status of art and, in response, increased funding for artistic endeavors in Canada (Canada Council, n.d.). In order to qualify for this funding, video producers, including Wong, were required to identify their works as ‘art’, while de-emphasizing any overt political agendas in their videos.

At this time, the Canada Council’s focus was trained on supporting initiatives exclusively in areas related to arts, humanities and social science. Despite the fact that community video is often informed by ideas that are in opposition to traditional ‘art’, many video artists have been
required to link their work with the purely aesthetic aspects of art in order to access funding (Marchessault, 1995a). These requirements had the potential to diminish the activist aims of Intermedia and the artists that worked within the collective. According to Dowler, Intermedia's commitments to 'artistic research' and 'social and educational development' became problematic for both the Canada Council and the artists who sought funding from the Council. If Intermedia's projects were understood as educational (or overtly political), rather than artistic, the organization's work did not fall within the Canada Council's mandate for funding (1995). As the history of video in Vancouver illustrates, however, video art can not be neatly separated from social and political activism—Intermedia's objective of democratizing video certainly combined aspects of both art and activism. Although the Arts Division of the Canada Council was mandated to support works that exhibited 'artistic excellence', writes Dowler, the criteria of 'artistic excellence' became increasingly difficult to establish as artists began to interrogate traditional understandings of art (ibid.).

Dowler notes that the Canada Council was in the position, not only of funding an as yet unestablished medium, but also of funding "a medium whose practitioners were highly politicized and using video as a tool that served aesthetic and social goals simultaneously" (ibid.: 46). Further, explains Dowler, the prevalence of cinema—and the perception of video's aesthetic similarities to the (dominant) medium—meant that videomakers had to educate Council members on the distinctions between the two forms in terms of costs, principles and aesthetics (ibid.). Establishing these differences was important, as difficulties in accessing funding would be compounded if videomakers and video centres had to compete not only amongst themselves, but also with the more established and accepted medium of film. Without an understanding of the differences between film and video, the 'higher' production quality and more coherent
narrative structure of film might be privileged over those of video. This certainly would have been detrimental to Paul Wong’s development as an artist and video activist, as few (if any) of his video works have reflected the narrative or aesthetic traditions of mainstream, or even alternative, film.

Despite attempts by artists to challenge its funding criteria, the Canada Council continued to place constraints on which projects it would fund and remained “intent upon staking out a terrain of the properly artistic, which was contrasted with that of the ‘educational’ and ‘social’” (ibid.: 42). This decision was based, in part, on misunderstandings about the nature of video art in Canada, but was also a decision imposed by the Canadian Council’s parent institution—the federal government. The Canada Council received pressure from the federal government regarding which initiatives to fund, and often had to place funding in areas they would not otherwise have privileged. Members of the Canada Council often felt their autonomy as a funding body was threatened by federal government interests (ibid.). The relationships between the federal government, the Canada Council and Intermedia were, fortunately, not unidirectional. Strengthened by the formation of the Intermedia collective, Wong and his contemporaries were able to influence the course of arts funding in Canada.

Pressure from artists and from within the Canada Council itself eventually changed Canadian public funding policies and procedures. According to Dowler, the Canada Council’s funding of Intermedia “led eventually to the development of an entirely new set of policies and programs at the council” (ibid.: 39). He explains that in 1973 the Canada Council initiated a task force composed of film and video specialists which aimed to fund artistic, social, political and experimental works that did not qualify for support from other government bodies. The task force provided funding to a broad range of initiatives, including different types of videomaking,
performance and videotape exchanges (ibid.). Such initiatives were furthered when, in 1975, Intermedia’s Michael Goldberg was hired as the first Video Officer of the Canada Council’s Video Programme. That Goldberg, a well-known Vancouver video activist, held such a prominent position in one of the main video funding bodies in Canada certainly influenced the trajectory of video in Canada. Indeed, Goldberg’s policies were based on video’s potential for critique (ibid.) and certainly advanced this aspect of videomaking in Canada. As members of Intermedia, Goldberg and Wong were closely allied with respect to these commitments and, therefore, Goldberg’s work with the Canada Council carried forward Wong’s commitment to video activism and accessible video collectives.

Balkind explains that Intermedia operated with an open-door policy, attempting to make its space and equipment (which included film and video cameras, projectors and editing equipment) broadly accessible. According to Balkind, however, Intermedia’s attempts at accessibility backfired as the result of increased competition for equipment. This strain on resources, along with egocentrism and the insistence on artistic individuality by many of its members, he writes, contributed to Intermedia’s eventual collapse (1979). Although Intermedia was conceived with a distinct social and political goal in mind—the democratization of media—Shaw notes that at the end of 1969 some Intermedia members and community groups began working towards “a more consciously political media center” (1995: 29), which would make video technologies more accessible to the community. The collapse of Intermedia in 1971 led to the evolution of additional video collectives in Vancouver, as those initially involved with Intermedia moved on to other, often more specialized, endeavors (ibid.). Former members of Intermedia became instrumental in other local artists’ collectives, including Metro Media, the
Western Front, and the Satellite Video Exchange Society (SVES)/Video In(n). As a founding—and current—member of the latter collective, Paul Wong has demonstrated his continued commitment to politicizing video art, critiquing mainstream discourses and making video technologies and dialogues more accessible to the public. Michael Goldberg’s *International Video Exchange Directory*, a project aimed at increasing discussion and information sharing among videomakers from around the world, provided the foundation for the establishment of SVES/Video In(n).

*The International Video Exchange Directory: Advancing the exchange of information and ideas*

Social and political events in Canada influenced the work of Video artists in Vancouver. Shaw cites Pierre Trudeau’s implementation of the War Measures Act in 1970 as an event that precipitated video-based discourses on civil liberties and institutional control (1995). Events such as those related to the October Crisis incited local video artists to begin addressing issues of freedom of expression and information exchange. Such concerns, Shaw notes, led to the proliferation of international video conferences and to the *International Video Exchange Directory*. These initiatives, explains Shaw, were intended to challenge dominant systems of information exchange on social and political topics by introducing marginalized and alternative viewpoints (ibid.). The directory was initiated by Michael Goldberg through Image Bank (an Intermedia affiliate) in 1971. Diamond writes that, “[a]ccording to Paul Wong, the first *Video Exchange Directory* created the basis for a tape-exchange library, the Satellite Video Exchange

---

14 The Satellite Video Exchange Society (SVES) began in 1972 as an organization devoted to sharing both information and equipment for the production of video. By 1973, SVES had evolved into the administrative body which oversaw the production of the *International Video Exchange Directory*, and the activities of the Video Inn, a centre for video production. The SVES also administered a library of videos from around the world, which would later become officially established as the SVES’s Video Out, a centre for storing, distributing and restoration of video works. SVES, the *International Video Exchange Directory*, Video Inn and Video Out are each discussed in detail throughout this chapter.
Society, one year later” (1996: 171). Subsequent issues of the directory were put out through the newly-established video collective, the Satellite Video Exchange Society (SVES) beginning in 1972. At the time of its inception, the International Video Exchange Directory was described as “an ongoing project that is published each year to enable video people around the world to contact each other” (Lovett, 1979: n.p.). Through the directory, Wong and other videomakers were able to establish contact and share resources and information on the technical, aesthetic and ideological bases of video as an emergent medium for art and activism.

The creation of the International Video Exchange Directory was based in the perceived potential of video as it related to “a deep sense that the free exchange of information is an incredible force for social change and artistic expression” (ibid.: n.p.). To this end, the directory documented video centres, individuals and organisations associated with video, the type of work done by these groups and individuals, as well as any equipment they had available for use by others. Goldberg and Wong’s commitment to making video technologies accessible expanded from a local to an international project with the publication of the directory, as the directory included information on video resources from all seven continents. The international scope of the directory was exciting and inspiring to Wong and other local video artists, as “it show[ed] clearly that people all over the world are fighting for the same rights, compatible aspirations, and are often doing similar work” (ibid.: n.p.). The directory, then, advertised Wong’s artistic and activist video endeavours to an international audience and provided Wong with access to the aesthetic, social and political video works of other producers. In the 6th annual International Video Exchange Directory, Preus and Harvey wrote that the free flow of art and social and political commentary initiated by the directory had successfully encouraged learning and support for individual producers, as well as video-based centres (1974a: n.p.). The directory prompted
connections between video producers and certainly confirmed, solidified and advanced the social and political efforts of Wong and his contemporaries.

The directory was an extraordinarily successful project—some of the local and international ties between individuals and groups initiated by the Video Exchange Directory are maintained today (Diamond, 1996). Aside from initiating connections between artists, the directory led to the establishment of a remarkable library of early video works from around the world.\(^{15}\) The videos included in the original tape library were each classified\(^{16}\) under one or more major headings, such as ‘awareness’, ‘politics’, ‘lifestyles’ and ‘history’ and also under subheadings, such as ‘religion’, ‘sexual awareness’, ‘ethnic history’, ‘community politics’, ‘abstract video art’ and others (Lovett, 1979). This video cataloguing system facilitated public access to the tape library (Goldberg, 2000) by highlighting possible areas of interest and also demonstrates an emphasis on examinations of social, political and cultural issues, as well as the ‘artistic’ aspects of video. Working from these beginnings, Wong and other local video artists have continued to engage critically with issues related to sexuality and race in their videos.

Continuity/Errors: Stability, evolution and video activism/art at the Satellite Video Exchange Society/Video In(n)

The work initiated at Intermedia, and continued with the International Video Exchange Directory, precipitated the formation of the artist-run centre Video Inn, under the auspices of its umbrella organization, the Satellite Video Exchange Society (SVES) in 1973. The SVES is an

\(^{15}\) While the directory was successful in facilitating information-sharing among video artists and activists, it was not widely accessed by those outside of video and art communities. Hoping to make video more accessible to those not involved in its production, SVES “decided [their] core service would be a non-commercial video library, where the public could choose from a wide variety of themes and genres largely ignored by the mass media” (Goldberg, 2000: 37).

\(^{16}\) All tapes in the original tape library were viewed, provided with a description, and then catalogued under relevant subject headings. All of this information was filed in a loose-leaf binder that members of the public could refer to when selecting tapes for viewing (Gentleman, 1974: n.p.).
artist-run organisation dedicated to the presentation and production of alternative artist-made video (Goldberg, 2000). Video In, Video Inn, or SVES, as it has variously been called is “the only artist-run centre devoted exclusively to independent video on Canada’s West Coast” (Abbott, 2000: 11). Founded by Paul Wong, Michael Goldberg, and Shawn Preus, Video In remains one of the most active media-based artist-run centres in Vancouver. Works emerging in the early years of Video In included documentary dramas, performance art pieces and fictional pieces that engaged with community issues, “all with a strong emphasis on sex, drugs, rock and roll and garbage” (Diamond, 1996: 172). The early members of Video In, including Wong, experimented with the aesthetic, documentary and activist possibilities of video, while “[promoting] the non-commercial use of video technology through education and international video tape exchange…tape and print library services, equipment rental, workshops and screenings” (Balkind, 1979: 76).

Video In’s early focus was on the open production and exchange of information via video; since its inception, Video In’s members have employed video as a discursive and political tool. The knowledge-sharing goals of Video In were accomplished through the centre’s tape exchange, through attempts to broadcast videos on television, and via its print and tape

---

17 In keeping with its promise of being an artist-run centre, the business decisions at the SVES were made via a Management Collective composed of activist/artists from the centre (Balkind, 1979).
18 In keeping with its goal of remaining accessible to marginalised peoples, Video In was originally located in a central downtown neighbourhood near Gastown and Chinatown in Vancouver. Unfortunately, the centre had to relocate to a more ‘upscale’ location in 1987 due to issues with the building it was in—including incessant cockroach infestations and an ‘irresponsible landlord’ (Wong, 2000). It was at this point that the organisation changed its name from Video Inn to Video In. The name change referenced ‘video in’ and ‘video out’ connections on media devices and indicated that video was produced through Video In and could be distributed by Video Out. The name also referenced the collective’s desire to legitimize mainstream discourses—that is, to make video ‘in’. The 1987 move was followed by the centre’s most recent relocation (in 1993) to “a renovated, purpose-built facility with a guarantee of long-term stability….with plenty of room for future growth and change” (Wong, 2000: 98) at 1965 Main Street, near East 4th Avenue in Vancouver.
19 Daybooks—communal daily log books kept by Video In(n) members—from the organization’s early years indicate that, at times, the centre had as many as 6 viewing stations in its tape library, which were available to the public, and were often full (SVES Archives, (I)). Here, members of the public could access Wong’s works, among others.
library (Abbott, 2000). In her review of SVES/Video In meeting minutes from 1973 to 1982, Diamond unearthed statements pointing to the organisations' commitment to avant-garde art forms, countercultural movements, radical politics and to remaining a small, accessible, grassroots collective. She found the following statement of intent from early members of Video In: “‘We are involved in and will promote a harmonious non-polluting, non-sexist, self-sufficient alternative lifestyle that has a sense of humour’; and ‘[w]e will provide access to the materials and tools under our control to those who do not have media access’” (1996: 172). Further, Wong indicates that a great deal of the work at Video In has been characterized by “an ongoing battle to create alternative venues for video in opposition to the conservative tenets of broadcast television” (2000: 96). Thus, Abbott explains, the works and actions that emerged from Video In were firmly tied to social activism; indeed, she asserts that the emphasis on activism was prioritised over other activities by many early members of the organization (2000).

Video In has engaged with numerous socially and politically active video communities locally, nationally and internationally via its video exchange program, tours of video installations and performances, through co-productions with other groups and organisations, and with educational workshops on video technology and the various activist aims of producers at the centre. Video In’s early focus on video exchange, writes Abbott, was informed by the vision of an interactive communications network in which those involved would both produce and receive information (2000). Early members of Video In were committed to the free exchange of independent and experimental video works, “grounded in the belief that society would become more socially responsible through the distribution of information unavailable through dominant communication channels” (ibid.: 13). Paul Wong’s videos have consistently engaged with and presented alternatives and challenges to dominant histories and discourses. In presenting
marginalized viewpoints and critiquing mainstream discourses on race and sexuality, Wong has consistently demonstrated his dedication to politicizing—and altering—social relations through alternative media.

Since its early years, Video In has engaged with issues of racism to varying degrees of awareness and success. The challenges to colonial government that characterized the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the 1970s and 1980s were, for example, important to members of Video In. The Video In library housed tapes that addressed the 1973 occupation at Wounded Knee, “which, through library viewing and screening, started a more in-depth relationship with First Nations people in B.C.” (Goldberg, 2000: footnote #15 p. 42). Further, entries from Video In’s 1986 Daybook show that videos examining the Leonard Peltier case were watched often (SVES Archives, (1)). An August 21, 1983 Daybook entry reads, “Native Indian viewer in for first time in months. I’d almost forgotten about Wounded Knee” (SVES Archives, (n)). While this entry points to the connections between Video In and Aboriginal communities, it also emphasises that the (predominantly white) membership at Video In held its own prejudices and was, perhaps, only superficially engaged with Aboriginal issues (the writer was reminded of Wounded Knee only after a ‘Native’ person came in to view tapes addressing this event). The writer of this entry points to the sporadic and peripheral participation of Aboriginal peoples at Video In and also to the centre’s lack of sustained critical engagement with Aboriginal politics at this time.

---

20 Activists in the American Indian Movement challenged the United States government’s past and present policies and practices related to Aboriginal peoples in the U.S. AIM demanded examinations of past treaties and reparations for treaty violations on the part of the U.S. government. AIM continues to fight for the drafting of new treaties, the restoration of stolen lands, and government commitment to protecting and improving the health, safety, economic, social and cultural welfare of Aboriginal peoples in the United States (Waterman & Salinas, n.d.).

21 Leonard Peltier is the American Indian Movement (AIM) leader who many maintain was wrongfully convicted of the murder of two FBI agents in 1975 (Waterman & Salinas, n.d.).
Many current video producers at Video In are inspired by the organisations’ roots and Video In’s commitment to cultural and political activism continues to evolve (Abbott, 2000). Activism at the centre has become more cognizant of and attentive to issues of representation and is more aware of the centre’s own participation in oppressive structures (ibid.). This awareness has resulted in the implementation of programs which support video productions by and for women, people of colour, First Nations and queer groups. Undoubtedly, Paul Wong’s critical analyses of race and sexuality (both in his videos and as an SVES/Video In member) have contributed to the evolution of understandings of marginalized positions, identity, representation at the centre. SVES/Video In currently operates as a not for profit membership cooperative, which offers artists and organisations access to video production equipment, work space, and post-production facilities. Even though Video In is one of the oldest and most recognized video collectives in the country, it continues to struggle financially (Wong, 2000).

Along with the financial struggles Video In faces, the organisation continues to be confronted with challenges to its legitimacy. Wong writes that “[t]he small space that Video In has claimed is tenuous and constantly under siege. We are still not allowed to gather collectively\(^{22}\), make noise, and produce our work openly and freely—that has been the history of video art” (ibid.: 104). Faced with varying degrees of financial instability and with threats of censorship\(^{23}\) over the years, Video In has fought for visibility as an organisation; however, “neither Video In, nor the artists who have worked from the centre, have gained the recognition of mainstream institutions and media” (Abbott, 2000: 22). As the centre has not gained the

---

\(^{22}\) Municipal events licensing issues restrict the types of events the organization mount in its building (Wong, 2000).

\(^{23}\) Video Out’s activist principles are evidenced by the fact that the videos distributed through the centre are not classified based on provincial film and video classifications guidelines and are never censored (SVES Archives (b)). Taking an anti-censorship stance places Video Out in conflict with government attempts to control the flow of certain types of representation, particularly those related to sexuality. See Chapter 3, an examination of Paul Wong’s video installation *Confused: Sexual views*, for further discussions of censorship and video art/activism in Vancouver.
visibility necessary to be self-supporting it, like its predecessors, depends on public funding from bodies such as the British Columbia Arts Council, the City of Vancouver, Human Resources Development Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, as well as individual donors. Both as a member of Video In’s current Board of Directors and as a video producer, Paul Wong has negotiated the complex relationship between video and public ‘arts’ funding. Along with funding initiatives, such as those Wong encountered at Intermedia, which required videomakers to downplay the social, political and educational aspects of their work, Wong has been particularly critical of multicultural funding initiatives. Wong’s critiques have focused on the relation between activist/artists and multicultural initiatives in Canada in his 1994 video, So are you. Wong’s involvement with SVES/Video In has, clearly, influenced the content of his oeuvre, as he addresses the social and political engagements of the organization in his video works. Wong’s activism has not been limited to the expressive medium of video art; he has also participated in public forums aimed at critiquing dominant media institutions and prompting change within these structures.

(Re)playing video: Cataloguing, promoting and preserving video at Video Out

In 1979, Balkind emphasized that the tape library and the international videotape exchange “was an idea whose time had not only come, but has remained, gathering strength and relevance as video art and performance have moved into the forefront—however underground—of contemporary artistic activity” (1979: 76). The video library launched as a result of the International Video Exchange Directory was solidified as an organization when Jeanette Reinhardt officially founded Video Out as an organization in 1980. Video Out, the distribution arm of SVES, is a non-profit artist-run service inspired by the same activist goals of SVES. A

24 See Chapter 4 for an in-depth examination of Wong’s So are you (1994) and multicultural discourses in Canada.
1994 application for funding from the Canada Council states that Video Out aimed to distribute and “assist in the promotion, rental and sale of innovative independent video productions and to return revenues to the artists it represents”. Video Out’s primary activity is the national and international submission of the videos in its catalogue to festivals, libraries, individuals, broadcasters, educational and art institutions, with a particular focus on groups and institutions that will pay fees to artists for their works (Info. for producers, n.d.). Video Out distributes videos by sending preview packages of materials to Canadian and international video festivals, as well as to libraries, galleries and to broadcasters. Although Video Out distributes its catalogued works widely, its biggest clients in terms of revenue are generally Canadian art institutions (SVES Archive (e)). Video Out has been one of the primary sites for storing, preserving and distributing Paul Wong’s video works. The circulation of Wong’s videos through Video Out has contributed to his establishment as an artist by disseminating his works in both alternative and mainstream spaces and has provided him with monetary compensation for his work. These contributions have bolstered Wong’s achievements and have made it possible for him to create a successful career in producing alternative video works.

25 This version of the application was included in a letter dated 15 February, 1994 from Carla Wolf to the Video Out Distribution Committee. The application contains a general outline of Video Out’s goals for the following 2 years (SVES Archive (b)).
26 Any monetary awards gained at festivals are paid directly to the artist (Info. for producers, n.d.).
27 An incomplete document from 1992 in the SVES archives indicates that of art institutions, educational institutions, special events, lease/sales and previewed tapes, most of the Videos Distributed by Video Out go to Canadian groups and institutions and that significantly fewer are distributed to the United States and even fewer are distributed internationally (SVES Archive (e)).
Video Out's submission guidelines\textsuperscript{28} indicate that the focus of the catalogue\textsuperscript{29} is West Coast and Canadian video works with a diverse range of themes and styles. Further, Video Out endeavors to obtain the entire body of works produced by the videomakers it represents (\textit{Submissions}, n.d.). Video Out's Distribution Catalogue lists all of the videos available for distribution and in the Resource Centre, its in-house video library and viewing station. The Video Out website notes that there are over 1000 works held by the distribution centre, including the earliest works produced in British Columbia. Indeed, as Abbott notes, the tape library has become “one of the largest collections of independent video in the world” (2000: 15). Currently, the tape library holds upwards of 30 of Wong's independent and collaborative video works, including \textit{60 unit: Bruise} (1976), \textit{Confused: Sexual views (compilation edit)} (1984) and \textit{So are you} (1994), the videos that comprise the focus of this thesis. As this resource remains widely accessed and is constantly evolving, the tape library is an important distribution point for Wong's videos and a starting point for discussions of Wong's work. Indeed, it was through this library that I first became acquainted with Wong's videos and began my explorations into the history of video art and activism in Vancouver.\textsuperscript{30}

In storing, maintaining and continuing to distribute these videos, “Video Out plays a key role in maintaining the history of Western Canadian media art and promoting its future” (\textit{About Video Out}, n.d.: n.p.). Videotapes must be properly stored in order to be preserved. Unfortunately, Goldberg laments, few early videos were stored under ideal conditions; as a result,

\textsuperscript{28} Video Out continually accepts non-commercial, independently-produced video submissions by artists, though it does not accept all submissions for distribution. The Video Out committee, which meets quarterly, determines which videos are accepted for distribution. Videos are selected based on the technical quality of the work and on the diversity of topics, styles, themes within the collection. All videos accepted for distribution are also added to the Video Out tape library for public viewing at the in-house Resource Centre.

\textsuperscript{29} This catalogue can be accessed online at http://videoout.neocodesoftware.com/videoout, or as a print version published in honour of the Video Out's 20th anniversary in 2000 and which is augmented by annual Video Out distribution catalogue supplements that list new videos acquired since 2000.

\textsuperscript{30} For further discussion of this process, please see the introduction to this thesis.
attempting to view some of these works is difficult, if not impossible. Fortunately, some of these videos can be salvaged by way of new restoration techniques (2000). In the mid-1990s, Video Out distribution began transferring old tapes to new tape stock. These efforts eventually included transferring some ½ inch open reel tapes—including Paul Wong’s 60 unit: Bruise (1976), which Video Out intended to restore and target “to an Arts Education market as curricula for Canadian Art History, communications and Women’s Studies courses” (SVES Archive (b)). Video Out has preserved and repaired some of Paul Wong’s earliest video works, ensuring that these important artistic and activist pieces are circulated even today. The continued circulation of Wong’s videos ensures that these works will inform (and inspire) new generations of video artists and allows audiences to continue to engage with the discourses these videos examine.

_Bambi meets Godzilla: Video activist/artists challenge the mainstream media monster_

Wong relates that much work at Video In has been characterized by “an ongoing battle to create alternative venues for video in opposition to the conservative tenets of broadcast television” (2000: 96). Despite Video In’s commitment to critiquing television, many early producers at the centre sought to have their work broadcast. In the late 1960s, cable television evolved alongside accessible video technologies in Canada. Unlike video, however, television has developed into a cultural _institution_, which not only entertains audiences, but also transmits culture and influences its viewers. Given its prominence and ability to persuade audiences, Wong writes that “[t]elevision is without doubt the most powerful and influential telecommunications medium of our time…” (ibid: 90). While Wong and SVES/Video In(n) members resisted the dominance of television, they hoped that in gaining access to this powerful medium it could be transformed. Aware of the authority of mainstream discourses and the role
of television in disseminating these, SVES/Video In sought to challenge and transform
governing ideologies from within.

Communications media, including television, have played an important role in ‘uniting’
and defining the Canadian nation, linking disparate communities and spreading dominant
ideologies, according to Siegel (1996). State-run media institutions, such as the Canadian
Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the National Film Board (NFB), have produced and
distributed film, television and radio programming which seeks to counter the increasing
influence of American media in Canada (McIntosh, 1996). These initiatives, some artists and
activists observed, furthered the ideology of the Canadian state, but did not necessarily reflect the
realities and needs of marginalized Canadians. In the face of Canadian nationalist medias and
under the influence of powerful American media, artists and activists fought for public access to
television in the 1970s and early 1980s. Through these actions, video artists hoped “the lies of
the mass media could be replaced by a politicized and correct (or at least more correct)
representation of historical realities” (Diamond & Kibbins, 1996: 265). These aspirations
influenced major projects at artist-run centres in Vancouver, including SVES/Video In’s attempts
to gain access to broadcast television.

In the 1970s, many videomakers hoped that the concurrent advancement of video and
television media would lead to a symbiotic relationship between the two mediums, which would
result in the decentralization and democratization of mainstream electronic media (Ross, 1982).
Members of Video Inn, recognising the power of dominant media holds in shaping the social
universe, lobbied the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)
in an attempt to gain public involvement in the process of television communication. Along with
issuing licences, the CRTC is the body responsible for renewing, amending, suspending and
revoking licenses (Siegel, 1996) and for regulating broadcast standards. Cable television network executives and television’s governing bodies are able to determine what constitutes the legitimate realm of presentation on television and, in so doing, communicate certain discourses, while disallowing others. Artists and activists at Video In employed video in lobbying the CRTC\textsuperscript{31} for control of the last VHF\textsuperscript{32} channel available in Vancouver, notes Goldberg (2000).\textsuperscript{33} In the 1970s and early 1980s, community-based organisations, including SVES/Video In(n), intensely lobbied the CRTC “for access to a local, high-quality broadcast channel, financed by the cable system” (Diamond, 1996: 176). Abbott explains that community cable television (rather than mainstream television) was particularly appealing to artists and activists because of its potential for grassroots organizing and its non-interfering administration (2000). While Wong and SVES/Video In(n) worked to gain control of a cable station, efforts were also made to gain access to airtime on existing community cable stations.

In an attempt to “make broadcasters more accountable to the public and to stop catering solely to the desires of corporate media and government” (Wong, 2000: 94), media activists and other members of the public in Vancouver lobbied for changes to CRTC guidelines. In response to these pressures, and “[i]n order to justify the profits reaped from cable hook-up to millions of homes” (Lai & Lum, 1990: 22), the CRTC began to require that some cable stations commit to a certain amount of community-based programming. Thus, Lai and Lum attribute the emergence of community television almost entirely to “public pressure on the CRTC to force cable companies to create community stations in the early 70’s” (ibid.). These pressures were mounted in opposition to mass media’s monopolization of information (ibid.). In 1971, as a result of such

\textsuperscript{31} This commission was known as the Canadian Radio-television Commission from its inception in 1968, until 1976, when it was renamed the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

\textsuperscript{32} Very High Frequency

\textsuperscript{33} The video, \textit{The Video Inn at the CRTC} (1973), for example, documents a “theatrical intervention at public hearings for a proposed 3rd Canadian TV network” (Goldberg, 2000:39) by members of Video In.
pressures, the CRTC began to require that cable companies support community access by “funneling a tiny portion of their profits to support community productions” (Wong, 2000: 94). Under these new CRTC guidelines, the support of community-based programming became a condition of license for cable companies (Abbott, 2000). The implementation of this policy saw hundreds of hours of locally-produced video aired on television in Vancouver.

This project was not an entirely successful one, though: Marchessault notes that only about a third of cable companies actually complied with these new CRTC guidelines. Those companies that did initiate such programs also imposed restrictions that prevented access to these programs (1995a). These barriers were not immediately or easily observable, as the economic and institutional factors that influenced decisions about who could access cable television resources, and how this access would occur, were obscured by a general “euphoria of access and participation” (ibid.: 22). Abbott notes that CRTC policies regarding community programming have led to the inadvertent ‘ghettoization’ of community programs. According to Abbott, the CRTC “explicitly discouraged programs of mass appeal while at the same time having no formal evaluation system to gauge the activities of corporate overseers of community stations” (2000: 24). As this program was poorly administered, she claims, community television could not easily succeed. In reality, writes Diamond, “[t]elevision was too hierarchical, its pretence of objectivity too deeply in place, its technology too high-end and maintained by personnel too threatened by displacement” (1996: 177) to allow artists and activists unfettered access to the airwaves.

Some independently-produced programs made by members of video collectives were included on Cable Ten, Vancouver’s community cable television station.34 Michael Goldberg
points out, however, that the goal of community television was based on ideals in stark contrast to those of the cable companies that provided space for these initiatives. The economic interests of cable companies precluded any commitment to supporting projects that sought to provide alternatives to mainstream television (2000). By the 1990s, Lai and Lum write, community cable shows had not progressed far and were generally poor quality on the basis of both form and content. Community cable programs continue to occupy marginal positions on air: these programs receive little support and tend to have low production values that result in the negative valuation of these programs as unprofessional (1990).

Although some artists were able to access community-based programs on cable television, attempts by artists and activists at Video In to obtain an alternative TV station repeatedly failed. Artists and activists at Video In were discouraged and frustrated by their experiences both with community-based programming and with their attempts to secure an alternative TV station. By the mid-1970s, attempts to access cable as a means of democratizing media had ceased at Video In, as “it was foolish to even attempt to take on the corporately-controlled mass media” (Wong, 2000: 94), given the institutional power of television. Rush notes that although the possibilities associated with television access were never fully realised, “many artists and groups...did receive their first access to video through cable companies” (Rush, 2003: 20). Indeed, writes Diamond, “[t]he astonishing proliferation of independent production for cable in the 1970s can not be discounted” (1996: 179).

1980s, however, network funding for Cable Ten had been seriously reduced and artists were growing frustrated with the networks continued copyright infringements and failure to fairly compensate artists for their works (1996).
35 This included weekly talk shows produced by the BC Federation of Women and the Vancouver Status of Women groups, which dealt with feminist issues and were produced by women artists and technicians. Another program from this time was “The Gina Show” (1979), which was produced by John Anderson and the local artists collective Pumps, and presented news on music, performance and culture in Vancouver, as well as showcasing works from these areas (Diamond, 1996).
In recent years, the television universe has greatly expanded along with some optimism about ‘specialty’ cable channels. This expansion has decentralised the control of mass media to a certain extent, but has not democratized television production. The proliferation of television stations, Wong asserts, “has simply amounted to more channels offering the same old thing” (2000: 95-96). While early video artists worked to overhaul the broadcasting system, Kibbins notes that “[b]y the early Eighties, the idea that the increasingly flexible and accommodating system of globalized capital could be a clearly defined object of attack began to seem quaint” (1997: 7). Global systems of capital and communication are difficult to confront for several reasons, for example, these systems seem to possess a “spectacular gift for integrating the terms of protest into [their] own marketing language” (ibid.). Wary of the potential for expropriation, some artists created works, such as multi-monitor exhibits, that could not be broadcasted on television. Such refusals to participate may have been because of the awareness that, as Marchessault points out:

If empowerment came from demythologizing the technological and social institutions of television by the very fact that anyone could be on television, that television could be used to make a difference, then it also served to reinforce the difference television makes (1995a: 19).

Thus, Kibbins explains, many artists and activists changed their political tack and began to focus on critiquing and changing major institutions, rather than attempting to overturn them outright (1997). As video artists have been unable to “break into the mainstream and influence global communications through broadcast” (Wong, 2000: 94), Wong has focused his efforts elsewhere. Wong’s involvement in alternative video collectives, combined with his presentation of marginalized identities and histories in works such as
60 unit: Bruise, Confused: Sexual views and So are you, create a vantage point from which mainstream institutions and discourses can be examined, critiqued and destabilized.

Conclusion

This chapter has established the activist/artistic video communities of which Wong has long been a central member as important sites of social and political action. Furthermore, these collectives have effectively worked to organize, disseminate and preserve the work of activist/artists marginalized in mainstream spaces. In this way, artist-run centres, such as SVES/Video I(n) have been incredibly productive and important spaces for the production and evolution of alternative discourses. Foucault’s ‘rule of double conditioning’ provides a useful framework for examining relations of power-knowledge in the emergence of video art and activism in Vancouver. As Foucault asserts, and as the history presented in this chapter reveals, relations of power-knowledge and other relations are intertwined and are constantly transforming. Through video production and collective action, Wong and his contemporaries have actively and effectively engaged with both mainstream funding bodies and mainstream media. Video activist/artists worked to emphasize the activist dimensions of their work in the face of government funding requirements which failed to adequately account for this aspect of alternative video productions. Indeed, video activist/artists became responsible for justifying the social, political and otherwise activist dimensions of their works to mainstream funding bodies. Ultimately, this work and the funding secured from these mainstream agencies enabled the further production and preservation of alternative works and spaces.

Artist-run centres in Vancouver have continued to co-sponsor events and otherwise support each other’s initiatives, events and exhibits (Alteen, 1995). The art produced at artist-
run centres remains innovative, resistant to dominant discourses and institutions and actively engaged with the goal of social and political change. In the early years of video, Goldberg writes, “[t]here were no places to study portable video making, let alone video art,” (Goldberg, 2000). In this environment, then, most videomaking was accomplished by trial and error and activist/artists learned from each other. In the absence of formal schools, artist-run collectives were important venues for the expansion of video art practice, and for idea and information sharing among video artists. Given the complex processes associated with procuring government funding for video works, it is important that Video In continues to exist as a resource for individual artists attempting to gain funding. Paul Wong (2000) notes that video artists have continued to struggle to gain access to large audiences and contribute to social change through the dissemination of alternative discourses.

Video activist/artists’ failure to significantly influence mainstream television broadcasts illustrates that, in power-knowledge exchanges, certain positions are marginalized. In this case, marginalized video art and activism lacked the means necessary to effect long-term or far-reaching changes to the cultural colossus of mainstream television. Wong points to the futility of such struggles in illustrating how attempts of video activist/artists to gain access to television have been largely abandoned. It is idealistic and foolish, he states, for video activist/artists to believe that they could confront and defeat corporately-controlled mass media. Such mass technologies, notes Wong, have continued to evolve and are disseminated at a rate that is impossible for small-scale activist/artists and collectives to compete with. Despite these failures, Wong points to the development of several ‘alternative’ cable stations, including the Women’s Television Network, in the late 1990s (ibid.). Today, however, mainstream television remains
unmistakably one of the primary sites for the (re)presentation and (re)enforcement of mainstream ideologies.

The local video activism that began with attempts to democratize media expanded into other areas. Video Inners who organized against discourses of activist/artist exclusion from mainstream media access in the late 1970s and early 1980s were diverse on the bases of gender, race and sexuality—their commonality lay in their commitment to democratizing media. From these beginnings, some of these activists moved on to form new groups and created video works aimed at fighting against racist, homophobic and sexist discourses. As the following chapter demonstrates, examining the exchange of power-knowledge from the perspective of specific relations can help to illuminate how such discourses emerge and are challenged to varying degrees of success from marginalized positions.
Chapter 2

(Neo)colonial in(ter)jections: Colonialism, identity and the construction of the Canadian national ‘family’ in 60 unit: Bruise

Through his ‘rule of immanence,’ Foucault posits that strategies of power, the multiple sites of resistance present in immanent power relations, and what he calls ‘local centres’ of relations exist in a continuous association. Local centres of power-knowledge are those places where techniques of knowledge and strategies of power act in combination to create forms of discourses. The discourses—whether medical, legal or pedagogical—that emerge in these local centres are the “vehicle of a kind of incessant back-and-forth movement of forms of subjugation and schemas of knowledge” (1978: 98). Analysis of discourse must start from local centres of power-knowledge, he explains, because relations of power and discourses are the most immediate in these places. Further, Foucault cautions against examining broader spheres of power independently of local relations, as the sphere of power relations requires the support of local relations in order to exist, while specific local relations require the envelope of immanent power relations in order to function. Thus, the relations between mainstream power relations and ‘local centres’ is not hierarchical. These two levels, he emphasises, do not exactly mirror each other, but constitute their own coexisting entities. In local centres, he explains, overall strategies and ways of knowing are re-imagined and new forms of discourse emerge. Within local centre relations, then, it becomes possible to observe the relations and resistances that form the bases for overall strategies of power relations. In these places, we can observe the constant exchange
between mainstream discourses and the emergent discourses that repeat, renovate or dismantle them (ibid.). Paul Wong's videos provide an excellent lens through which to observe and analyse the interplay between immanent power structures and the discourses that emerge at the level of local relations.

The chapter “Subjects of sex/gender/desire” in Judith Butler’s *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*, (1999) focuses aspects of her analysis in terms of local centre relations but, unlike Foucault, emphasizes that certain structures and groups hold more power than others. The bulk of power, according to Butler, is held by dominant, or hegemonic, institutions and supports certain relations over others. Hegemonic institutions, she writes, are composed of the juridical structures of language and politics. Group and individual identities are both produced and policed by these politically and discursively constituted systems of power. The legitimacy of dominant systems depends on the assumption that identities are not constructed by these systems. Rather, juridical systems of power claim to exert their control over agents who exist prior to or outside of these relations of power and systems of knowledge and, therefore, have consciously, or at least tacitly, agreed to be governed by existing systems of power. Butler states, however, that subjects are constructed within and by these very systems and “the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures” (ibid.: 4). As a result of the fact that subjects are constructed in accordance with the requirements of relations of power it is not possible to disentangle identities “from the political and cultural intersections in which [they are] invariably produced and maintained” (ibid.: 6). Further, Butler asserts, discourses and power relations associated with identities such as race, class and sexuality vary based on the intersection between these discursively constructed identities (ibid.). Using these
insights in my examination of 60 unit: Bruise, I consider how identities associated with race and sexuality are inter-related in historically and culturally contingent ways in Canada.

Wong's 60 unit: Bruise can be examined in relation to the mainstream power relations evident in Canadian legal, political, medical and media institutions. In particular, this video provides a starting point for an examination of the employment of metaphorical constructions of 'family' in the construction of Canada as a white, heterosexual nation. Some theorists examining nation states, notably Benedict Anderson (1991), have understood nations as 'imagined communities'. McClintock argues, however, that nations are not simply imagined communities predicated on shared experiences and identities, they are also "[h]istorical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed" (1997: 89) in gendered and often violent ways. She explains that the ideals that license nation formation are anchored to the highly patrolled boundaries of social identities, and result in differential access to resources and institutions for certain peoples. McClintock's analysis, while highlighting the fact that nations are constructed, also points to the material realities of difference for individuals and groups within nation states, thus indicating that they are certainly not comprised of cohesive communities (ibid.). Far from being cohesive, communities are quite fragmented, and some people are marginalized.

Marginalized peoples are constrained by the narrow definitions of identity offered in dominant discourses. According to Butler (1997), the process of forming a representational discourse from marginalized positions is often seen as necessary to the empowerment of these positions. Butler shows, however, that organizing around constructed identities, such as those associated with gender, race and sexuality, often has the reifying effect of reinforcing normative and essentialised understandings of these identities. As these identities are created within the
matrix of cultural, social and political relations, uncritically accepting these categories as a basis for organising obscures the fact of their discursive construction in the first place. However, representational discourses which examine identity as socially, culturally and historically constructed acts to destabilize these constructions (ibid.). My analysis of \textit{60 unit: Bruise}, then, examines how race is constructed in the Canadian colonial context, while also considering how these constructions form a basis for activism in Canadian queer and Chinese communities.

\textit{60 unit: Bruise}

\textit{60 unit: Bruise} is an experimental video artwork and piece of social commentary, produced in 1976 by Paul Wong and his then frequent collaborator, Kenneth Fletcher.\footnote{Kenneth Fletcher committed suicide in 1978. Paul Wong addressed his death in a piece entitled \textit{In Ten Sity}, performed at the Vancouver Art Gallery that same year.} Wong’s video opens with a static, medium-long shot\footnote{This is a camera shot which generally includes a view of the figures in the frame from the knees up. This type of shot generally also includes some background.} of Wong and Fletcher sitting side by side in chairs. Fletcher is fully clothed, while Wong sits shirtless. This simple shot leaves the viewer nothing other than the two men on which to focus their attention. After the camera focuses on the two men for a few moments, Wong opens a hypodermic needle package and hands the needle to Fletcher, who proceeds to draw blood from his arm. During this process, Wong squeezes Fletcher’s arm above the injection site in order to make Fletcher’s vein more accessible. Wong then cleans the area of injection on Fletcher’s arm with a cotton swab. At this point, Wong turns around in his chair so his back is facing the camera and Fletcher injects the blood under the surface of Wong’s skin on his upper back. The camera zooms in and remains fixed on the now-forming bruise. A final shot of the fully developed contusion zooms out and reveals Wong, alone, with Fletcher’s empty chair beside him. It is important to note that Fletcher and Wong
performed the actions in this video themselves. Rather than documenting a similar exchange between actors or other individuals, Wong and Fletcher chose to enact this intimate exchange and, in this way, the video can be viewed as autobiographical; Wong and Fletcher’s lived experiences as racialised, gay men can be read in the viewing of this video.

Indeed, based on well-established visible indicators of race, the viewer is immediately able to identify Fletcher and Wong as differently racialised. Based on a cursory physical evaluation of the two men, Fletcher is likely to be read as ‘white,’ while Wong may be—indeed, has been—identified as ‘Asian,’ ‘East Asian,’ ‘Chinese,’ ‘Chinese-Canadian,’ or by a number of other euphemisms for race. Clearly, the two men are assigned identities in very different ways. In White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness (1993), Ruth Frankenberg explains that, “as a normative space [whiteness] is constructed precisely by the way in which it positions others at its borders” (231). Whiteness, she explains, is an ‘unmarked’ category which becomes significant only in relation to those who are not included in its boundaries. Further, North American culture is often understood as white culture and, thus, a sense of belonging to that culture is determined by one’s inclusion or exclusion from ‘whiteness’ (ibid.). For these reasons, Wong is identified (and identifies himself) using a number of labels, whereas Fletcher is seldom explicitly identified as ‘white,’ or as someone of ‘Western-European’ origin, as his surname implies he is. The explicit identification and problematization of whiteness is necessary to my examination of the history of colonialism in Canada in this chapter. As experiences of race are complicated by other identities, such as gender and sexuality, it is important also to acknowledge that both Fletcher’s racialised privilege and Wong’s marginalization are interceded by both gender and sexuality.

38 Later in this chapter, I address the widespread acceptance of constructions of race which rely on visible characteristics, particularly skin pigmentation.
Working from marginalized positions as a gay, Chinese man, Wong’s work calls forward both dominant and marginalized histories and discourses of gender, race and sexuality as they relate to colonial practices. Butler explains that it is possible to destabilize dominant relations while functioning within relations of power. She posits that possibilities for non-dominant expressions and understandings of gender, race and sexuality exist within the complex matrix of dominant heterosexual discourses and power relations (1999). In drawing attention to these marginalized identities and discourses, it is possible to destabilize dominant understandings. In so doing, Wong advances critiques of dominant understandings and contributes to the possibilities for social change.

Colonial In(ter)jections: 60 unit: Bruise and Chinese histories in Canada

As 60 unit: Bruise represents an exchange between differently racialised bodies, my analysis of this video must include an examination of colonial histories and racialised identities, that is, examinations of how race is constructed and utilized within colonial contexts. The Canadian colonial project has been, and continues to be, supported by social relations organized around race. As 60 unit: Bruise illustrates, colonial constructions of race are broadly accepted as commonsensical and, as such, are employed today as they were in the past. In Canada, current racist ideologies are informed by the country’s history of colonialism. Race, then, remains an important site of interrogation. Anderson writes that “race has been a most effective unifying concept in the making and extension of European global hegemony” (1991: 25). Colonialism and other forms of oppression are necessarily based on the hierarchical ordering of certain

---

39 Examinations of the history of racialization and colonialism are particularly important here, as these histories are widely ignored, concealed and denied importance in mainstream contexts. As this is the case, these histories do not belong to the collection of culturally- and historically-dependent signs which compose Barthes’ (1985a) ‘second,’ or connoted meaning. In acknowledging these histories and their importance, I analyse aspects of this work which may be ignored by other viewers.
peoples above others. The assignation of positions in these hierarchies is arbitrary, capricious and based on socially constructed categories.

Frankenberg (1993) asserts that while whiteness exists as the unmarked category of race, it too is constructed. She explains that, “whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination” (ibid.: 6). Furthermore, as whiteness exists as a site of dominance, racism shapes the daily experiences of white people whose lives are defined by racialised privilege rather than by oppression. This hierarchical ranking of races has meant that white people have a vested interest in maintaining their privilege through physical and ideological boundary maintenance. Frankenberg points out, for example, that racialised groups are also stratified along class lines. Indeed, she writes, racism is also “a system of material relationships with a set of ideas linked to and embedded in those material relations” (ibid: 70). Razack explains that today, as in the past, white is the colour of domination (1998); however, the definition of whiteness has changed over time. As Stam notes, “English colonialism was practiced against the Irish before it was applied to Africans and Native Americans” and other people of colour (1997: 192). While ‘the Irish’ were once understood as racially distinct from ‘the English’, those once categorized as Irish or English are now positioned within the tenuous category of ‘whiteness’.

The assignment of constructed and tenuous labels to individuals and groups, explains Satzewich, has come to be understood as the process of racialization. This practice is informed by assumptions about the essential behaviours, beliefs or abilities of individuals or groups (1998). Anderson explains that the modern concept of ‘race’ has its roots in the work of “nineteenth-century British, American, and western European biologists” who believed that people could be categorized into racial groups based on inherent, immutable and observable biological
characteristics (1991: 11). Over time, race has been differently attributed based on a variety of
signifiers. The attribution of race, explains Satzewich, is often based on phenotypic traits—that is, visible physical characteristics, especially skin pigmentation—or on perceived genetic
differences. Alternately, race has been determined by political-geographical regions, but with

The unquestioned assumptions of ‘race’ existed—and continue to exist—despite
evidence refuting the veracity of these assumptions. Race is now understood in biology and
physical anthropology, as well as other disciplines, as the arbitrary assignment of a socially
constructed label (Satzewich, 1998). Although the concept of ‘race’ has been shown to be
inaccurately tied to genetics, it is still widely deployed in social and scientific contexts
(Anderson, 1991). Today, however, racist ideologies are often couched in terms of ‘cultural
difference’, writes Satzewich. Rather than invoking discourses on race; the white majority in
Canada often speaks of irreconcilable ‘cultural’ differences as the root of conflicts between
whites and ‘others’ in this country (1998). Similarly, expressions such as “‘ethnic,’ ‘ethnic
pluralism,’ ‘race relations,’ ‘cultural diversity,’ and ‘multiculturalism’ have often been used in
These terms, then, conceal the historical construction of difference, as they have come to operate
as veiled allusions to ‘race’. The meanings associated with ‘ethnicity’—that people and groups
can be categorized based on readily-identifiable and essential traits—are the very ideological
assumptions that inform historical understandings of race (Satzewich, 1998).

The continued significance of historical markers of race is made evident in 60 unit: 
Bruise. Importantly, this work was one of the first video works in Canada to employ newly-
available colour video technologies (60 unit: Bruise, n.d.). That this particular piece was made
using this new technology is not a coincidence. As Gagnon writes, "Wong has remarked that he was highly aware of the blood-brother ritual in *60 unit: Bruise* as involving an exchange between yellow and white bodies" (2000: 173). Indeed, it is only through the use of this technology that the blood exchange, the resultant bruise and the racialised differences between Wong and Fletcher are vividly demonstrated. Without prior knowledge of Wong and Fletcher's personal histories, *60 unit: Bruise* can be read as an exchange between differently-racialised bodies only if the phenotypic assumptions of race are enacted; there are, otherwise, no indications of either man's relationship to racialised identities. In analysing this video, viewers must draw on a history that has created 'yellow' bodies as inferior to 'white' bodies. In employing this history of racialization, however, Wong also challenges it. Wong forces those who examine his work to confront the continued reliance on 'visible' markers of race.

Regardless of which signifiers are employed in the process of racialisation, the practice is tied to the "belief that inherent biological differences determine physical, social, and intellectual capabilities" (Satzewich, 1998: 29). As Satzewich observes, boundaries between racialised groups in Canada are based on and maintained by perceived linguistic, cultural, and other differences. The belief that racialised groups are differently endowed is central to racist practices wherein certain racialised groups are subjugated by others who believe themselves to be superior. The effects of racialization and the racist beliefs that inform and accompany the social construction of race have been expansive. Since the late eighteenth century social relations have been structured around these alleged biological differences (1998). Minh-ha confirms that the formation and reproduction of racialised (and other) identities are tied to power relations (1997). The creation of race "gave white groups the power of definition in cultural and ideological terms, as well as more instrumental power in the hands of politicians, bureaucrats,
owners of capital, labour unions, judges, police, and other influential members of the ‘ruling’ sector” (Anderson, 1991: 25). The hegemonic power wielded by the white majority in Canada, then, is embedded in institutional contexts (ibid.), where people of colour are oppressed, marginalized and denied influence. Certain images are systematically employed in the creation and maintenance of hegemonic power. These discourses appear repeatedly in mainstream film and other visual media and act to reinforce prevailing social relations.

Colonial Intersections: 60 unit: Bruise and the junctures of gender, race and sexuality

Since the late 1800s, writes McClintock, nationalist discourses have been driven by their “capacity to organize a sense of popular, collective unity through the management of mass, national commodity spectacle[s]” (1997: 102). ‘Commodity spectacles’ include the images, allegories and metaphors represented in visual discourses—such as can be found in advertising and mass media—which present nationalist discourses in readily accessible formats. The accessibility and appeal of visual (re)presentations makes these spectacles powerful tools for the creation and enforcement of nationalist ideologies. The narratives advanced by these allegorical and metaphorical spectacles, McClintock notes, are experienced differently by groups according to identities such as gender, race and sexuality. In these (re)presentations racialised identities intersect with other identities, such as those of gender and sexuality, resulting in divisions and experiences which are not binary in nature (1997). Activist/artist videos are technologically similar, though often ideologically opposed, to film. The technological similarities between the two media makes video a particularly useful and effective means of challenging dominant filmic conventions, as video producers can employ filmic conventions in ways that appropriate, oppose and, thereby, undermine dominant images. The moving images in 60 unit: Bruise, although they
appear similar to filmic images, challenge mainstream media narratives of race, sexuality, gender and nation.

The 'commodity spectacles' presented in mainstream discourses, including those found in visual media, both produce and patrol national and group boundaries. To this end, McClintock asserts, the imagery of 'family' has been a persistent and powerful discourse for boundary maintenance on the basis of race, gender, sexuality and nation. This metaphor assumes that 'families' are groups of genetically homologous individuals and, therefore, accepts certain individuals are members of the 'national family', while rejecting others. McClintock indicates that anti-colonial theorist Franz Fanon views the family metaphor as exclusionary and violent in that those who do not fit within the tight confines of the metaphor are viewed as 'abnormal' and are aggressively excluded from the national 'family' (ibid.). In Canada, nation-formation is often discussed apropos of the contributions of (white) French and English colonizers, while the histories of Aboriginal peoples and people of colour are ignored and erased. Excluded from dominant histories, and constructed as a morally and socially degenerate threat to white communities, Chinese-Canadians have long been denied membership in the Canadian national 'family'. An examination of immigration and labour history in Canada provides evidence of the ways in which Chinese-Canadians have been excluded from the Canadian national 'family'.

The first Chinese immigrants to the west coast of Canada arrived in the mid-1800s, writes Anderson. The majority of these immigrants were men who immigrated as labourers into often dangerous, low-paying and low-skilled jobs (1991). For much of this early history, Chinese people were overwhelmingly employed by railway companies, in canneries, sweat shops and garment factories, laundries, as harvesters and as domestic labourers (Wong, 1990b). Given the low wages paid to Chinese workers, white labourers saw the Chinese as a threat to job
availability and security. In the late 1800s, these fears led to concerted efforts to prevent the further immigration of Chinese labourers into the province of BC, while encouraging the immigration of Western Europeans (Anderson, 1991). Peter Li notes that when the need for Chinese railway workers in Canada lessened, a head tax on Chinese immigrants was imposed. This tax was in place between 1885 and 1923, when it was replaced by the Chinese Immigration Act (commonly known as the Exclusion Act), which significantly restricted Chinese immigration into Canada (Li, 1999). In 1947, influenced by “widespread agreement that all explicitly discriminatory obstacles to the entry of immigrants should be removed”, the Chinese Immigration Act was repealed (Anderson, 1991: 180).

60 unit: Bruise can be examined in relation to Chinese labour and immigration histories in Canada. In this examination, the video can be seen to appropriate, subvert and re-imagine early and Canadian nationalist discourses that informed legislation addressing the ‘Asian Invasion’ and the perceived threats presented by Chinese immigrants to Canada. In 60 unit: Bruise, it is Wong’s Chinese body which is ‘invaded’ by a white man’s blood and which must work to protect itself against this invasion. The bruise that results from this exchange can be viewed as symbolic of the mark that violent hegemonic assaults (both physical and ideological) have left on Chinese-Canadians. Further, that Wong assists Fletcher in this ritual blood exchange reiterates the important role that Chinese-Canadians played in constructing this nation. Indeed, the undervalued and exploited labour of Chinese-Canadians was necessary to the service industry, food production, and the construction of railways, all of which supported the objectives of white populations in Canada. These readings are entirely counter to the discourses which informed the subjugation of Chinese-Canadians. Interpreting 60 unit: Bruise in this way, then,

Due to the large numbers of Chinese immigrants relative to other non-white immigrant groups, Mawani writes, “Chinese residents were the ones most often targeted by racist discourses and practices” (2003: 7).
troubles dominant ideologies and re-imagines Canadian history from the point of view of oppressed and exploited peoples. From this point of view, the histories of Chinese-Canadians can be reassessed and assigned meaningful value. Perhaps Wong, in presenting this exchange, is also implying that connections can be established between Chinese and white communities, even in the face of grave historical relations. If read in this way, 60 unit: Bruise reinforces the value of activist video by supposing that, through activism, social relations can be improved. While racialised relations in Canada have changed through activist engagements, such as Wong's, the immigration and labour histories of Chinese-Canadians remain important indicators of social relations today.

Despite major changes to legislation, immigration and labour issues continue to affect the lives of Chinese-Canadians and racialised peoples wishing to immigrate to Canada. Restrictions against unsponsored Chinese immigrants who, it was believed, would not properly integrate into Canadian society continued even after the Chinese Immigration Act was repealed (Anderson, 1991). Changes to Canadian immigration legislation continued (unofficially) to restrict the immigration of certain racialised peoples until the 1960s (ibid.). In 1967, the points system for immigration to Canada, which assigned points to “applicants’ education, technical and professional training, age, labour marked experience, and knowledge of one or both official languages,” was introduced (Li, 1999). Under the points system a large number of immigrants from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan arrived in Canada (with many locating in Vancouver) in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Anderson, 1991). While the points system did improve immigration possibilities for some, according to Alan Simmons (1998), it has been widely assessed as a ‘neoracist’ immigration policy. Contemporary policies, he writes, are influenced by racist ideologies which make immigration from certain areas of the world more difficult. The points
system, then, conceals the racist ideologies that inform it by differentially valuing the education and employment experience of some groups of immigrants as compared to others.

The labour history of Chinese-Canadians is echoed under the points system, which reinforces sexist and racist stereotypes in Canada by supporting the immigration of people of colour to fill low-paying, low-status positions. Further, current immigration policies and legislation in Canada do not sufficiently protect the rights of immigrants and foreign workers (ibid.). Canada's colonial past is marked by racist principles and policies that have denied people of colour parity in connection with voting rights, land ownership, education and employment. In turn, this history has informed the continued exclusion and marginalization of Chinese-Canadians. Anderson shows that discourses around the effect of immigration on 'traditional' Canadian lifestyles were still being employed in government discussions of immigration in the late 1970s (1991). From this perspective, *60 unit: Bruise* is not simply important as an analysis of historic relations; it also presents challenges to modern policies which are informed by past relations. Indeed, the discourses Wong engaged with 30 years ago continue to offer significant challenges to social relations in Canada today.

Metanarrative discourses on 'nation' and 'race' are often figured in terms of temporal and evolutionary progress. Under this conception, certain nations and peoples are understood as less evolved than others, as moving slowly forward on a temporal continuum. Where the family metaphor has been expanded to include non-colonizing peoples, it is often done in a paternalistic manner (McClintock, 1997). Here, the 'child-like' and 'primitive nature' of certain races is contrasted with the developed the 'enlightened adulthood' of European imperial nationalism (ibid.). In this way, the authority and superiority of white (heterosexual male) colonizers in
Canada has been asserted over all ‘others’. The family metaphor also assumes that women require the paternal protection and guidance of the nation’s fathers.

Joan Sangster examines the incarceration and attempted ‘reform’ of young women for ‘sexual misconduct’ and ‘immoral’ behaviour in Ontario in the interwar period (1996). Sangster writes that incarceration was employed “as a means to regulate the sexual and moral behaviour of women perceived to be ‘out of sexual control’” (ibid.: 240) during this period. The regulation of women’s sexuality at this time was determined by racist and heterosexist assumptions and the ideologies which supported primacy of the nuclear family. Non-monogamy, premarital sex and women’s sexual autonomy were all perceived as threats to the social structures supported by the (white) heterosexual nuclear family. This pathologizing of women’s sexuality, writes Sangster, was linked to dominant understandings of race. Sangster’s analysis indicates that interracial relationships were only viewed as problematic when they occurred between white and non-white individuals, particularly if they involved a white woman\(^{42}\) and a man of colour\(^{43}\). In such cases, Canadian provincial courts connected what were considered dissolute behaviours (including sexual promiscuity) with people of colour and, by extension, with any woman who associated with people of colour—particularly if those associations were romantic or sexual. In this way, the sexuality of men of colour was also controlled by laws and regulations aimed at controlling young women’s sexuality (ibid.).

Anderson points to the fact that interracial relationships were perceived as a threat to the ideal Canadian family: she writes that in 1922 one member of the BC Legislature stated, “we

---

\(^41\) The Female Refuges Act (FRA), which enabled these incarcerations, targeted women between 16 and 35 years of age (Sangster, 1996).

\(^42\) Sangster’s analysis shows that some women of colour were incarcerated for (sexual) incorrigibility in Ontario, but the regulation of sexuality appears to have focused on white women.

\(^43\) The absence of discussions of homosexuality in Sangster’s analysis implies that homosexual relationship were not addressed or acknowledged with regard to these incarcerations. Sangster does indicate that those responsible for the incarcerated women expressed some concerns about homosexual relations among the women.
cannot conceive of a commingling of our blood with that of the Asiatics’” (Anderson, 1991: 138). This statement shows that the image of ‘blood’ is linked to discourses of family, intermarriage and racial ‘purity’. The blood exchange in 60 unit: Bruise is illustrative of discourses that view miscegenation as dangerous to a nation propagated by the white nuclear family. Wong’s identity as a Chinese man is particularly relevant to discourses on miscegenation, as Chinese men were imagined as particularly dangerous to white women. Sangster explains that, “[w]hen women were found with Chinese men, parental and police anxiety was even more intense” (1996: 251-252). Chinese men, in particular, were alleged to be lawless gamblers, opium addicts, “pimps and drug pushers” (ibid.: 258). In the late 1800s and early 1900s, it was commonly believed that Chinese men traded in and were a threat to white women of all social and economic classes (Anderson, 1991). Based on these assumptions, Chinatown too was viewed as “a morally retrograde prostitution base where white women were lured as slaves” (ibid.: 92). In 1919, as a result of these fears, the BC provincial government passed the Women and Girls Protection Act, which “[outlawed] white women’s employment on Oriental restaurant premises” in Vancouver’s Chinatown (ibid.: 159). By the 1930s, Anderson notes, there was increasing resistance to such discriminatory requirements and some business owners staged protests or defied the regulations. Anderson also indicates that the regulations were publicly protested by some of the (white) women who faced job losses under this directive (ibid.). Despite such protests, Chinese men continued to face discrimination and marginalization in Canada.

At the same time as Chinese men where constructed as sexual threats to white women, they were also feminized by factors such as employment restrictions. Chinese men found employment in spaces such as laundries, canneries and food production which were the traditional domain of women in North America. The feminization of Chinese men continues to
be evidenced in both homosexual and heterosexual sexual spaces. Fung (1996) finds that most gay male pornography is targeted at a white audience and observes that Asian men are largely absent from its depictions. As Muñoz points out, pornography is highly racialised and, in pornography, “race counts as a different sexual practice (i.e., doing S/M, doing Asians)” (2002: 54). Fung observes that where Asian men are included in pornographic depictions with white men, Asian men are typically presented as sexually passive (1996). These depictions arise out of a history in which Chinese men have been stereotyped and marginalized in multiple and often conflicting ways.

Faced with unremitting anti-Chinese racism, Anderson shows, many Chinese men actively chose not to bring their families to this country; however, Canadian immigration policies aimed at suppressing the establishment of Chinese communities played the largest role in determining the gender of Chinese immigrants (Anderson, 1991). Federal head taxes on Chinese immigrants along with other policies limited the possibilities for family formation within Chinese communities. Anderson notes that an 1887 revision to the 1885 Act to Restrict and Regulate Chinese Immigration clarified that the Chinese wives and children of ‘British’ and ‘Christian’ men were exempted from the tax, but Chinese wives and children of Chinese men were not. The exclusion of the Chinese wives of Chinese men was based in concerns that the immigration of Chinese women would lead to the permanent settlement and growth of Chinese populations in Canada, a possibility which, at the time, was largely viewed as undesirable (ibid.). These immigration restrictions led to decreases in the Chinese population in Vancouver in the 1930s because it was, due to immigration policies, composed primarily of older, single men, and lacking in young women of child-bearing age” (ibid.). Thus, Canadian immigration policies, tied to the notion of a particularly racialised Canadian ‘family,’ have restricted the formation of

44 The issue of Asian men in gay male pornography is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.
Chinese families. These restrictions, however, have been coloured by hierarchical gender relations that privilege paternal ‘blood lines’. In this conception sexual unions between Chinese men and white women are viewed as threatening, but unions between white men and Chinese women were seen as less problematic. Here, gendered and racialised hierarchies are shown to intersect in the belief that the genetic material of white men would achieve ascendancy over the genetic material contributed by their Chinese wives.

As the construction of the ‘family’ metaphor depended on racist practices, so too was it based on heterosexist principles and practices. Warner observes the enforcement of rigid (economic and sexual) gender roles are maintained via the repression of abortion, non-marital sexual relationships, pornography and other discourses and practices that might threaten heteronormative family formation. Warner understands the nuclear family as an ‘agent of social control’, which presents heterosexuality as the ‘obligatory’ and dominant form and undermines the legitimacy of homosexual unions (2000).

Along with the challenges it levels at racist histories, 60 unit: Bruise also confronts the histories of queer peoples in Canada. The video implies that these histories, like those of Chinese-Canadians, are also marked by violence, restrictions and exclusions. While the exchange between Wong and Fletcher can be read as violent in the context of Chinese-Canadian history, the intimacy of the injection ritual also signifies a connection between these two men; thus, the penetration and fluid exchange enacted in this video can be read in relation to discourses concerning (homo)sexuality. 60 unit: Bruise boldly opposes homophobic discourses and violence and “stands as a transgressive act of desire and identification between the two men” (Diamond, 1996: 175). This exchange articulates a history of homosexuality that has been broadly suppressed.
Gay relationships were criminalized in Canada until 1967, when amendments to the Criminal Code of Canada saw the decriminalization of “sexual acts by two consenting adults, in private, if over the age of twenty-one” (Warner, 2000: 44). Due to the positioning of homosexuality as illicit, gay and lesbian social and sexual communities existed ‘underground’ and were difficult to trace; thus, until recently, queer histories in Canada have not been sufficiently documented (ibid.). Where these communities were identified, they were confronted with police harassment, intimidation, verbal, physical and sexual assaults. Like Chinese-Canadians, homosexuals were constructed as threats to the Canadian nation. During the Cold War period, Warner documents, gays and lesbians were thought to propose risks to Canada’s national security and, as a result, legislation and informal regulations controlling homosexuality were amplified. In 1953, for example, changes to Canada’s Immigration Act prohibited homosexuals from immigrating to Canada. This legislation was accompanied by the targeted purging of homosexuals from positions related to foreign affairs, the RCMP, the military and other so-called ‘sensitive’ positions. In the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, gay and lesbian communities were frequently targeted by law enforcement officials and were commonly arrested for assembling in bars and at parties—even those held in private homes (ibid.).

In the face of this history, Wong’s video can be seen to challenge hegemonic ideologies relating to homosexuality. Again, the bruise on Wong’s back can be seen as recalling the oppression of queer people in Canada. Understanding Canadian nationalism as threatening to queer peoples, rather than the other way around, throws dominant ideologies and presentations into crisis. This video’s homosexual exchange is particularly relevant when contextualized in the social and political climate of 1970s North America. It was not until three years prior to the production of this video that homosexuality per se was declassified as a mental illness in the
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. At this point, discourses that pathologized homosexuality were prevalent, though they were facing challenges.

**Marching on: Activism in the Canadian colonial context**

Wong’s video is situated in an environment that included increasingly active ‘gay rights’ discourses in Canada and elsewhere. While gay and lesbian communities did exist prior to the 1960s and 70s, it was not until this time that visible and highly politicized gay liberation movements emerged. *60 unit: Bruise* both reflected and contributed to this activism, which, for the most part sought equality for gay and lesbian people in Canada. Although gay and lesbian activism was evolving at this time, most politicized gay organizations did not take up issues of gender, race and class as many of these groups, reflecting the racism and sexism of society at large, were predominantly male and white (Warner, 2000). Often excluded by both communities of colour and queer communities, the experiences of queer people of colour have been compounded by both racism and homophobia. At a time when the intersections between marginalized identities were not adequately examined, *60 unit: Bruise* existed as a particularly significant commentary on the combined effect of sexuality and race as sites of oppression. Butler (1999) explains that because the binarised categories of sex, gender and sexuality are socially created and fallacious, identities that fall outside of what is accepted in dominant discourses present significant challenges to these categories. These identities persist despite the severity of social controls placed on non-dominant expressions of sexuality and gender and race. Such occurrences, writes Butler, while revealing the socially created nature of these identities, also points to the futility of attempting to enforce limited identity categories in the first place.

---

45 This manual, published by the American Psychiatric Association, is one of the main sources for diagnostic information on mental health issues.
While these categories are problematic and impossible to maintain, they have structured social relations in Canada.

In “Imagining an intercultural nation: A moment in Canadian queer cinema”, James Allan shows that, as with mainstream (re)presentations of racialised groups, (re)presentations of homosexuality have typically been unflattering, stereotypical, and aimed at the exclusion and repression of queer people. Butler reveals the existence of spaces where queer, gendered and racialised identities can be “mimed, reworked, resignified” (1997: 384), even in cultures where these certain expressions of these identities are violently oppressed (ibid.). While with Canadian national texts, this oppression has the effect of creating and reinforcing structural inequalities, with queer texts, this has the effect of disempowering and decentering dominant ‘straight’ discourses, myths and symbols. In the case of 60 unit: Bruise, the depiction of penetration and fluid exchange between Wong and Fletcher can be interpreted as a direct challenge to naturalised, discursively created boundaries around (hetero)sexuality and the nuclear family.

This video highlights the historical specificity of discourses and accompanying understandings. Knights notes that 60 unit: Bruise was produced at a time and in a specific location (among the members of Video Inn) where a strong youth drug culture had developed. She explains that in the specific time and place that the video was produced, the image of injection and fluid exchange was less shocking than it is for many viewers today (2000). 60 unit: Bruise was produced in 1976, several years before issues of HIV/AIDS emerged in North America. Informed by over 20 years of discourses linking HIV/AIDS with homosexuality, the image of the needle and the blood exchange is read differently today by Canadian audiences. As HIV was not yet associated with gay communities at the time this video was made, there was not

---

46 The daily logs of activities at Video In(n), along with some of the videos produced at the collective during this period (including Wong’s The Mainstreet Tapes [1976b]), indicate an interest in drug use among some members of the collective (SVES Archives, (n)).
an anti-gay reaction to the depiction of this blood exchange; rather, reactions to this work centred on the intimacy of the exchange between these two men. Contemporary readings of this video, then, are likely to be informed more by queer discourses than readings would have been the case three decades ago. This video shows that discourses can be challenged and modified over time, but it also (unintentionally) points to how our reading of discourses changes over time.

In her examination of the intersections between race, nation and discourses on public health, Renisa Mawani studies discourses and policies related to leprosy and Chinese immigrants to British Columbia in the late 19th and early 20th century. At this time, racist discourses in Canada imagined the Chinese as unclean, diseased and as threat to the moral and physical health of the nations’ citizens. Mawani notes that medical misconceptions of disease linked leprosy to the practices (or perceived practices) and biology of racialised peoples on Canada’s west coast (2003). As discourses on health and contagion are racialised, so too are these discourses related to dominant understandings of sexuality; ‘homosexuals’, like Asian men, were criminalized, pathologized and imagined as threats to the moral constitution of the nation. Discourses on HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, for example, were markedly tied to dominant understandings of (homo)sexuality. At the turn of the last century, leprosy was imagined as a ‘Chinese disease’ much in the same way HIV/AIDS was (and still is) conceived of as a ‘gay disease’. *Bruise* presents an exchange that is doubly threatening in that it is both homosexual and interracial.

The assumptions which inform racist practices, while largely oppressive, have been utilized to the benefit of marginalized peoples. Higginbotham asserts that, “we must recognize

---

47 For example, Paul Wong illustrates that the “racist and stereotypical concept that ‘all Orientals look alike’” (Wong, 1987c: 3) has been manipulated to the advantage of some Asian people. Specifically, Wong writes of the experiences of young Chinese men who immigrated to Canada as ‘paper sons’. ‘Paper son’, he explains, “is a term commonly used by the Chinese, referring to those individuals who immigrated to this country using real or false
race as providing sites of dialogic exchange and contestation, since race has constituted a
discursive tool for both oppression and liberation” (1992: 2). In allying with racialised identities,
artists of colour have challenged the stereotypes that comprise these identities. According to
Gagnon, the formation of communities based on common (racialised) identities is often informed
by the intention of affecting political and structural changes. Whereas mainstream
representations tend to privilege dominant cultural positions, representations by self-identified
artists often work in opposition to mainstream understandings of race. The images and
discourses we encounter in mainstream contexts, then, do not simply re-present already existent
identities, they are also implicated in the active formation of subject positions. Non-dominant
subjective accounts make evident otherwise obscured experiences and functions of
institutionalised racism. As both mainstream and non-dominant illustrations have the potential
to influence the formation of individual and group subjectivities, activist/artist presentations offer
the possibility of changing social relations (ibid.).

In Canada, the creation of Chinese peoples as ‘different’ from the white majority has
facilitated the marginalization of Chinese communities, writes Anderson. This fabrication of
‘difference’ led to the establishment of Chinese communities, such as Vancouver’s Chinatown,
which were markedly separated from white communities and reinforced from dominant positions,
much in the same way that race is constructed and reiterated. Anderson notes that while
Chinatowns formed as a result of the requirements of European colonizers in Canada, they were
also formed, in part, because of the needs and desires of Chinese immigrants to Canada (1991).
Thus, both the physical segregation and racialization of Chinese Canadians became points
around which communities were developed and mobilizations occurred.

Identification papers of deceased people with living relatives in Canada” (1987c: 3). Wong explains that this
practice was prevalent between the 1947 repealing of the Chinese Immigration Act and the early 1960s (1987c: 3).
Lai and Lum detail an intense period of activism during the early 1970s in Vancouver’s Chinatown. They explain that community development occurs differently “at specific points in time, and in relation to the social, economic, and political conditions that inform them” (1990: 20). In the 1960s and 70s, the discourses concerning civil rights, ‘Black Pride’, women’s and American Indian movements, “created a climate in which Asian Americans could also begin to address issues of identity” (ibid.). This was also a time of increased prosperity and influence for local Chinese communities. These conditions, they explain, made it possible for the residents of Chinatown to lobby successfully to prevent the construction of a new fire hall and a freeway that was to run through Chinatown, possibly further fracturing the community, and certainly affecting the economic viability of the area. Chinese activists in Vancouver in the 1970s confronted conflicts within their own communities, as well as racism in mainstream contexts. Chinese activists in Vancouver, for example, participated in “national actions organised to prevent the 1979 release of Bamboo, Lions, and Dragons, a racist documentary produced by the National Film Board about Asian Canadians,” write Lai & Lum (ibid.: 21). Anderson explains that the film presented negative portrayals of early Chinese immigrants and justified white fears pertaining to Chinese immigration to Canada. Faced with protests against the film’s stereotypical presentations and historical inaccuracies, the NFB halted its circulation (1991). As a result of these and other mobilizations, many young Asian people, including Wong, “identified

48 At this time, Lai and Lum note, there were increasing conflicts between native-born Chinese-Canadians and recent immigrants from China and Hong Kong. In the early 1970s, increased Chinese immigration to Vancouver, coupled with conflicting local viewpoints on the “Cultural Revolution in China was affecting local politics, leaving Chinatown highly factionalized with groups supporting different party lines” (Lai & Lum, 1990: 20). Also during this time, Lai and Lum show, numerous organisations in Vancouver’s Chinese communities began working towards establishing a Chinese Cultural Centre (CCC) to replace the already existent Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA), which had long been the official voice of the Chinese community in Vancouver. The CBA was perceived by many in Vancouver’s Chinese communities as an undemocratic and overly conservative organization (1990). Through these examples, they indicate that the Chinese community experienced internal conflicts and was, therefore, not a cohesive community.
the need for representation and a revision of popular history to include an Asian component” (Lai & Lum, 1990: 21).

The 1960s and 70s saw a focus on positive discourses on the ‘distinctiveness’ of cultures in Canada, according to Anderson. In this context, these discourses occurred at the governmental level in venues such as the Royal Commission on Biculturalism and Bilingualism hearings between 1963 and 1968, where some of the important contributions of ‘ethnic groups’ in Canada were recognized. Spaces such as Vancouver’s Chinatown were put forward in governmental and political discourses as indicators of Canada’s dedication to becoming a ‘mosaic’ nation founded on ‘ethnic diversity’ (1991). At this time, then, “Canada’s policy of multiculturalism has made ‘Chineseness’ a politically effective counter-ideology” (ibid.: 27). Both local and national governments sought to revitalize and preserve Vancouver’s Chinatown in an attempt to support Canada’s multicultural agenda (ibid.).

The revitalization and beautification of Vancouver’s Chinatown in the 1970s was influenced by government bodies, which often proposed changes that were in opposition to those the residents and business owners in the area would choose to enact, writes Anderson. In the 1960s some of the most prominent residents of Vancouver’s Chinatown mounted opposition to governmental attempts to restructure the community. These changes were resisted by way of the promotion of “Chineseness” through the medium of tourist Chinatown (ibid.: 179). As a result of these efforts, Vancouver’s Chinatown was rapidly transformed into “a prosperous investment, service, and marketing centre” (ibid.: 216), catering to Chinese and non-Chinese clientele. By the 1970s more positive discourses on ‘Chinese’ and ‘Chinatown’ had emerged in Canada; however, continued resistance to the development and progress of Chinese communities in Vancouver, manifest in and calls to limit “residential quotas based on race,” also surfaced at this
time (ibid.: 240-241). These quotas point to the continued salience of the ‘family’ metaphor in
determining who should be accepted as members of the Canadian nation, where they can settle
and in what numbers.

The ‘family’ metaphor also continued to inform discourses on homosexuality in the
1970s, as it does today. Canadian filmmaker John Greyson writes that the emergence of visible
gay communities in the 20th century has been accompanied by “a litany of police raids,
entrappings, and prosecutions aimed at keeping a lid on such manifestations of public and
collective identity” (1996: 385). Gay and lesbian activism forced the Canadian government out
of queer bedrooms, but, he claims, this withdrawal from the private sexual lives of queers led to
increased “surveillance of those public places where men seek anonymous sex” (ibid.: 385). The
suppression of the exploration and even discussion of certain sexualities in public spaces is
evident in differential state controls on homo and heterosexual discourses. While free speech has
been vehemently defended in the case of political discourse, the right to discourse on sexuality
has not been supported in the same way. Greyson notes that work of artists addressing queer
sexuality “is disproportionately singled out for suppression” (ibid.: 391). That reaction to queer
discourses has been so extreme reveals the potency and threatening potential for mainstream
discourses on sexuality. Warner relates an increasing social conservatism in Canada beginning in
the mid-1970s and carrying through to the mid-1980s. At this time, discourses on ‘family
values’ lead to increased state focus on gay sexualities and ‘obscenity’. This focus was manifest
in raids on gay night clubs, bath houses, and police crackdowns on public sex involving gay
men49 (2000). Heterosexuals were/are not subject to entrapment and harassment for engaging in

49 A similar focus on heterosexual public sex has not accompanied these crackdowns.
public sex in places the state defines as public. As a public representation of homosexual desire, \textit{Bruise} stands as an important challenge to the repression of public homosexual acts.\footnote{Asian men have typically been depicted as the submissive ‘bottom’, rather than the dominant ‘top’ in gay pornographic representations (Muñoz, 2002). The top/bottom dichotomy imagines that, in sexual encounters between two individuals, one person must be dominant (the top) and the other submissive (the bottom). While some people are quite happy enacting this relationship, Asian men who do not identify as bottoms lack any other pornographic presentations of gay Asian men with which to ally. Due to the persistence of these depictions, Asian men are often expected by their (non-Asian) sexual partners to enact this relationship, whether it is their preference or not. Thus, the white normativity of gay male porn is a reflection of racism and white privilege within many North American gay male communities (Muñoz, 2002). This issue is discussed further in Chapter 4.}

The 1970s and 80s were also a time of increased visibility for gay and lesbian communities, including those formed by and for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people of color (ibid.). Just as racist practices precipitated the formation of anti-racist organizations, homophobia and heterosexism necessitated the emergence of gay and lesbian liberation movement. Warner observes that in the early 1970s, “gay and lesbian communities in the larger cities were angrily and actively resisting police homophobia and harassment, as a new, more militant consciousness took root…” (ibid.: 41). The reforms and advances attained by gay and lesbian activists were countered with social conservative backlash in the 1970s, including calls for the recriminalization of homosexual acts between consenting adults and even included one Toronto United Church pastor’s call for the execution of homosexuals (ibid.). Gender issues were evident in gay and lesbian organizing, as they were in Canadian society at large. Warner observes few independent lesbian organizations at this time in Canada, rather there were gay and lesbian or feminist organizations that include both straight and lesbian women (ibid.).

\textit{Conclusion}

On the one hand, activist/artist videomakers are, or may be constrained by what already exists as discourse, but on the other hand, dominant discourses can be turned on themselves by activist/artist video. Indeed, as Foucault states, attempts to silence certain discourses on
sexuality have the "multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire" (Foucault, 1978: 23). Today, the economic, political and social marginalization of people of colour in Canada is often blamed on factors other than racism (Satzewich, 1998); however, the continued salience of racist assumptions, regardless of how these are couched, is made obvious by the fact that anti-racism legislation and equal opportunity employment initiatives across Canada have not ended racism in this country (ibid.). While no longer openly acknowledged in Canada, the hierarchical ranking and differential experiences of people of colour indicate the widespread invocation of the very understandings of race that informed colonialism. Despite the fact that they are socially constructed, racial categories inform actions and ideologies and, therefore, have very real social consequences (ibid.) and cannot be discounted as important categories of analysis. Furthermore, attempts to suppress expressions of sexuality have only resulted in the expansion of discourses on sexuality. The following chapter examines attempts to censor Paul Wong's video installation *Confused: Sexual views* (1984) and the discourses that emerged as a result of censorship attempts. At the time *Confused* was made, for example, homosexuality had become associated with HIV/AIDS.
Chapter 3
Confessions of the dangerous kind: Challenging the censorship of sexual discourses through Confused: Sexual views

With his ‘rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses,’ Foucault posits that “[d]iscourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations” (Foucault, 1978: 101-102). Here, he claims that power and knowledge—both of which are variable on the basis of both structure and purpose—are coupled in discourse. Furthermore, silence—what is not said, cannot be communicated, or is restricted by relations of power—is another aspect of discourse. Foucault explains that there is no absolute or binary relation between what is addressed openly in discourse and what is not addressed. Rather, he refers to silence as “the less absolute limit of discourse” (ibid.: 27), and explains that silence operates within relations of power along with what is not silenced. He explains that multiple elements of discourse are employed in various intersecting and competing strategies. Discourses of power and knowledge are not stable, but are transformed spatially and temporally, based on specific tactical functions. Discourse, he concludes, has the dual effect of reproducing and shielding relations of power, while at the same time destabilizing them (ibid.).

In The history of sexuality: An introduction (volume I), Part two, chapter 1, “The incitement to discourse” (1990), Foucault writes that increasingly specific discourses on sexuality have emerged within the field of power relations in the West since the 18th century and explains that the expansion of discourses on sexuality can be attributed to an “institutional incitement” to produce these discourses (1990: 18). That is, mainstream institutions have required the constant confession, not only of unusual aspects, but of every mundane detail of sexuality. Thus, sex is now examined “through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail” (ibid.). Relations of power, explains Foucault, are immanent, or intrinsic, in other
relations, such as “economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations” (1978: 94).

His analysis, for example, tracks the emergence in the eighteenth century of what he calls ‘systematic campaigns’ that worked to tie sexuality to “a concerted economic and political behaviour” (ibid.: 26).

As the power relations immanent in social, political, economic and ideological spheres are supported by certain expressions of sexuality—specifically the heterosexual monogamous union—Foucault explains that the incitement to discourse on sexuality was an attempt by mainstream institutions to control sexualities which did not fit this model. Indeed, the upsurge of discourse on sexuality in the 18th and 19th centuries has led to the increasing acceptance of heterosexual monogamy as the norm for sexual expression and Foucault explains that the “law of [heterosexual] marriage” is one of the primary systems for directing sexuality in the West (1990: 39). As these unions have become accepted as ‘normal,’ they are not interrogated in the way that ‘other’ sexualities are. Homosexuality, non-monogamy and other non-mainstream sexualities are problematized at every turn through increasingly specific discourses on sexuality. Through this process, claims Foucault, sexualities that were outside of the heterosexual monogamous form began to fragment, such that each became their own ‘unnatural’ form. Indeed, complex systems for classifying and pathologizing certain aspects of sexuality have been created in numerous disciplines (ibid.).

On one hand, Foucault notes the public and private acknowledgement of “peripheral sexualities” could indicate that attempts to regulate these sexualities have relaxed. He points to the case that in some spheres, such as the legal sphere, “the severity of the codes relating to sexual offenses diminished considerably in the nineteenth century” (ibid.: 40-41). On the other hand, he states that attempts to regulate sexuality have been increased through the requirement to
discuss these in detail. The proliferation of discourses is evidenced in the increasing scrutiny of sexuality in other spheres, such as the medical sphere, where ‘abnormal’ sexuality was, quite literally, treated and punished differently. Foucault concludes that although certain sexualities continued to be punished and pathologized, they were for the first time also recognized. That these sexualities were recognized meant that critiques of mainstream sexuality could originate from these formerly unacknowledged positions (ibid.). Indeed, he concludes, attempts to silence certain discourses on sexuality have the “multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire” (1978: 23).

The discourse of homosexuality, states Butler (1999), points to the deceptiveness of discourses that present heterosexuality as stable and natural. She explains that because the binarised categories of sex, gender and sexuality are socially created and deceptive, they are faced with the constant emergence of sexualities that fall outside of what is accepted in dominant discourses. This occurs in all spaces and times, despite the severity of social controls placed on non-dominant, and binary, expressions of sexuality and gender. These occurrences, while revealing the socially created nature of sexual identities, also point to the futility of attempting to enforce such categories in the first place.

Foucault (1990) explains that the deployment of ‘censorship mechanisms’ involves creating the censored discourse as unauthorized, suppressing the discussion of the censored thing, and denying its existence. In order to control sexuality, he writes, it was “necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present” (ibid.: 17). Prohibitions against speaking about or representing certain aspects of sexuality have increasingly come to control how sexuality may be discussed, by whom and in which contexts. While sexuality was
controlled on the basis of who could do or say what, there was at the same time an explosion of discussions of sexuality 'at the level of discourse'. Indeed, writes Foucault, an examination of the history of sexuality must begin in the assessment of changing discourses on sexuality (ibid.).

Sexuality and censorship have been extensively examined by Canadian video artists and collectives since the 1970s. Videomakers in Vancouver have "consistently and vehemently attacked censorship" in their attempts to support representations of marginalised, oppressed and misunderstood subjectivities (Abbott, 2000: 29). Indeed, it is this dedication to anti-censorship activities that often inspires producers to utilize video media in addressing controversial and unconventional issues (ibid.). In the 1980s in Vancouver, social and political events, such as the cancellation of the Confused: Sexual views installation at the Vancouver Art Gallery and attempts to control and define pornography by governmental bodies in Canada led to increased focus on such issues in artist and activist communities. The Confused trilogy, which included performance, video installation and video production, has been described as "Canada's most famous and influential work of video art" (Confused: Sexual views, n.d.: n.p.). The trilogy is acknowledged as having affected the further development and acceptance of video as an art form in Canada (ibid.).

Central to the incitement of discourse on sexuality is the confession, through which individuals who expressed previously ignored or unacknowledged sexualities were required "to step forward and speak, to make the difficult confession of what they were" (Foucault, 1990: 38). The confession requires the telling of intimate and uncomfortable details with the aim of vocalizing 'truths'. In fact, Foucault claims that the act of confession, particularly in Western religious and legal contexts, has long been "one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth" (ibid.: 58). Now prevalent in both private and public spheres, the confession is no
longer confined to religious or legal arenas, but is used and assigned primary value as a method of truth production in many areas, including personal relationships, medical institutions and in various other public and private spheres. Today the confession takes many forms and is manifest in letters, personal narratives and other media.

Whether elicited or voluntary, the fact that the confession originates from the individual and not from an inquisitorial body is one of its central and most powerful features. Indeed, explains Foucault, individuals assert both their uniqueness and their connections with others through confession. Further, due to the fact that confessions are perceived as the necessary vocalization of individual thoughts, desires and actions, “we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us” (ibid.: 60). Whereas power is believed to be oppressive, the confession has come to be viewed as liberating. This perception, writes Foucault, conceals the fact that the production of confessions is permeated by relations of power. The confession occurs within a power relationship in which the receiver of the confession “requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile” (ibid.: 61-62). In this chapter, I examine the outcomes elicited by the vocalization of particular confessions in Confused: Sexual views. These outcomes, I show, include both attempts to censor and attempts to expand discourses on certain aspects of sexuality.

A confounding project: the creation of Confused: Sexual views

The Confused trilogy was a collaborative project produced by Gary Bourgeois, Gina Daniels, Jeanette Reinhardt and Paul Wong.51 The first phase of the project was Confused: Sexual views, a series of interviews conducted by Wong et al. with individuals and couples

51 When the Confused trilogy was made, Gary Bourgeois, Gina Daniels, Jeanette Reinhardt and Paul Wong were all established local Vancouver video artists and members of the Video In collective.
addressing various topics relating to sexuality. The artists considered this first phase the main research component of their work and utilized the interviews and information gained from them in the production of the two following pieces in the trilogy. The second phase of the trilogy was to be the presentation of these videotaped interviews in a multi-channel\textsuperscript{52} installation, also called \textit{Confused: Sexual views}, at the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) ("Artist Statement", 1984). Shortly before the installation was to open at the VAG it was cancelled by the gallery's director who objected to the video's sexual content and derided the artistic merit of the piece. This action incited a storm of actions and discussions addressing issues of art and censorship in both local and national contexts. The final phase of Wong et al.'s project was the video \textit{Confused}, an hour-long fiction/non-fiction narrative piece which starred Wong, Daniels, Reinhardt and Bourgeois as the four main characters. This final video documents the sexual experiences and interconnections between two male/female couples—one a closed marriage and the other an open relationship. Throughout the course of this video, a re-coupling occurs and each of the characters explores same-sex sexual relationships.

While I was able to view this final piece in the trilogy, I was not able to view the entire collection of interviews that made up the first two phases of the trilogy, as all 27 interview tapes were missing from the Video Out tape library while I was conducting my research.\textsuperscript{53} Were these tapes available, I would not have been able to view the interviews as the artists intended them to be viewed for the second phase of this project—as a multi-monitor installation piece. As the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52] Multi-channel video pieces are those in which more than one 'channel', or set of video images, are played simultaneously on more than one monitor.
\item[53] I encountered further obstacles when attempting to locate material in the Video In tape archive. I had hoped to view Stokely Seip and Robert Harvey's 1984 video \textit{Confused: The Controversy}, a video in which "[t]elevision news footage, live coverage and excerpts from the work in question are combined to provide a media eye view of the events related to the cancellation of [the] \textit{Confused: Sexual views} installation at the Vancouver Art Gallery" (\textit{Confused: The controversy}, n.d.). Unfortunately, when I attempted to view \textit{Confused: the Controversy}, I found that the wrong tape was in the case, and I was unable to locate the correct tape. Although it is important that this tape archive be open to the public, increased traffic in the archive will undoubtedly contribute to further loss and damage of archived materials.
\end{footnotes}
Confused: Sexual views installation was to consist of the concurrent transmission of multiple interviews on separate monitors, each viewer would observe different moments and combinations of moments from several interviews at once. Thus, two viewers—even if they were in the same room at the same time—might observe and engage with entirely different aspects of the installation. While it certainly would have been interesting and informative to view both the entire collection of interviews and the installation piece, I find a fourth video produced after the Confused: Sexual views installation was cancelled, more useful to my analysis here. In the midst of the controversy surrounding the VAG’s cancellation of Confused: Sexual views, Paul Wong produced and edited Confused: Sexual views (compilation edit) (1984), a short video which includes less than 30 minutes of excerpts from 12 of the 27 interviews included in the original 9 hour exhibit. Informed by the cancellation and the discourses on sexuality and censorship that this action elicited, this video is, arguably, more important to an examination of these issues than the original installation would have been. This edit is important in that the material it presents was distilled and edited by Wong in the midst of growing controversy around the VAG’s cancellation of Confused: Sexual views. In this way, the work provides insight into the discourses that Wong felt were particularly important with regards to both the original intention of the piece and to the issues raised by the cancellation.

The artists’ intentions with the installation are reflected in Wong’s compilation edit. Throughout the entire Confused project, explains Wong, the artists wished to elicit a multiplicity of dialogues on sexuality with a particular focus on examinations of stereotypes and generalisations. The work was meant to include candid discussions of sexuality which dealt with a range of attitudes and values associated with sexuality by addressing individual experiences and understandings of sexuality. Wong emphasizes that, “basically the whole work is about
questioning the singular model” of sexuality (“Artist Statement,” 1984: 9). The intention of the installation, Wong explains, was not to shock audiences or advocate particular understandings of sexuality. Rather, he states, the goal of the project was to create a context in which a diverse audience could engage with the multiplicity of discourses on sexuality presented in the interviews (ibid.). Some of the issues that Wong et al. wished to engage with were the complexities that guilt and social roles add to sexuality, as well as certain socially-created binaries, which they understood as having a major influence on individuals’ expressions of sexuality. In particular, Wong references the binaries of masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual and dominant/submissive (ibid.).

Wong writes that the individuals and couples interviewed in Confused: Sexual views were culled from among the producers’ friends and acquaintances. Wong explains that he and his collaborators were looking for participants “who would agree to be interviewed and who also would be fairly articulate” (ibid.). Wong states that the selection of participants was based on a set of ‘popular cultural stereotypes’ that the artists wished to examine. The content of the interviews was shaped by the producers’ desire to include specific ‘types’ of people in the interviews, including “a gay couple, a lesbian couple, a raging heterosexual male, a raging heterosexual female, bisexual single, bisexual couple, older people [and] someone from the religious sector” (ibid.). This selection criteria, the producers hoped, would result in the inclusion of individuals with diverse “social as well as sexual attitudes” (ibid.). In the end, Wong indicates, the interviews were not comprehensive, but rather were “quite specific based on the juxtaposition of the 27 subjects and who they are, what they have to say, and how they present themselves on camera” (ibid.: 10). Despite the fact that Wong et al. concluded upon completing the interviews that they are not entirely representative of all sexual possibilities,
experiences and understandings, they were thought to “cover a broad range of preferences to represent a faction of sexual consciousness” (ibid.).

Although the artists aimed to elicit a breadth of honest accounts with their interview questions, the artists’ own conceptions of sexuality placed certain restraints on the topics discussed. For the interviews, Wong et al. compiled a ‘topic sheet’ for possible areas of discussion. Included on this sheet were issues ranging from “perversion to abortion, pornography, religious background, to socio-economic position, to what was your first sexual experience... and so on” (ibid.: 11). Additionally, the work included discussions of sex-trade work, marriage, and long- and short-term relationships. These topic areas elicited conversation in some areas, but at the same time, possibly restricted discussion in other areas.

During the interviews, Wong explains, he and the other videomakers “were very concrete about what we wanted and we wanted people to be very direct” (ibid.: 9). Wong et al. desired to elicit frank and honest discussions about sexuality, maintaining that this insistence on candour benefited the project, as “[t]he discussion of sexuality is surrounded in so much mystique, so much taboo, so much history, that most people even with their mate or closest friend don’t discuss sexuality the way that they do in the interviews, regarding general as well as specific sexual practice” (ibid.: 10). Confused: Sexual views was an attempt to create dialogue between the personal revelations of the interviewees and the viewer. The hope, according to Wong, was to encourage viewers to question mainstream models and understandings of sexuality by offering alternatives to these viewpoints and, ultimately, to change the way individuals understand and express sexuality (ibid.).

The editing process, writes Gale, “is a function of authorship, a means of shaping a story to acknowledge and audience and stimulate feedback” (1995: 73). The editing decisions in
Confused: Sexual views (compilation edit) are integral to how the discussions and representations in the video are received and understood. Wong’s decision to edit each interview in a particular way and to juxtapose certain interviews with each other acts to emphasize certain topics and qualities, while downplaying others. Watched in the order imposed by Wong, the interviews compare and contrast personal accounts of attractions, sexual practices and individual musings on guilt and sexuality, for example. Wong’s editing reveals some of the similarities and differences between the accounts of the gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, asexual and pansexual individuals and couples included here, as well as consistencies and contradictions within individual accounts. In the first interview, for example, Andy’s statement about his willingness to have sex with someone he was only physically attracted to is quickly contrasted with a seemingly contradictory statement in which he states that he finds sexual objectification ‘disturbing’. In another instance, Michael’s love of pornography is countered with his partner Terry’s hatred of pornography. Further, men and women who consider themselves sexually ‘passive’ are contrasted with men and women who consider themselves sexually ‘dominant’ and multiple and conflicting definitions and expressions of masculinity and femininity are presented. Michael’s observation that gay men are vilified in mainstream media discussions of HIV/AIDS is followed by an interview with Sara and Kellie, a lesbian couple, which highlights the fact that HIV/AIDS is not linked in the same way to lesbian sex.

In Confused: Sexual views (compilation edit) each interview subject’s name is shown on the bottom of the screen at the beginning of each interview. I am able to identify two of the participants (Chick Rice and Sara Diamond) as local artists and can confirm that neither of these women use pseudonyms. I cannot confirm, however, whether the other interview subjects use their own names in this video, but I assume that they do. Based on statements by some of the
interview subjects in this edit, I am able to identify certain pieces of information that are relevant to an analysis of the videos. For example, some of the interviewees provide information about their 'sexual orientation,' age, relationship status and so on. In other cases, this information is not evident and I have not been able to provide this background on the interview subjects. Further, although I have shown race to be a socially constructed category problematically linked to perceived physical differences, I have identified the interview subjects based on these indicators, as the consideration of race is central to this thesis.

I incorporate relevant selections from the *Confused: Sexual views (compilation edit)* throughout this chapter, but first, I provide a brief introduction to each of the interview subjects: The first interview presented is with Andy, a white male, whose sexual ‘orientation’ is not specified. The second interview excerpt is with Brad, a white male, who although he discusses a sexual experience, does not indicate the sex or gender of this partner. The third interview in this compilation is with Bruce and Liz, a white couple with a baby. This couple appears to identify as straight, though both recount having had same-sex sexual relations. The fourth interview in this series is with Chick Rice, an Asian-Canadian woman, who has been a well-known Canadian artist and professional photographer since 1975 (*Chick Rice*, n.d.). The fifth interview excerpted in this video is with Colin, a white male who does not explicitly state that he is straight, but does recount a sexual experience with a woman. Colin’s interview is followed by excerpts from the interview with Jeanie, a white and self-identified straight woman. The seventh interview in this piece is with Joe, a white male who has had sexual relationships with both men and women, but at the time of this interview was exploring asexuality as an option for himself. An interview with Mark and Deirdre, a straight white couple in their early 20s, is presented next. The next interview excerpt features Marlene, a straight, white female. The tenth interview in this series is
with Michael, a 25 year-old gay white male. The eleventh interview included in the compilation is with a white lesbian couple, Kellie and her partner Sara Diamond. Walter and Terry, a white, straight, couple are the final subjects interviewed in this video.

‘Protecting’ (?) the Public: The Vancouver Art Gallery and the cancellation of Confused: Sexual views

From the original interviews, Wong makes a couple of selections in the compilation edit which point to the influence of institutional requirements on individual sexual relationships. In the interview with Bruce and Liz, for example, the couple indicates that they were officially married because they believed doing so would be ‘best’ for their baby. In this interview, the couple indicates that they believe that the heterosexual, monogamous, union they have entered into will provide the most stable and suitable environment in which to raise children. In the interview with Mark and Deidre, Mark indicates that his Catholic upbringing has influenced how he expresses his sexuality. He states that he is not comfortable being dominant in sexual situations because he was taught to be always “minding [his] manners”. These selections reflect Wong’s awareness of the role that mainstream institutions play in the production and patrolling of sexual and discursive boundaries. The relevance of these selections is made evident through an examination of the cancellation of Confused: Sexual views by one of Canada’s major art institutions.

Art galleries hold the power to accept or refuse the work of any given artist and thus can influence which artists have ‘successful’ careers and which do not. Decisions about which works to accept are largely contingent on the individuals in decision-making positions at these

---

54 Diamond is a prominent Jewish-Canadian videomaker and theorist, who was actively involved in discourses concerning the cancellation of Confused: Sexual views at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Her comments on the event are integral to this chapter.
galleries. In a March 1984 article in *Video Guide*, Diamond details the cancellation of *Confused: Sexual views*. Diamond explains that the relation of the gallery to the artist is often similar to the relation of employer to employee in that galleries often commission works from artists. In other cases, she notes, the gallery functions as a business, “buying the work for the public” (1984: 7). Artists whose work is showcased at public galleries gain access to “a broad spectatorship..., critical response, a better chance at future funding, other showings and sales” (ibid.). This results in a situation where power inequalities exist between galleries and artists, with artists dependent on galleries for exposure. Elspeth Sage points out that “the status of artists in Canada is dependent on the relationship between individual artists and the galleries that will or will not display their work” (1986: 26).

In November 1983, the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG), commissioned Wong et al. to create a temporary video installation. When Wong et al. presented the VAG with *Confused: Sexual views* in February 1984 VAG Director Luke Rombout, despite the fact that it had already been extensively publicized by the VAG, cancelled the installation only three days before it was to open (Diamond, 1984). Rombout cancelled the installation after viewing a portion of the tapes and concluding that the videos “‘dealt with social-sexual investigations of some sort [and] [t]here is no connection with visual art’” (Duke et al., 1986: 423). Further, Rombout stated that “the tapes themselves had no aesthetic merit, could not be placed in the context of ‘visual art’ and were therefore inappropriate for showing at the gallery (“Artist Statement”, 1984). Diamond examines the institutional reception of *Confused: Sexual views* and recounts Luke Rombout’s claim that the video was ‘not art’ because it was a documentary and therefore, “[did] not constitute a creative act” (1996: 164). Diamond is frustrated by Rombout’s claim that *Confused: Sexual views* was cancelled because it was not ‘art’. At the time she insisted that, with its semi-
documentary format and choice of topics, the “installation fits squarely into the rubric of fifteen years of video art” (1984: 7). Indeed, she explains, “[m]any recognized video artists have used interviews as either part or all of an aesthetic and/or social statement” (ibid.). In fact, Diamond asserts that this work was similar to other works by Wong that had been endorsed by the VAG in the past (ibid.). Diamond shows the implications of this event to be profound, as she claims that the cancellation “reinforced the historic division between documentary (as low art form aligned to film, journalistic practices and propaganda) and those experimental practices acceptable to (high) visual-art institutions” (1996: 189).

Diamond notes that this event resulted in “a climate of distrust and alienation” between the VAG and many local artist communities (1984: 7). Rombout’s decision drew a great deal of criticism “from the art and critical community, for they are for the most part outraged by his decision to cancel Sexual Views” (ibid.). After the cancellation of Confused: Sexual views by the Vancouver Art Gallery, “video exhibition at an institution [the VAG] that was known throughout Canada for its strong relationship to that medium has lapsed” (Diamond, 1996: 189).

The cancellation of Confused: Sexual views, wrote Diamond, indicated that artists wishing to gain gallery recognition must not “criticize the dominant imaging of sexuality in this culture..., refer to alternative sexual experience such as lesbian, gay, or assertive female heterosexuality in their work...[or] produce explicit work...whether it be about sex or about other social issues” (Diamond, 1984: 7). While part of Rombout’s justification for canceling the installation was obviously based on debates about what constitutes art, he also claimed that “[t]he material might be found highly contentious by gallery viewers and might be considered to be indecent” (“Artist Statement”, 1984: 10). Rombout’s statement reveals that part of his concerns about the installation were based on the ‘appropriateness’ of the material in Confused:
Sexual views for public viewing, as well as concerns about audience responses to the work. Diamond points out that the installation included a range of discussions regarding sexual practices and experiences, but did not involve “explicit visual representation of sexual acts” (1984: 7). The interviews that make up Confused: Sexual views emphasise a multiplicity of sexual possibilities and make “the work as much about talking about sexuality as about sexuality per se” (ibid.).

After the cancellation, the Vancouver Sun reported that “Rombout said he felt responsible to the city of Vancouver, the provincial government and the membership of the Vancouver Art Gallery” not to allow the work to be exhibited (“Art Exhibit”, 1986). Diamond expresses indignation at Rombout’s claim that the cancellation was in the public good. She writes that “[what is truly outrageous in Rombout’s actions is the notion that the public required protection from this work” (1984: 7). Rombout’s actions imply that he felt he was in a position to determine what constitutes appropriate material for the public to view and also what public reactions to the work would be.

Due to the fact that the exhibit would involve frank discussions of sexuality, Diamond recounts, the installation was to be restricted to patrons over 19 years of age, and patrons would be ‘warned’ of the nature of the exhibit and, thus, could decide whether or not they wished to view it (1984). What Diamond points to here is the fact that the gallery had already taken steps to ‘protect’ the public from the content of this installation before it was cancelled. There was little risk of minors viewing the exhibit, and anyone viewing the exhibit was making a conscious and informed decision to do so. According to Wong’s anecdotal evidence, people who viewed the interviews were not offended by the sexually explicit discourses presented in Confused, as the tapes presented sexuality “in a very optimistic and healthy context” (“Artist Statement”, 1984:
Similarly, Diamond asserts that “the debate around how to represent sexual experience as an artist, the difference between exploitative and non-exploitative sexual imagery, the relationship between explicit and symbolic language in representing sexuality, has emerged as perhaps the central debate with the critical and art-producing communities in Canada in [1984]” (1984: 7).

Diamond asserts that Rombout’s concern was not protecting the public from this exhibit, but rather that he was trying to protect the VAG from criticism “from the VAG’s many corporate sponsors, conservative government funding bodies, and a tiny minority of reactionary patrons” (ibid.). As Sage notes, gallery directors often accept less controversial works in order to avoid offending their membership and the public (1986). Alteen points to a marked increase in conservatism at the Vancouver Art Gallery which coincided with the cancellation of Wong et al.’s work. He writes that, “[b]eginning with or culminating in (depending on your view) the cancellation of Paul Wong’s Confused: Sexual views, the Vancouver Art Gallery fell increasingly under the spell of corporate sponsors and consequently has been extremely conservative in programming contemporary art” (1995: 16). Diamond observed at the time that the “cancellation fits into a growing institutionalization and conservatism on the part of official galleries, a process which corresponds, in turn, to a rebirth of right-wing morality crusades and repression” in broader society (1984: 7).

Subsequent to the cancellation, Wong proceeded with two separate legal actions against the VAG, both of which he lost. In suppressing this piece of work, many artists and activists

---

55 In 1983, the Vancouver Art Gallery moved from a much smaller venue to the impressively-columned building it now inhabits in downtown Vancouver. As the VAG had only recently moved from its smaller, less-established location at this time, it was clear to many that Rombout was attempting to avoid upsetting the VAG’s new, larger membership with Wong et al.’s exhibit (Vancouver Art Gallery, March/April 1984).

56 Wong mounted two court cases in response to the cancellation. In the first, he attempted to get an injunction against the VAG that would require the gallery to mount the installation. In the second, he attempted to sue the gallery for breach of contract, but he lost that court battle as well (Williams, 1987). The contract between the VAG and Wong was a verbal one, which had not indicated that Wong et al.’s proposed video would be subject to approval by the gallery. In the first case, the judge ruled, however, that “the suitability for exhibition of a commissioned
asserted, the numerous discourses on sexuality that it represented were stifled. In denying a forum for the expression of the discourses presented in *Confused: Sexual views*, Diamond asserted that the cancellation of the work was “a major blow to developing a new understanding of sexual representation” (1984: 7). At the same time, she emphasized that the discourses concerning the cancellation moved far beyond simple question of whether or not to support Paul Wong’s work (ibid.). As a result, attempts to silence the discourses in *Confused: Sexual views* resulted in the proliferation of discussions and organizing around issues of censorship and sexuality.

Despite the fact that *Confused: Sexual Views* was shown in some small Canadian galleries and was eventually exhibited (by Wong) in Vancouver, Gagnon writes that “[o]ne consequence of the ensuing controversy was that the tape was never adequately released or distributed during the 1980s” (2000: 170). For Wong, the result of his rejection by the VAG was twofold. On one hand, as a *Vancouver Sun* article reported at the time, the cancellation of *Confused: Sexual views* resulted in mental distress and a damaged reputation for Wong. Due to the court battles that this cancellation necessitated, Wong stated that *Confused: Sexual views* became his “biggest, most expensive, time-consuming work” (*Ban*, 1986: B6). According to Diamond, “[t]he cancellation itself and the statements by the VAG’s director have damaged the artist’s reputation and presented his work in a distorted way” (1984: 7). On one hand, Wong “said he was blackballed on the Canadian art gallery circuit, branded a pornographer and [he] lost commercial contracts” (Lederman, 2002). On the other hand, this event generated publicity

---

*artwork might always be an ‘implied term’ of every such commission* (Feldman, Weil & Duke Biederman, 1986). The court’s decision validated Rombout’s role in deciding what could be termed ‘art’ and what the public could and/or should be exposed to.

57 As a result of the cancellation, Paul Wong started a production company (On Edge Productions), which presented *Confused: Sexual views* at Vancouver’s Graceland Cabaret between November 30th and December 1st, 1986 (*Confused: Sexual views, n.d.*).
for Wong, and the *Confused: Sexual views* installation was defended and booked in smaller
galleries across Canada. Also, six years after the cancellation, *Confused*\(^{58}\) was selected to air on
*Night Video*, a CBC television program hosted by David Suzuki and Shari Ulrich (SVES Archives (g)). Thus, although Wong felt that the controversy hurt his career, it also attracted
national attention to the piece itself, and to Wong’s legal battle against the VAG. In support of
Wong’s legal pursuits against the VAG, the ‘Paul Wong Defence Campaign’ was initiated
(Diamond, 1984). Through this campaign, local artists and anti-censorship activists sought a
public apology from the VAG for the cancellation, encouraged artists to boycott the gallery in an
attempt to force a reversal of the cancellation, asked galleries across Canada to host the
installation. Finally, the campaign proposed a Vancouver-based exhibition of works addressing
censorship, which would “involve presentations on topics such as censorship, sexual
representation [and] the function of the gallery” (ibid.: 7). This event was realized as the Visual
Evidence series in Vancouver in May and June of 1987.\(^{59}\)

**Border XXX-ings: Censorship and Canadian governments**

The cancellation of *Confused: Sexual views* contributed to the formation of the Canadian
federal government’s Task Force on the Status of the Artist (Sage, 1986). From its investigation,
the task force concluded that if “Canadian artists are to work freely within their profession, they
must enjoy freedom from such arbitrary standards as ‘artistic merit’ or ‘good taste’….All levels
of government should respect and promote this principle [of freedom of artistic expression] in
their legislation and policies” (Report of the Task Force on the Status of the Artist, cited in Sage,
1986: 28). As artists and anti-censorship activists in Vancouver have shown through their

---

\(^{58}\) To be clear, this was not the *Confused: Sexual views* installation, but the final segment of the Confused trilogy, the
narrative video, *Confused*.

\(^{59}\) This event is discussed in detail later in this chapter.
activities, however, artistic freedom is not always adequately protected by governmental bodies in Canada.

Established in 1986, Article 19, the International Centre Against Censorship\textsuperscript{60} is a human rights and anti-censorship organization named after Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "[e]veryone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (\textit{Introduction to Article 19}, n.d.). This body explores issues of freedom of information and expression in Canada and concludes that the \textit{Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms}, adopted in 1982, addresses freedom of expression and is "important in any consideration of intellectual freedom in Canada" (Schrader, 1996: n.p.). Under the \textit{Charter of Rights and Freedoms} "free speech principles have constitutional protection in Canada," but freedom of expression "and other rights and freedoms are subject to certain limits" (International Centre Against Censorship, 1990: np). The centre maintains, however, that these rights are not always adequately protected by federal or provincial governments.

Government censorship of sexually explicit material is often encouraged by non-governmental groups. Feminist anti-pornography activists, such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, have long fought for the censorship of pornography, claiming that it embodies and encourages sexual violence towards women.\textsuperscript{61} Still other organisations were concerned with what was perceived as "the general climate of censorship that [was] on the

\textsuperscript{60} This organization is based in London, England.
\textsuperscript{61} Believing that pornography violates women's civil rights, MacKinnon and Dworkin co-authored the Model Anti-pornography Civil Rights Ordinance in their 1988 book \textit{Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality} Minneapolis: Organizing Against Pornography 1988. In this text, Dworkin and MacKinnon understand pornography as "the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words, including by electronic or other data retrieval systems", or "[t]he use of men, children, or transsexuals in the place of women" in such depictions ("An Excerpt," n.d.: n.p.).
increase in Canada” (SVES Archive (i): n.p.). Beginning in the mid-1970s in North America, Warner explains, gay liberationists and feminists became increasingly involved in debates around pornography and censorship. He notes that for many feminists, “pornography presented a major social problem because it degraded and dehumanized women, reflected hostility toward them, and portrayed them as merely objects for the sexual gratification of men” (2000: 125-126). Other feminists, explains Warner, were committed to reducing violence in pornography rather than eradicating pornography altogether. Further, some gay men and lesbian women identified pornography as “a vital component of liberated sexuality [which] celebrated sexuality...and in particular affirmed same-sex sexuality as good” (ibid.: 126). Gay and lesbian movements have long sought the “freeing sexually expressive materials from state censorship and repression” (ibid.: 267). Further, many gay and lesbian activists recognized that censorship law reforms could be used to restrict (homo)sexual expressions in art. As a result, many gay and lesbian activists argued against attempts to strengthen censorship laws in Canada (ibid.).

Again, the discourses that were occurring in relation to the cancellation of *Confused*: Sexual views are reflected in the segments Wong includes in the compilation edit. Michael professes his ‘love’ of pornography, explaining that, “[n]ot only can I personally relate to pornography, but everybody wants pornography, they really do”. He goes on to protest that “[t]he only people who have complete access to pornography are the ones who insist that they don’t want to see it. The ones who have to screen it out to make sure that people who want to get it can’t get it”. Further, in the interview with Walter and Terry, Walter discusses his interest in pornography. He states, “I love pornography. I’m a big fan. I have a collection of pornography. I consider myself to be a historian of pornography.” Terry appears perturbed by Walter’s statement and explains her position on pornography. Terry states, “I don’t like pornography at
all...I think pornography is misleading to what actually is going on and I think that sexual fulfillment is really far distant from what goes on in pornography. I think it’s disgusting...I hate pornography.” Here, the video footage ends and the screen fades to black as the production credits roll. That the video ends with statement is significant, as debates about the sexual content of the Confused: Sexual views installation were central to its cancellation.

The International Centre Against Censorship points to federal laws on obscenity in Canada, explaining that Canada Customs officers have been allowed to arbitrarily detain materials, including books and magazines, subjectively determine to be obscene. Materials may be deemed obscene if they present images, writings or other depictions which express “the undue exploitation of sex or of sex and...crime, horror, or cruelty and violence” (International Centre Against Censorship, 1990: np). In the mid-1980s, Diamond explains, this system was “susceptible to discriminatory and selective implementation, places the burden on importers to prove that a book or magazine is not obscene, and excludes publications from circulating during a lengthy and costly administrative process” (1984: 7). The Centre explains, for example, that materials addressing or depicting homosexual sex were regularly seized by Canada Customs.

Warner notes that in the mid-1980s, Canada Custom’s officials regularly seized and banned materials based on personal, subjective, judgments, rather than on clear guidelines. These officials consistently targeted materials that described or depicted homosexual acts. In the mid-1980s gay and lesbian bookstores in Canada, particularly Glad Day Books in Toronto and Little Sister’s Book Store in Vancouver, recognized that they were unduly targeted and harassed by customs officials who seized and even destroyed books, videos and magazines imported by these stores (2000). In 1987 Little Sisters mounted its first legal action against Canada Customs
and, after a 13-year legal battle, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Canada Customs had, indeed, discriminated against the book store.  

The targeting of depictions of homosexuality was certainly influenced by an increase in homophobic discourses and actions prompted by the perceived link between gay men and HIV/AIDS. Warner observes that AIDS was initially seen as a ‘gay disease’ which posed a threat to the heterosexual population. In the early 1980s the number of HIV positive individuals began increasing, sparking a climate of (homosexual) anti-sex hysteria in Canada (2000). Smelik explains that the perception that the AIDS ‘crisis’ in the early 1980s was attributable to gay men led to a resurgence in public condemnations of homosexuality (2000).

Sections of the accounts Wong includes in the compilation edit reflect, comment on and challenge homophobia and discourses on homosexuality and HIV. Joe, for example, bemoans what he views as the promiscuity of gay men. He declares, “I also find it sad the way gay people have to abuse themselves in the way of promoting being gay....It just sometimes makes me really sick because it’s just so pathetic it’s like they’ve got ‘gay’ written all over them when they’re there. It’s just neon lights flashing: ‘Here it is boys come and get it’”. Unlike Joe, Michael asserts that “[t]he advantage of having a male heterosexual dominant society is that it makes homosexuality much more elite”. Michael expresses disgust at heterosexual behavior, stating that he thinks “men fucking women is really sick” and indicates a “simple rule of homosexuality: always sleep with other guys”. Michael also addresses mainstream media’s focus on the perceived link between AIDS and homosexuality, stating that “AIDS is the number one trendy disease you can get and fags are being given the unwanted credit for that and it kills you and it kills them and it makes great [newspaper] copy”. As stated early in this chapter,

62 In 2001, shortly after the conclusion of this first case, further seizures prompted Little Sister’s to return to court with another challenge to Canada Customs. This most recent challenge has yet to be resolved.
Wong follows Michael’s interview with the interview with Sara and Kellie, a lesbian couple. This juxtaposition highlights the fact that lesbian women were not affected in the same ways as gay men were by the increasing homophobia in the era of HIV/AIDS.

Warner writes that in the mid-1980s, Canada’s federal government, informed by the belief that pornography and prostitution were inherently degrading to women, began to examine these issues and proposed legislation around them (2000). Bill C-54, which aimed to amend definitions of pornography under the Criminal Code of Canada (Rosen, 2000), was introduced to the House of Commons on May 4, 1987 by then Justice Minister Ray Hnatyshyn (Spence, n.d.). Much debate around governmental control and censorship at this time centered around this controversial bill. Some protesters of the bill were concerned that it defined pornography so broadly that it would even have restricted some “depictions of intercourse between consenting adults” (Bernstein, n.d.: n.p.). This possibility led to arguments that these proposed changes to censorship laws would be too vague and restrictive. The bill sought to redefine erotica and pornography and “convict producers, publishers, distributors [and] exhibitors under those amended definitions” (Williams, 1987: 14). Thus, one of the main concerns with the new legislation was that any art work classified as pornographic could land the artist in court, where the ‘artistic merit’ of the work could only be established by the acquittal of the artist under the Criminal Code (ibid.). The bill failed with the dissolution of Canada’s 33rd Parliament in October, 1988, when a federal election was called (Rosen, 2000), but extensive public protest in Canada was instrumental in the abandonment of these proposed changes (Bernstein, n.d.: n.p.).

Other organizations, such as The British Columbia Library Association (BCLA), expressed concerns about the legislative changes proposed by Bill C-54. In 1987, the BCLA

---

63 The BCLA is a non-profit organisation which, in 1987, represented at least 700 “librarians, information specialists, and others interested in the development of high standard library service” in the province of BC (SVES Archive (i): n.p.).
wrote that it was “concerned about the effect on libraries of those sections which state that anyone may be found guilty of an offence who ‘possesses for the purpose of distribution’ matter deemed pornographic under [Bill C-54]” (SVES Archive (i): n.p.). This bill, wrote the BCLA putting librarians and other information specialists at risk of punishment for disseminating materials deemed pornographic by the state. In a press release dated September 17, 1987, the BCLA stated that “Bill C-54 will have a serious impact on the social climate in Canada as a result of the sweeping definition of pornography” (ibid.). The BCLA was particularly concerned that changes to the Criminal Code did not distinguish sexual abuse from ‘healthy’ sexuality and would result in “criminalizing and stigmatizing public representation of sexual conduct which is both lawful and positive” (ibid.). Furthermore, the proposed changes risked the “curtailment of free speech through criminal sanctions for inciting, promoting, encouraging or advocating any prohibited conduct” (ibid.).

The International Centre Against Censorship shows that provincial legislatures in Canada hold the power to enact laws that contradict section 2 of the Canadian Charter, “so long as they expressly declare their intention to do so” (International Centre Against Censorship, 1990: np). Thus, in Canada, “the guarantee of freedom of expression is not adequately protected at the provincial level” (ibid.). The Centre, indicates, for example, that “[p]rovincial administrative bodies are empowered to ban films from distribution entirely, or they may classify films as unsuitable for certain age groups” (ibid.).

Bill 30 (The Motion Picture Act) received Royal Assent in the British Columbia legislature on June 17, 1986. This bill amended the Motion Picture Act with the intention of creating a clear regulatory system for video pornography, which could be used to classify videos as adult or non-adult at the level of distribution (British Columbia Legislative Assembly, 1986a).
Changes to the *BC Motion Picture Act* saw ‘adult motion pictures’ defined as those which depict explicit sexual scenes, bondage in a sexual context, persons who are or who appear to be under the age of 18 involved in explicit sexual scenes, and explicit sexual scenes involving violence, whether depictions involving the conditions above are real or simulated (SVES Archive (h)).

The amendments, stated Brian Smith, the Social Credit Party MLA from Oak Bay-Gordon Head (Elections BC, 1988), would allow the distribution of materials classified as ‘adult’ to adult customers, but would prohibit “materials involving sex with children, sex with animals, extreme brutality and violence involving humans or animals, and bestiality, necrophilia and other categories of that kind” (British Columbia Legislative Assembly, 1986a: 8295). Also prohibited would be videos containing “sexually-explicit scenes involving violence and other acts that are particularly repugnant to the bulk of the population” (British Columbia Legislative Assembly, 1986b: 8698).

The *BC Motion Picture Act* allows certain exemptions from censorship to film societies and cultural organisations, “the membership of which is by annual subscription and is limited to persons who are not less than 18 years of age....” (SVES Archives (h): 3) and if the organization views motion pictures “as a medium of art, information or education” (ibid.: 4). These guidelines remain problematic for organizations such as Video In, as its membership is not restricted to those over 18, nor would they elect to restrict their membership in this way. Aside from prescribing ‘acceptable’ content and activities in the motion picture industry, the act “enables the direction of the Film Classification Branch to demarcate, interpret and govern the distribution and content—and consequently the production—of sexual representations within videotape as well as film” (Williams, 1987: 14). Any video classified as ‘adult’ would have be assigned a license and could only be distributed under the conditions of that license, which
would include prohibitions on displaying, selling or renting ‘adult’ videos to minors (British Columbia Legislative Assembly, 1986b: 8698). Although debate in the British Columbia legislature regarding this bill was limited, concerns were raised about which materials could be classified as ‘adult’ under the amendments to the Motion Picture Act. In response to these debates, MLA Brian Smith stated that exceptions to the act allowed material that was considered to have artistic, historical or educational value to be exempted from distribution restrictions (ibid.). Concerns about how the ‘adult’ material was to be defined and determined and debates regarding the sweeping powers these amendments gave to the BC film classification board arose during readings of this bill in the legislature. 

Lorne Nicolson, the New Democratic Party MLA for Nelson-Creston (Elections BC, 1988), felt that the bill should not be passed at the time due to the extremely broad powers and regulations it proposed (British Columbia Legislative Assembly, 1986c). Despite these concerns, the bill was passed in 1986, and has since influenced the production and distribution of visual media in British Columbia.

All films and videos in BC, whether ‘adult’ or otherwise, must be submitted to the BC Film Classification Office and must be approved for distribution and exhibition by the Director of Film Classification (Province of BC, 2001). Under section 12 of the Motion Pictures Act, the director of the Film Classifications Office, anyone authorized by the director, or a peace officer are given the power to “at any time during regular business hours enter a theatre or the premises of a motion picture distributor, an adult film distributor, a video distributor, an adult film retailer or a video retailer for the purpose of (i) viewing or inspecting a film or an adult film, or (ii) determining if the licensing provisions of this Act or the regulations or the conditions of a licence

---

64 Lorne Nicolson expressed concern that the bill did nothing to control a great deal of the child pornography produced and distributed in Canada, as this often occurs outside of official, and therefore controllable, systems of production and distribution (British Columbia Legislative Assembly, 1986c).
have been or are being complied with…” (ibid.: n.p.). These individuals may also seize videos that have not been approved by the classifications office and are, therefore, not properly licensed.

Prompted by governmental attempts to censor certain discussions and representations of sexuality and by the cancellation of Confused: Sexual views at the VAG a group of anti-censorship activists formed the Coalition for the Right to View (CRTV) in Vancouver. The CRTV statement of purpose explains that that coalition’s goals were to combat government censorship with specific emphasis on the areas of proposed videotape censorship legislation, the censorship of periodicals by the Periodical Review Board, the censorship and prohibition of materials by Canada Customs, and anti-obscenity legislation in the Criminal Code of Canada (SVES Archives (c)).

In 1987, the Coalition for the Right to View (CRTV) joined forces with the Vancouver Artists’ League and Video In to present the Visual Evidence exhibition in May and June, 1987. This series was curated by Karen Knights and Sara Diamond and included screenings, workshops and panels “designed to further discussion around issues of sexual representation in videotapes by contemporary producers” (Williams, 1987: 15). Although it had been three years since Confused: Sexual views was dropped by the Vancouver Art Gallery, it was still considered a significant event and was included in discussions at the Visual Evidence series. A flyer for Visual Evidence advertised “Going all the Way: A Panel on Recent Work and Approaches,” featuring Paul Wong, and explained that the cancellation of Confused: Sexual views by the VAG “[raised] concerns about institutional censorship and artists’ contractual rights” (SVES Archives (j): n.p.).

65 Both women were local video artists and active members of Video In alongside Paul Wong. Sara Diamond, as I have shown in this chapter, was one of the interview subjects included in the Confused: Sexual views installation and in Confused: Sexual views (Compilation edit).
*Visual Evidence*, writes Abbott, was conceived as “[a]n act of civil disobedience”, which “publicly announced that it programmed work containing unapproved, sexually explicit depictions which, in a direct challenge to the B.C. Motion Pictures Act, had not been submitted to the Film Classifications Office” (2000: 30). The works included in the *Visual Evidence* series were selected by the series’ curators specifically because they would likely be censored under new legislation and existing laws (Leiren-Young, 1987). The event included uncensored video works from Canada and the United States that dealt with sexually explicit content in the form of gay, lesbian and pornographic videos.

Before screenings at *Visual Evidence*, event organizers addressed the video’s content and asked that any police or government censorship affiliates leave the screening in order to protect against the possibility of a police bust and to protect those viewing and curating the material. The following statement was read aloud and posted on the entrances at each screening in the Visual Evidence series:

By order of the organizers of this event and the board of directors of these premises be it known that any members or employees of the B.C. Classifications Branch, Canada Customs, Vancouver City Police Department, the Attorney General Department of B.C. are hereby informed that they are not welcome on these premises for this, the Visual Evidence screening. By order of the organizers of this event we hereby ask that such persons listed above leave immediately. If you continue to remain you are hereby illegally on the premises (SVES Archives (j): n.p.).

A *Georgia Strait* article addressing the Visual Evidence series indicates that then BC Film Classifications Officer, Mary Lou McCausland, stated that she was not intending to subject the

---

66 As the director of film classifications McCausland was responsible for applying the new Motion Picture Act regulations instituted under Bill 30.
videos included in the series to classification. In this article, it is noted that McCausland told "the Vancouver Sun" her office routinely exempts art groups and non-profit societies from the requirement that all films and videos shown in B.C. be ‘classified’" (Leiren-Young, 1987: 4). At the time, Diamond described McCausland as a ‘liberal’ classifications officer, but pointed out that McCausland could easily be replaced by someone more ‘conservative’ who would apply censorship laws differently (ibid.). Moreover, along with refusing to submit the videos showcased in the Visual Evidence series to the BC film classifications board, the event organisers refused to restrict audiences “to the limited membership of artist centres and to those over eighteen” and showed video works in public locations (“Erotic video challenge”, 1987: 12). These actions placed the Visual Evidence series at odds with recent changes to the BC Motion Picture Act. Furthermore, the series was in conflict with Canada Customs officials. The arbitrary application of censorship by Canada Customs officials was made evident at the Visual Evidence series, when one copy of an erotica tape from the United States that was to be shown at the event made it through Canada Customs, while another copy did not (Williams: 1987). Through such initiatives, video artists in Vancouver actively challenged attempts to censor video works. Ironically, and as a result of these efforts, nearly 20 years after Confused: Sexual views was rejected by Rombout, it was featured in a Paul Wong mini-retrospective at the Vancouver Art Gallery (Milroy, 2002: R1).

Conclusion

The debates regarding Confused: Sexual views centered on issues related to sexuality, to the exclusion of many others. As with many other of Wong’s videos, race is also an important
Conclusion

The debates regarding Confused: Sexual views centered on issues related to sexuality, to the exclusion of many others. As with many other of Wong’s videos, race is also an important issue glimpsed in the compilation edit. Importantly, only one person of colour (Chick) is included in the compilation edit; however, discourses on the intersections between race and sexuality emerge in a couple of the interviews with white subjects. Marlene discusses her sexual interests, stating that “some people think I have fetishes. I like dark men. I find black men very attractive. I find Oriental men very attractive. But I don’t think it’s a fetish, I think it’s just looking for something opposite to yourself… Blonde men just don’t do it for me”. Also, among Michael’s very specific list of characteristics that he finds sexually attractive, he mentions that “Chinese bus boys can be really hot”. These comments foreshadow many of the stereotype-driven discourses that emerge in the examination of Wong’s video So are you (1994) in the following chapter.
Chapter 4
Watch Yourself: (Neo)colonialism, multiculturalism and examinations of identity construction in So are you

Foucault’s ‘rules of continual variations,’ part of his method for discourse analysis, posit that in examining sexuality we must not focus exclusively on who has secured positions of power and knowledge and who has not. He maintains that relations of power and knowledge are subject to shifting forms of distribution, which include reversals of power and which are in constant flux. Power and knowledge are not employed or reinforced in a singular way or by specific individuals and groups. Instead, relations of power and knowledge are constantly changing and shifting; therefore, it is not necessary or indeed possible, in Foucault’s estimation, to absolutely establish who has power or access to certain discourses and who does not. Instead, he writes, a method for understanding discourse must focus on the transformative nature of discourses and relations of power-knowledge (1990).

As I have indicated in previous chapters, Judith Butler (1999) points to the challenges that Foucault’s prescription embodies, as Butler interrogates the unequal distribution of power and the material realities tied to these inequities. In her discussion of relations of power and sexuality, Butler turns to Foucault’s work in The history of sexuality, volume I and examines the assertion that power is immanent in all relations, including those associated with sexuality. In this conception, she writes, individuals are viewed as wholly subjected to hegemonic prohibitions, an understanding which precludes the existence of “a subversive or emancipatory sexuality which could be free of the law” (1990: 38). Employing Foucault’s method, Butler shows that individuals can not express sexuality in ways that are independent of power relations because there does not exist a sphere that is exempt from these relations. However, writes Butler, it is possible for individuals to form identities that “do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural
intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible" (ibid.: 38-39).

While such transformations are vastly important to Butler’s analysis, she does not focus on these to the exclusion of examining the distribution of power in society. She writes that we can not fully extricate ourselves from the identities which are assigned to us because, in articulating our position against these identities, we must necessarily refer to them; however, speaking of subjectivities such as race, gender and sexuality does not simply reinforce the ‘regimes of power’ they initially support. She explains that “precisely because such terms have been produced and constrained within such regimes, they ought to be repeated in directions that reverse and displace their originating aims” (1997: 383). Butler points to the politicized appropriation of ‘queer’ as an identity by the very communities that the term was initially used to repress (ibid.). Similarly, some racialised groups and individuals have re-claimed the very terms that were and are utilized in supporting racialised power imbalances. The process of politicizing and reclaiming marginalized identities is complicated by the intersection of these identities.

Wong’s videos point to the tensions that exist between groups of people who face similar, but disparate, oppressions. Activist/artists such as Wong are faced with issues of shifting alliances based on intersecting social identities of gender, race and sexuality. Christopher E. Gittings (2002) examines filmic and textual discourses on racialised Canadians in relation to the privileged, unmarked, white national citizen. Paul Wong asserts, for example, that filmic presentations in Canada historically stereotyped “Asian communities [in English-speaking North America]...as law-abiding insular, intimidated and timid in the New World” (1987a: 9).¹ Wong emphasizes that representations of Asian women have presented them as extremely passive and servile, or as easily accessible sexual experts or prostitutes (1990b). Similarly, James Allan

¹ In this article Wong defines the ‘New World’ as “English-speaking North America” (Wong, 1987a: 9).
points out that the nation-building discourses disseminated through mass media, film, video and text emphasize mythology and symbols that both create and reiterate heterosexist ideologies (2001). In the 50s and 60s, for example, “gays and lesbians were portrayed in movies only as tragic, pitiful, stereotyped, or villainous—if they appeared at all” (Warner, 2000: 37). Any portrayals of gay male characters on television at this time were comedically effeminate and completely sidestepped any mention of sexuality (ibid.). Canada’s colonial past and racist and homophobic nationalist discourses were (and still are) reflected in and reinforced by dominant filmic discourses. Thus, artists and activists like Wong are faced with the task of re-presenting Chinese-Canadians in ways that reflect Chinese-Canadian experiences, rather than white, hegemonic interpretations.

Today, the economic, political and social marginalization of people of colour in Canada is often blamed on factors other than racism (Satzewich, 1998); however, the continued salience of racist assumptions, regardless of how these are couched, is made obvious by the fact that anti-racism legislation and equal opportunity employment initiatives across Canada have not ended racism in this country (ibid.). While no longer openly acknowledged in Canada, the hierarchical ranking and differential experiences of people of colour indicate the widespread invocation of the very understandings of race that informed colonialism. Despite the fact that they are socially constructed, racial categories inform actions and ideologies and, therefore, have very real social consequences (ibid.) and can not yet be discounted as important categories of analysis.

Instances of the intersections of gender, race and sexuality multiply as Canadian society becomes more diverse. In this climate, it has become increasingly important to examine how the process of identity production contributes to homophobic, racist and sexist discrimination. Canadian social, political and cultural interactions are informed by the nation’s colonial history.
The persistence of this history is evident from the influence of official multicultural policies and initiatives in cultural and artistic communities in Canada. As a video artist and activist, Paul Wong has addressed the effects of official multiculturalism on both art and social relations in Canada in his video works, writings and curatorial projects. His analyses of identity production and identity-based discrimination have evolved over the years and by the 1990s his works included deeply nuanced examinations of the intersections between identities. As a result of efforts by artists and activists in the 1990s, including Wong, the historical importance of art by and about Asian-Canadians was increasingly acknowledged in mainstream spaces. At this time, Asian artists—many of whom felt marginalized in both mainstream and alternative artistic spaces—began organizing communities and events aimed specifically at promoting and supporting Asian art in Canada.

So are you: Media, mirrors and molds

Paul Wong’s 1994 video So are you examines the complex interplay of gender, race and sexuality and the relationship of identity to the body in the neo-colonial context of 1990s Canada. The video alternates between scripted, dramatized scenes and documentary interviews, with each segment examining aspects of sameness and difference in relation to issues of racism, sexism and homophobia. The characters in this video embody essentialist stereotypes of gender, race, sexuality and the intersections between these ascribed identities. To this end, Wong employs such archetypes as the black-faced entertainer of minstrel shows to point to the history of racism in colonized North America: like the minstrel show characters, the characters in this video are often farcical caricatures inspired by racist, sexist and homophobic assumptions. None of the characters or individuals interviewed in this video are immune from these assumptions; as the
schoolyard-taunt-inspired title *So are you* points out, everyone is subject to stereotyping and everyone participates in the process of stereotyping others. In this video, however, Wong shows that certain stereotypes associated with gender race and sexuality have endured as tools for the continued marginalization of women, people of colour and queer folks in unique and intersecting ways.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Zippay writes, many videomakers were creating “powerful inquiries into how the fictions of cinema, television and advertising are ‘read,’ and how they reinforce embedded cultural, sexual or racial mythologies” (1991: 8). Wong highlights the instability of identity categories throughout this piece, as the actors in *So are you* transition between roles: a white male stockbroker becomes a drug addict, and a black woman who plays a sex worker also plays a television news reporter. In this way, *So are you* points to the constantly shifting understandings, discourses, stereotypes and identities associated with gender, race and sexuality.

In *So are you*, Wong scrutinizes the role of media and cultural institutions in reiterating limited and stereotyped representations of individuals and groups based on intersecting identities. Some of the stereotypes perpetuated by the media, especially in sensationalistic news stories, are made evident in this video. Through the Canadian news media, many Canadians have become familiar with such turns of phrase as ‘Asian youth gang’. Wong illustrates that well-established stereotypes utilized in mainstream media can be readily understood by video audiences because they are so persistent and are deeply ingrained in our consciousness. As Gagnon points out, the stereotypes in *So are you* “are harsh and recognizable” (2000: 172).

Butler notes that individuals and groups are constrained by existing power structures and discourses, such as those made evident in the stereotypes presented in *So are you*. She
emphasises that a reconceptualization of discourses and power relations must occur in the process of seeking political and social change. Butler writes that political actions are limited by which social identities we can conceive of based on the store of already existing discourses and power relations; however, she writes, parodying or otherwise resignifying hegemonically created discourse and identities creates a basis for political action, as these identities are revealed as contingent and malleable (1999).

At several points in the video, the secondary actors in the piece are shown telling jokes which are dependent on well-established racist and sexist assumptions. These jokes target people of colour, people living in poverty, and women, and often employ combinations of racism and sexism which point to the intersections of these identities. The model of the alcoholic North American Indian, the ‘white trash’ welfare mom, the malodorous Pakistani man, the sassy black mamma and the simple and agreeable Southern U.S. black man, among others, all make appearances in *So are you*. According to Tuer, Wong “chooses to parody rather than interrogate” (1995: 118) identities and their representation in the mainstream media. In not making overt judgments on the enactments and interviews presented in this video, Wong invites viewers to make their own determinations about the stereotypes examined here. Through these examinations, Wong highlights the tendency among viewers to uncritically “[expect] and [receive] these images, whether [as] stereotypes or counter-types” (Gagnon, 2000: 168). To this end, Wong employs the image of the mirror, a symbol which invites reflection and introspection, throughout *So are you*, thereby asking viewers to examine their own involvement in the perpetuation of stereotyped assumptions and the persistence of racism, sexism and homophobia.

Gale notes that early video discourses and techniques stood in strong opposition to the mainstream discourses and techniques of television and film. By the mid-1990s, however, each
form had come to influence the other and it was becoming increasingly difficult, especially with the advent of high-quality digital video technology, to draw distinct lines between the disciplines of film, television and video (1995). Certain video artists, however, continue to employ techniques that distinguish their works from cinematic presentations. In *So are you*, for example, Wong uses editing conventions that remain exclusive to video, such as negative or flipped images, and prolonged superimpositions. Through his persistent use of video-specific styles and editing techniques, Wong continues to declare his commitment to the activist ideals that informed his earlier video productions. This commitment to social and political change is central to the examinations included in *So are you*.

*Now is Then: (Neo)colonialism and multiculturalism in Canada*

*So are you* opens on a constructed rainforest-inspired set, complete with rich vegetation, the sounds of thunder and birds in the background, and a small reflective pool. A young white man walks to the pool and gazes into it; initially he sees only his reflection, but soon spinning images begin to appear in the pool: Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton, and scenes of war in Africa, including a burning skull, protests, dead (black) bodies, and newspaper headlines. These images are intercut with scenes of a black man in black face dancing and making such statements as “hey there boss, welcome to the show. I see all my relatives are here....” These images tie the political instability and racialised violence experienced by black South Africans to the history of colonialism, slavery and racist representations and practices in North America. The next scene in the video shows the white man from the rainforest standing in front of a mirror shaving, while

---

2 The image of this man gazing into the pool at his own reflection references the Greek myth of Narcissus. In this parable, Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection, rejects all other lovers and languishes beside the pool. Wong employs this metaphor here to indicate the selfishness and insensitivity, not only of the young man in this scene, but also of those privileged by their whiteness.
a financial report plays on the radio in the background. Here, Wong addresses the selfish introspection of North Americans despite our continued complicity in global capitalist practices and the consequences of these practices in the lives of people of colour worldwide. While the first scene addresses international issues related to global neocolonialism, the remainder of the video examines everyday gendered, racialised and sexualized exchanges in a Canadian neo-colonial context. Stam notes that while colonialism was historically practiced through the use of force, it is currently enacted via economic and ethnocentric cultural practices, particularly those associated with the media (1997). In contrasting the images that open this video with those that follow, Wong draws attention the persistence of colonial ideologies in the media and in everyday interactions in Canada. Though these colonial ideologies persist, in So are you, Wong examines how these are often obscured by official discourses on multiculturalism in Canada.

Initially, writes Sage, multicultural initiatives in Canada were aimed at assimilating immigrants into French or English-Canadian communities. In this way, multiculturalism was more about helping Euro-Canadians adjust to immigrants than the other way around (1991). Indeed, Stam notes, the Canadian version of multiculturalism involves the creation of superficial government-based initiatives which are “designed to placate the Quebecois, native Canadians, blacks, and Asians” (1997: 190). Such initiatives are limited in nature and do little to redress the actuality of power imbalances as they relate to race in Canada. Wong addresses these issues in a dramatized scene in So are you. This scene shows a white woman who is vaguely identified as a cultural administrator, and who appears to plan multicultural events, conducting an interview with Yolanda, a woman of colour. Both women are wearing clothing that places them firmly within the archetypes of their characters: the white woman is wearing a blazer, blouse and skirt, and Yolanda is wearing colourful, flowing ‘ethnic’ clothing. Throughout the interview, the
white woman makes condescending comments to Yolanda, including a remark on her “impressive little resume”. As Yolanda talks, the interviewer frequently interrupts her, or appears to be preoccupied with other thoughts. The interviewer’s actions relay her refusal to view Yolanda as an individual worthy of respect and attention.

Wong indicates that both women in this scene work in the ‘cultural’ field. Because of this commonality, the interviewer indicates her surprise that she and Yolanda have not met before. Yolanda replies, “Well, I’m sure we have a lot of acquaintances in common,” though she appears unconvinced by her statement. This interaction indicates the lack of connection that exists between marginalized peoples and the official cultural organizations that supposedly represent their interests. Lai and Lum discuss the white majority’s control of institutions and culture in Canada and point to the exclusion of people of colour from decision-making and administrative positions within these structures. These conditions, they write, persist despite claims to inclusion, equality and shared investment in cultural institutions (1990).

Relevance and Racism: Multicultural funding for media arts

The effects of official multiculturalism have not been entirely negative. Onodera finds that multicultural initiatives have, in some ways, contributed positively to the development of media works by people of colour, as those previously denied funding and support due to racist beliefs and policies now have access to some resources. Given access to this funding, some video producers have been able to engage with discourses on culture and identity and address previously ignored histories (1990). This support, however, is based in many of the same principles that inform more violent and hateful racist practices insofar as they also leave essentialist and stereotypical understandings of race, ethnicity and culture unquestioned. As
Gagnon explains, official multicultural policies accept and encourage differences, but only to a certain extent and only within the well-defined boundaries laid out by government and funding agencies (2000).

Cultural funding policies in Canada have been influenced considerably by multicultural initiatives in Canada. As film and video-making require more monetary and other capital investment than do art forms such as writing or painting, videomakers are comparatively more dependent on outside funding. Due to this dependence on funding, video artists are particularly influenced by the multicultural requirements of funding agencies (Gagnon, 2000). Funding bodies require that artists produce works that fall within fairly narrow guidelines for 'supportable' works, writes Onodera (1990). In the interview scene in So are you, Yolanda begins to discuss her interest in organising large third-world festivals, particularly those related to African music. As Yolanda is explaining her interests, the interviewer interrupts her and asks, “Isn’t it fascinating what we do? I mean we can really make culture an integral part of our lives, can’t we”? Yolanda replies, “Well, I do actually find it fascinating, what I do…” , but the interviewer cuts her off again and states, “Well, I think that is just fabulous, we, not only do we have a responsibility, but we have the ability to do this, yes we do”. Here, Wong demonstrates the limited scope of official multicultural practices. The interviewer in this scene does not acknowledge Yolanda’s cultural initiatives, ostensibly because they are politicized and, therefore, do not fit with official models of multiculturalism.

Onodera writes that many governmental funding programs “dictate the content of the work as it ‘relates to multiculturalism in Canada’, or encourage work which reinforces politically correct concepts of visible minority communities [and]…follow a middle class, heterosexual, apolitical format” (1990: 29). That multicultural efforts are focused on presenting, sharing and
preserving only particular aspects of culture, such as food, song and dance, has been a constant critique of these initiatives. While funding is available for projects with mainstream goals and styles, it is more difficult for producers to obtain funding for alternative works. Sage notes that artists and groups seeking funding are required to shape their work in ways that conform to these funding guidelines (1991). Further, Onodera observes that these funding agencies elect to support works because of the need to represent particular types of diversity, rather than because of the merits of the proposal, or the quality of the artwork produced (1990).

For these reasons, Wong writes, multiculturalism is perceived by some local artists as a 'catch phrase' or 'buzz word', rather than an effective policy for promoting equality in Canada (1990b: 6). For many local artists, multiculturalism is understood as a tokenistic gesture devoid of any critical understanding of issues of race and racism in this country. Mavor Moore claims that official Canadian multiculturalism implies that sufficient action has been taken on political issues related to minorities in the performing arts, when, in fact, there is more work to be done in these areas (1987). Richard Fung expands on these claims in stating that "multiculturalism shifts the focus away from the political and social questions of race such as housing, employment, education, access to power, into a political marketing of personal identity" (1990: 18). In *So are you*, there are two scenes in which the camera moves past characters on a constructed street and alleyway set. In the first of these scenes, a white business man (recognizable as the same actor from the opening rainforest scene) drives by in a red convertible, then a series of characters interact with the camera as it moves through the set. The camera encounters a young Asian woman holding Jehovah’s Witness magazines, a black woman sex worker who propositions the camera, a homeless black man begs the camera for a cigarette, a young Asian man offers drugs for sale, a First Nations man is seen huffing (inhaling the fumes of an intoxicant out of a bag)
and a First Nations man and woman offer alcohol to the camera. The first of these scenes illustrates that certain manifestations of issues of poverty, substance abuse and sex work are linked to marginalized identities, thereby suggesting that an aspect of multiculturalism is the inequality and suffering experienced by marginalized peoples. In this way, the ideals associated with multiculturalism are exposed as sentimental, ineffective and even dangerous in their denial of the realities of racism in Canada.

Rather than reinforce this system, Onodera argues that artists need to assert true diversity—that is diversity unbounded by the requirements of restrictive definitions of multiculturalism—through both the content and form of their work. In her own work, Onodera proclaims, she is “not interested in being creatively limited to projects focusing only on racial and cultural difference” (1990: 31). Given her personal commitment to creating works that are not limited by multicultural requirements, Onodera implicates artists who do focus exclusively on these issues in promoting tokenism in multicultural funding practices (ibid.). By continuing to produce works representing particular groups or cultures, and in conforming to quotas for involvement by people of colour, artists become active participants in the stereotyping and racist practices of multicultural funding agencies. In complying with multicultural funding requirements, then, artists are implicated in reinforcing a situation where racial and cultural identities take precedence over the artistic merit of projects. By contrast, Wong has maneuvered through the labyrinthine web of multiculturalism, funding, and issues of representation in So are you. Despite the fact that this video was financed, in part, by both provincial and federal funding agencies\(^3\), Wong’s work offers striking condemnations of multiculturalism and government-run cultural organizations in Canada.

---

\(^3\) This video was funded by British Columbia Cultural Services Film and Video, Canada Council Media Arts and Paul Wong and Elspeth Sage’s production company, On Edge Productions.
Stam has distinguished between the ‘fact’ and the ‘project’ of multiculturalism. He states that the ‘fact’ of multiculturalism points to the “the existence of multiple cultures in the world...the coexistence of multiple cultures within particular nation-states [and] the existence of mutually impacting cultures both within and beyond the single nation-state” (1997: 188). This aspect of multiculturalism is both innocuous and inarguable, as it merely reflects the realities of globalization. It is the project of multiculturalism, he explains, that demands “changes in the way we write history, the way we teach literature, the way we make art, the way we program films, the way we organize conferences, and the way we distribute cultural resources” (ibid.: 188-189). The ‘project’ of multiculturalism has been deployed by state and corporate bodies, which “[market] and [package] difference for commercial or ideological purposes” (ibid.: 190). Fung takes Stam’s point a step further by expanding on the more insidious roles that multicultural initiatives have played in Canada. He writes that, “[m]ulticulturalism’s function has been to co-opt and eclipse the potential threat of anti-racist organizing” (1990: 18).

Stam imagines a radically democratic multicultural project based on the belief in the fundamental equality of all peoples and in the acceptance of community and individual responsibility for the state of social relations. Currently, understandings of multiculturalism are often characterized by major misconceptions, such as the belief that multiculturalism entails an attack on western (European) traditions and beliefs (1997). These concerns have ignited conservative reactions to multicultural initiatives in Canada. Wong shows that this response is often reinforced by media representations that stereotype and vilify people of colour through the exaggeration of cultural difference. Near the end of So are you, Wong presents a dramatized news report that documents the shooting of two white men. The news reporter in this scene
relates the fact of the shooting and explains that, “according to eyewitnesses, [the two men] were innocent bystanders who got caught in a shoot-out between rival Asian youth gangs.” She concludes her report by stating that, “this is yet another tragedy involving innocent citizens in the ongoing and escalating drug war.” This report is completely inaccurate, as an earlier scene shows that the white men, in making racist comments, initiated a confrontation with the Aboriginal man who shot them.

In the same newscast, the reporter relates the story of “the glamorous and powerful Mai Ling”, a realtor who “has been named woman of the year for her outstanding achievements”. The newscaster also reports on Mai Ling’s brother, Alfred Ling, who has revealed his plan to “rebuild all of Chinatown, including the lower east side”. Gagnon indicates that such representations are common and contribute to continued fear regarding the ‘Yellow peril’ in Canada. She cites the images of Vietnamese ‘boat people’, the ‘invasion’ of rich Hong Kong immigrants to Canada, and Asian youth gangs. Gagnon asserts that these are not isolated or fleeting instances of racism; instead, they are evidence of and justification for the continued construction and acceptance of powerful historical exclusions and neo-racist practices (1990).

Stam’s understanding of multiculturalism aims to ‘decolonize’ relations of culture and power by “deconstructing Eurocentric and racist norms [and by] constructing and promoting multicultural alternatives” (1997: 189). In this way, multiculturalism can be used to critique historical and present-day practices associated with European colonialism, namely the belief in European supremacy and the assumption of the innate rights of Europeans to subjugate all ‘others’. This understanding of multiculturalism suggests that equality between ‘ethnicities’ can be obtained by increasing awareness of distinct cultures, histories, perspectives and through the movement towards a more democratic society. This involves, according to Stam, an examination
of the processes by which difference is created and enforced, rather than simply attempting to communicate across difference. Stam’s ideal of multiculturalism would encourage the movement towards true social equality through a radical critique of the hierarchical and normative understandings of communities which result in unequal relations of power (ibid.). In the 1990s, Paul Wong and other local artists and activists were putting Stam’s ideal into practice by examining issues of identity construction and initiating critiques of Eurocentrism in traditional art and mainstream multicultural discourses.

**Eurocentrism and the marginalization of ‘Asian’ art**

Historically, writes Wong, art theory and criticism have focused on appreciating “the banalities of the Euro avant-garde” (1990: 7). Those who produce, distribute and consume art are influenced by this history and base their opinions on art on these ‘expert’ determinations. Canadian activist/artists have criticized Canadian governmental funding agencies for failing to acknowledge the importance of both historic and contemporary artistic and cultural works by people of colour. Among these criticisms are claims that the continued difficulties artists of colour encounter in accessing and educating audiences and funding agencies are, in part, a result of the lack of official acknowledgement of their works (Wong, 1987c). While the history of Asian art in Canada has not been extensively, or officially, documented, Asian Canadian artists have worked to begin this process. In 1991, Alteen observed that “it has only been in recent years that art history has acknowledged the huge debt modernism owes to [African and Asian] cultural traditions” (5). Alteen notes that postmodern discourses offer the opportunity to challenge the dominant position of Western art history in relation to the histories of other art
forms. Postmodernism, he explains, finally allows us to begin to acknowledge and evaluate non-Western forms as equally important as Western forms (ibid.).

Despite the prevalence of Western art theory and practice, the work of Chinese artists in the 1990s became increasingly sought out and valued internationally by both critics and collectors (Wah, 1997). Wah attributes this increased success to two factors. First, she states, Chinese artists “have a better understanding of modern art and are comfortable using it. [This] makes it easier for them to communicate with non-Chinese communities” (ibid.: np). Second, she claims, increased ‘cultural pluralism’ has led to greater interest in cultural dialogue and intercultural examination. While Wah points to the role that these changes have played in the increased success of Chinese artists, both of her statements are problematic. That Chinese artists would only gain acceptance in the context of Western art points to the biases of critics and curators who value western art forms above others. This raises the question of whether the work of Chinese artists must fit the very specific mould of western art forms. Further, the ‘cultural pluralism’ that Wah points to has been critiqued, as I have noted above with the case of ‘multiculturalism’ in Canada, as tokenistic and rife with cultural appropriation and misinterpretations.

While Wah claims that “as cultural pluralism becomes more common...different cultures can have dialogues on comparatively equal ground” (ibid.: np), many would argue that this is not the case. Fung points out, for example, that national forums “for discussing cultural or political issues for a pan Asian audience” are few and far between (Fung, 1990: 17). While Fung observes the lack of discussion on a national scale, the 1990s saw the intensification of writings, exhibits, conferences and other events based in examining identity issues associated with race and its intersections with other identities, such as gender and sexuality. Gagnon asserts that the
dialogues and conferences addressing these issues underscore the ways dominant institutions
“have historically functioned according to simplistic notions of multiculturalism, or else through
cultural erasures which homogenize and define culture within Eurocentric traditions and criteria”
(2000: 70). In the 1990s there was an increasing awareness of the influence of dominant
European traditions on the production, distribution and consumption of art in Canada. Lai
proposes that introducing aspects of non-white culture into dominant Canadian spaces acts to
reclaim those spaces for marginalised Canadians (1993).

(Anti)establishment: Artists of colour in the 1990s

In the 1990s, writes Fung, few people of colour were established as video and film
producers in Canada; the body of Asian Canadian video was just beginning to develop in earnest
at this time. Where people of colour were involved in established video art communities they
were often marginalized (1990). Wong observed that there was very little art being produced by
Asian artists in Canada and linked this fact to a lack of support for Asian art in Canada. He
writes that any support that Asian art and artists received tended to be uncertain and temporary
and notes that Asian artists, working from marginalized positions, were not given the opportunity
to evolve as artists (1990) thus hindering the evolution of Asian-Canadian art. Fung and Wong
point to the extension of institutionalized racism into spaces considered ‘alternative’ or
‘countercultural’. The lack of principal involvement of people of colour in these spaces and in
video art in general resulted in a “whitened version of the world” (Fung, 1996: 259) which
subsequently, reinforced the absence and invisibility of people of colour. While Fung and
Wong’s observations are accurate, it is important to highlight the presence and influence of
artists of colour, including these two men, throughout the history of video art in Canada.
Even as Wong and other artists of colour have played an important role in the evolution of art in Canada, by the 1990s the country had not developed much Asian cinema, let alone activist Asian cinema (Fung, 1990). At this time, however, Gagnon observed a major increase in the number of identity-based video works produced by artists of colour and Aboriginal peoples. She writes that East Asian video prior to 1985 “could in no way be predominantly characterized by any overt references to Asian identity or culture”, whereas in the mid-1980s many Asian artists, including Paul Wong, began producing works which were “[pre]dominantly characterized by politicized identifications, and also, by explorations of east Asian culture and Asianness” (1995: 98). While Wong does not examine race, identity and culture in So are you solely in relation to ‘Asianness’, he examines Asian culture and identity in other videos from this period.4

Although there were few people creating Asian film and video in the 1990s, Fung notes that “[t]here [were] even fewer people writing criticism from an Asian Canadian perspective” (1990: 17) in the early 1990s. The absence of Asian perspectives spans academic writings, art criticism and writings in the popular press, as most established scholars and critics are monocultural, writes Fung. As a result of this monoculturalism, Asian Canadians attempting to work in the arts have no body of work on which to base their own (1990). As with the emergence of video in general, the lack of an established theoretical or practical Asian film and video history in Canada can not be examined in entirely negative terms. Fung asserts that the lack of precedent in Asian Canadian film and video allows for innovations in both form and subject-matter. At the same time, he notes, Asian Canadian film and videomakers are burdened by audience expectations about the form and scope these projects should take (ibid.). Onodera

notes as well that the limited number of people of colour producing film and video places significant pressure on individuals who are working within those media. People of colour producing artistic and cultural works, she explains, experience pressure to represent ‘visible minorities’ in general and their own ‘ethnic group’ in positive and comprehensive ways (1990: 29).

Fung points to the expectation that Asian Canadian film and videomakers will and must create works related to Asian history and experiences in Canada. Fung himself insists that film and videomakers should create works that raise challenges and questions about important subjects, rather than creating works focused merely on entertaining or accommodating their audiences (1990). While many videomakers do create works with definite social and political aims in mind, Onodera, for example, explains that her decision to work with film and video was a creative, not social or political one (1990). Fung writes, however, that many videomakers of colour have come to understand the importance of both producing and analyzing video with a focus on ‘multiracial representation’. In the 1990s, the lack of representation of people of colour in Canadian video was due, in part, to concerns regarding cultural ‘appropriation’, which led to concerns about representing ‘the Other’ (1996: 257).

Alteen explains that discussions of cultural appropriation became pronounced within the field of Canadian art production in the early 1990s (1991). The lack of representation of ‘difference’ in Canadian video was partially influenced by an increasing sensitivity to the problems of speaking for and about ‘others’. This hypervigilance has contributed to the continued absence of discourses on race in mainstream—and even alternative—art. Despite these concerns, Wong has continually produced works which directly confront issues of identity and representation. As Wong’s work from this period demonstrates, the cultural politics of
Canadian artists began to show a commitment to addressing issues concerning race and racialization in Canadian society. At this time, Fung observed that “[s]ystemic racism is just finally being recognized as the major factor in keeping the art world predominantly white” (1990: 18-19). Fung observed that value-laden statements influenced by cultural biases were becoming recognized as such and were avoided in subsequent evaluations of art (ibid.). With So are you, Paul Wong has created a highly nuanced work which elicits social and political examinations of race and representation which adds to the changing valuation of politicized artistic contributions by people of colour.

In the mid-1990s, Fung wrote that “despite the organizing efforts of non-white producers to develop independent networks” (1996: 258), such initiatives were seldom effective. Gagnon explains that attempts at collective organizing based on a shared politics of race have failed at times due to conflicts around the definition and formation of ‘community’ (2000). Wong notes that artists in general, but particularly Asian artists, have difficulty accessing audiences. Despite outsiders’ perceptions of cohesion, Chinese communities in Canada are culturally and ideologically polarized (1987c). Wong addresses these perceptions in So are you by way of a documentary-style interview with Tim and Eric, two seemingly identical (white) twins. Tim and Eric talk about their similarities and speak at length about their differences, including their opposing thoughts and feelings. The two men emphasize the negative aspects of being twins, pointing to the lack of individuality and opportunity for unique self-expression they encountered growing up. In this scene, Wong employs video editing techniques, such as the superimposition of images, and images which are reflected, flipped, doubled and re-doubled to emphasize the twins’ physical similarities. Here, Wong’s presentations illustrate that the physical similarities of the twins result in the assumption that they are also similar with respect to personality. In so
doing, Wong confronts the construction of identity based on physical appearance and points to the inaccuracy of assumptions regarding the lack of difference among similar-looking individuals. While Asian communities in Canada have been constructed in this way, there does not exist one monolithic 'Asian' or even 'Chinese' community, anymore than there is a single homogenous 'white' community. Instead, Wong notes, class, politics, religion and other identities differ and sometimes conflict within the Asian-Canadian community (1990). Activist/artists in the 1990s, including Wong, worked to counter inaccurate perceptions of individuals and communities of colour.

*Empowering Events: Art-based initiatives by and for people of colour*

Alteen notes that in the early 1990s, artists of colour and aboriginal artists began curating exhibitions within the system of artist-run centres in Canada. These exhibitions often dealt with issues of race and “attempted to establish power and retain ‘voice’” within racialised communities (1995: 17). Until this time, exhibitions at artist-run centres that addressed issues of culture and race were not largely organized by people of colour, nor Aboriginal peoples. This change was initiated, in part, with the aim of increasing the diversity of audiences and artists, particularly with respect to gender, race and sexuality, within artist-run centres (ibid.).

In making space for artists of colour, writes Alteen, artist-run centres were attempting to encourage free and open dialogues around race and sexuality in a way that was seldom possible in mainstream spaces. Importantly, Alteen notes, “these exhibitions all envisaged audiences from the same communities as the artists they represented” (1995: 20). These events, he notes, were successful in addressing the heterogeneity of artists and audiences and in bringing together artists with diverse racial and sexual identities (ibid.). Despite these attempts to support artists
and audiences of colour, however, artist-run centres continued to be staffed and accessed primarily by white artists and audiences (Gagnon, 2000). Given the continued whiteness of artist-run centres, it is evident that these initiatives were not entirely or effectively diversifying Canadian art communities.

In response to the continued whiteness of art communities, artists of colour began to organize events, exhibitions and collectives outside of the system of artist run centres. As Alteen observes, these initiatives included "[t]he first exhibitions addressing race and identity politics" (1995: 16) in Canada. The conferences and exhibits that arose out of initiatives by people of colour both challenged dominant understandings of identity and legitimized art and cultural works that were previously undervalued. As these initiatives evolved, Gagnon notes, they focused less on critiquing dominant institutions and more on examining identity and politicized understandings of race (2000). This movement away from examining institutions acted to delegitimize dominant institutions as cites of valid cultural production and transferred that power into the hands of those excluded from dominant institutions. Gagnon explains that the efforts of marginalized peoples to discuss and organize around issues which affect them directly are of great importance. Through these efforts, she writes, marginalized peoples can work together to "claim their own subjecthood" (1995: 97). Thus, these events were mounted, first and foremost, by and for artists of colour in Canada and aimed to empower marginalized peoples.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, exhibits organized by and featuring the works of people of colour were mounted by Canadians in this country and around the world. Paul Wong co-curated two of the most noteworthy of these exhibits, the *Asian new world* festival in 1988⁶

---

⁵ For the purposes of this exhibit, Paul Wong defined the 'New World' as English-speaking North America, but he acknowledges that the Asian diaspora is dispersed throughout the world. Wong also acknowledges the presence and importance of Asian-Canadian artists in Francophone Canada and elsewhere in the Americas, but states that he and the other exhibit organisers had no established contact with people in these areas and, therefore, these regions were
and *Yellow peril: Reconsidered* two years later. The *Asian new world* film and video festival, an exhibition of sixteen Asian Canadian artists, was mounted in London, England.\(^7\) Paul Wong explained that the goal of the *Asian new world* festival was to open discussion around issues affecting Asian peoples in the ‘New World’, and to inform, provoke and entertain those viewing the exhibit (1987b). In pursuit of these goals, the *Asian new world* festival sought to broaden media arts networks, to work towards the inclusion of Asian artists in mainstream and alternative art spaces and to alleviate stereotypes and stimulate dialogues regarding difference (Sage, 1987).

Some of the main issues addressed in this exhibit included examinations of the (in)visibility of people of colour in predominantly white spaces as well as examinations of the social construction of race, culture and difference.

The success of the *Asian new world* exhibit led to the organization of other festivals and exhibits which directly addressed issues of Asian culture, race and art. Inspired by his experiences with the *Asian new world* festival, Wong was prompted to organize the *Yellow peril: Reconsidered* exhibit in 1990-1991, which he co-curated with Elspeth Sage. This exhibit showcased the film, video and photographic works of 25 Asian\(^8\) Canadian artists. Wong writes that the decision to focus on the media of photography, video and film was a political one. He observes that these media have been employed extensively to appropriate and misrepresent Asian cultures and histories. By reappropriating them, Wong states, Asian artists can work toward reclaiming and re-presenting their own cultures, images and histories. Further, he explains, photography, film, and video are practical media for information and idea sharing as they can be not included in the festival. They also chose not to include Asian producers living in their countries of origin (Wong, 1987c).

\(^6\) Published by the Satellite Video Exchange Society, *Video Guide* Issue 40, Volume 8, number 5 was the *Asian new world* thematic issue that doubled as a guide for the festival and was guest edited by Paul Wong. That an entire edition of this paper was dedicated to the festival points to the significance of the event.

\(^7\) The exhibit was presented at both the Chisenhale Gallery and Canada House in London.

\(^8\) In applying the ‘Asian’ identity category to the artists in this exhibit, Wong “defined ‘Asian’ by the colour of our skin and the geographic regions it implies” (Wong, 1990: 6).
easily reproduced and therefore distributed more widely than is possible for other art forms (1990).

The *Yellow peril* exhibit toured across the country and was shown at artist run centres in Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver. Though it was mounted at artist run centres, the exhibit was conceived of and organized outside of these organizations. The decision to initiate this exhibit outside of the system of artist-run centres was also a conscious and significant one. At the time, Wong noted that artist-run centres were ""predominantly operated by and for the white middle class”" (Alteen, 1995: 17). As an active and founding member of Video In, Wong was intimately acquainted with the system of artist-run centres and their cultural make-up. Given his involvement in these centres and art communities in Canada, it is particularly significant that Wong chose to mount this exhibit semi-independently of these centres. Through *Yellow peril: Reconsidered*, writes Alteen, Wong and other artists "attempted to break into the predominantly white stronghold" on the Canadian art world (ibid.). This exhibit directly and effectively confronted issues of racism and whiteness in artist-run centres and in Canadian society as a whole.

Canadian art movements in the early 1990s were linked to the rejection of multiculturalism and its insistence on an equality that doesn’t exist (Lai, 2000). Exhibits like *Yellow peril: Reconsidered* addressed the denial of racism in Canada and "broke the taboo against speaking about racial difference" (ibid.: 16). The exhibit, writes Lai, "was a reclamation of those categories that Europe used to colonise the globe" (ibid.). At the same time, *Yellow peril: Reconsidered* addressed issues of gender and sexuality and drew attention to the intersections between those racialised, sexualized and gendered identities. Wong explains that "[m]any of the *Yellow peril* artists are gay or lesbian and some have dealt with these issues in
their work” (1990: 10). For example, Richard Fung’s works addressed issues of Asian men in relation to white gay pornography and other works addressing “interracial expectations of obsession and fetish” (ibid.: 11) were included in the exhibit. In the early 1990s, writes Alteen, an abrupt shift towards acknowledging and examining the intersections of race and sexuality occurred within exhibitions at artist-run centres (1995).

Black like you: The performance of gender and race in So are you

According to Gagnon, the political examinations of race in video in the 1990s were an extension of earlier gay and lesbian, feminist and class-based examinations of identity politics. She observes that gay, lesbian, and queer communities have created spaces for the production, exhibition and discussion of gay, lesbian and queer art that has traditionally been marginalised (2000). By the 1990s, Warner writes, the term ‘queer’ was being employed in activism that was an extension of earlier gay and lesbian movements. ‘Queer’ was employed as a more comprehensive term, which aimed to include many peoples marginalized on the basis of gender and sexuality. At this time, he observes, there were also concerted efforts to include people of colour and Aboriginal people in queer communities. Despite these attempts to acknowledge diversity, many queer organizations continue to face criticism for not being inclusive enough, especially with respect to racial difference (2000).

Given the dominance of gendered and sexualized racial stereotypes in the media, many artists find these particularly important sites to engage with and critique. Richard Fung, for example, praises video productions in which videomakers examine issues of gender and sexuality as they relate to issues of race (1990). Likewise, in her own video works, Onodera rejects “models or categories of production which have historically denied and co-opted screen
representations of women, lesbians, gay men and people of colour" (1990: 30). Onodera’s strategy for countering these problematic dominant representations is to “engage the language of film, video and television to develop an alternative voice revealing [her] point of view” (ibid.: 30). As Butler points out, however, engaging with these dominant discourses is an uneasy process beset with complexities. She writes that we live in “a culture that appears to arrange always and in every way for the annihilation of queers” (Butler, 1997: 384). At the same time, she notes that within this culture, there still exists spaces and opportunities to challenge, re-interpret, perform and redefine understandings of gender and race.

Butler argues that identities are created within and delimited by regimes of power. We can not fully extricate ourselves from the identities which are assigned to us because, in articulating our position against these identities, we must necessarily refer to them; however, speaking of positionalities such as race, gender and sexuality does not “only and always reconsolidate the oppressive regimes of power by which they are spawned” (ibid.: 383). Butler notes as well that the dominant position has the power to ‘renaturalize’ normative presentations by rejecting non-normative presentations of gender. Drag, then, may have the effect of reiterating and reinforcing dominant (heteronormative) norms, rather than undermining them. In such cases, referencing the dominant norm “becomes the means by which that dominant norm is most painfully reiterated as the very desire and the performance of those it subjects” (ibid.: 389). Butler maintains however that re-imagining and re-producing identities in ways that counter the manner in which they were originally imagined within relations of power acts to “reverse and displace their originating aims” (ibid.: 383). Insofar as this is the case, gender norms are constantly shifting and are, therefore, revealed as tenuous and transformable.
Wong emphasizes the constructed and unstable nature of gender and sexuality as they relate to race throughout *So are you*. In this video, Wong interviews Andrew and Steven, two white men who do drag performances under the name ‘the Big Wigs’. One of the men explains that they are inspired in their drag personas by “certain images from crossing many visual media, such as films that have always struck [them] in a certain way.” The men often perform as white, blonde women, but explain that they also “portray the Big Wigs as black women and...will portray, some day, the Big Wigs as Chinese women...with big gold teeth”. In one scene with the Big Wigs, Wong documents the two men readying themselves for a drag performance in which they dress as black women. Andrew and Steven are shown with their faces and necks painted dark brown and with black wigs on. Steven is shown sticking a wooden bead into his nostril to widen his nose. Steven states, “Thank God for macramé. If only the old hippies could see what was happening to their wooden beads, girl”. Steven explains that becoming black for their performance “really happens when the nose happens. Once you get those beads up your nose, you’re automatically a black woman.” Steven then adds, “and it is an attitude. It’s the way you carry yourself”. Andrew expands on Steven’s statement and says that when dressing as a black woman, “You adopt that sort of cheeky black girl attitude”. Steven agrees that “you get that real sassiness about you”. Steven also states that “if you forget you’re black when you’re [performing], all you have to do is look in a mirror and you start becoming black again”. He also explains that “People treat you differently when you’re black. Even as beautiful as I feel tonight, I still get treated differently when I’m blonde...and white”. Butler confirms Steven’s observation about the intersections of race, gender and biological sex in drag performances and notes that in some instances⁹ “the norms of realness by which the subject is produced are racially

---

⁹ Here, Butler refers to drag performances at the New York drag ‘balls’ documented in Jennie Livingston’s 1990 film *Paris is burning*. 
informed conceptions of 'sex’” (1997: 388). Butler claims that drag is not necessarily subversive in every instance. In some instances, she explains, drag can be understood as “being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposed” (ibid.: 384). This interview with Andrew and Steven reveals how dominant constructions of gender, race and sexuality can be reiterated and reinforced in drag performances.

The Big Wig’s performances are based on dominant constructions of black women as different from white women. At the same time, their performances illustrate the fact that both gender and race merely repeat performances of dominant constructions. In this way, Butler shows, it is possible for drag performance to simultaneously challenge and reinforce hereternormative understandings of gender. Despite the fact that drag performance is bounded by what regimes of power allow us to imagine with regards to gender, it is always subversive to a certain extent. Butler points out that drag destabilizes and reveals the constructed and artificial nature of gender—and, in this case, race. In this way, drag “calls into question the claims of normativity and originality by which gender and sexual oppression sometimes operate” (ibid.: 386). Butler explains that drag “reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality’s claim on naturalness and originality” (ibid.: 384).

While drag is often understood as performance, Butler also conceives of heterosexuality as a performance that is constantly asserting its naturalness, normalcy and boundaries. This need for the constant reinforcement of the boundaries of normalcy proves rather that heterosexuality is not normal or safe from encroachment. Ultimately, drag has the potential to subvert and invalidate norms of gender, sexuality and race (ibid.). Wong’s presentation of The Big Wigs points to the constructed and performative character of gender, race and sexuality and indicates that these identities are changeable. As social interactions are largely organized around identity,
Wong indicates that the radical restructuring of social relations depends on acknowledging identity as constructed.

Conclusion

In the 1980s and 1990s, video artists were actively questioning the dominance of Western art and art institutions, writes Zippay. Through their interrogations, video artists aimed to "puncture the historical and popular texts through which cultural, racial and sexual identity has been defined and manipulated" (1991: 8). Works by artists such as Paul Wong troubled the "complex relationships between race, identity and stereotypes, commenting in different ways on a society largely blind not only to racist attitudes but non-white cultural practices in general" (Gilbert, 1993: 23). In this way, narratives were effectively re-written and re-imagined by artists who had been marginalized by mainstream art practices and ideologies.

The power structures established through racist colonial practices continue to function successfully today and affect the lives of videomakers in Vancouver. In 1991, Video In was contacted by the Canada Council's Standing Committee on Communications and Culture regarding the Committee's study titled, "The Implications of Communications and Culture for Canadian Unity". The letter indicated that the Committee intended to gather information from cultural and communications organisations regarding three subthemes: 'The Social Dimensions of Communication', 'The Common Denominators of Heritage', and 'The Arts and the Canadian Identity'. For each subtheme, Video In was asked to "address related factors which contribute to the development of a shared Canadian identity, or those which conversely may obstruct or distort a common vision of our country" (SVES Archives (k): n.p.). Further, the letter states that the

---

10 From the Canada Council 1990-1991 Folder From a paper from the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture" "The Implications of Communications and Culture for Canadian Unity" Terms of Reference September 26, 1991
committees' "observations and recommendations will be intended to identify the fundamental influences at work and propose means...to enhance a state of pride in and commitment to Canadian citizenship" (ibid.). Despite the fact that artists such as Paul Wong have challenged the discourses created within and in support of Canada's nationalizing agenda at Video In, the organisation is asked to participate in the very process that has been so extensively challenged by its members. The questions proposed the Standing Committee in this letter leave no room for the implication that this agenda might not be a desirable one. Artists in Canada continue to confront such agendas.
Final Conclusions

Summary of research findings

The shift towards conceptual art, with its emphasis on ideas over aesthetics, contributed to the eventual acceptance of video in many mainstream and alternative art spaces. While video has been accepted, even annexed, by the art world, it has been overlooked in many academic contexts. Postmodern theories have been distinguished by an interest in pastiche, parody, reference to self and history, the rejection of totalizing narratives and the erosion of disciplinary boundaries. It is through the contributions of postmodern thinking, then, that I am able to examine the marginalized medium of video from a sociological perspective. Sociology boasts no tools for the examination of aesthetic objects, thus, video-as-art can not be examined from this point of view. Thus, I have worked to establish that, like the written and verbal texts regularly studied by sociologists, the discourses presented in video works can be read in terms of meaning, intent and symbolism and can be analysed in the context of broader social relations.

In *The History of sexuality: An introduction (volume 1)*, Foucault (1990) claims that social phenomena are constructed within and through discourse in given times and spaces. Thus, the analysis of spatially and temporally unfolding discourses is imperative to understanding prevailing social relations. Through such analyses, relations of power-knowledge are exposed and possibilities for rupturing existing relations are made evident. While Foucault’s work refers to specific discourses of sexuality, I have determined that it can be expanded upon and applied to intersecting discourses of gender, race and sexuality in the Canadian (neo)colonial situation. Like Foucault, Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999), acknowledges that social identities and understandings are related to discursive practices; she contributes useful expansions and critiques of Foucault’s work, especially with regard to the
intersection of socially-created identities and with her anti-essentialist examination of identity formation. Recognizing, however, that theoretical models necessarily simplify complex social processes, I have created a more nuanced examination of specific historical and contemporary discourses and relations in order to connect the discourses I examine with the material realities they influence.

In this research, Foucault's four cautionary prescriptions, laid out in Part IV, Chapter 1, "Method" (1990), have proved to be an effective base for a method of analysis which reveals the interconnections between systems of power, schemas of knowledge and discourses. I combine this method with examinations of activist/artist initiatives motivated by the material realities of discursively created identities. I then work to illuminate the extent to which discursive innovations lead to tangible social change—change which has real material effects, not only for the artists and activists who engage in the discursive process through their works, but also for society as a whole.

Foucault asserts that the 'rules,' he lays out in his method of discourse analysis should be used as guidelines or recommendations for areas of examination and ways of understanding discourse and discourse analysis. While these 'rules' are useful approaches for creating a method of discourse analysis, they do not exhaust all useful areas of study, nor do they apply uniformly in all instances, he explains. As this is the case, I have isolated Foucault's 'rules' in this research and have applied each to a case in which it is particularly relevant. In this way, I am able to fully explicate, apply, critique and expand on one of Foucault's 'rules,' in each chapter of this thesis. However, in reflecting back on the entirety of my research, I am also able to apply these rules in concert and in relation to each other.
In Chapter 1, I applied the 'rule of double conditioning,' in situating Wong in the early history of local video art and activism. In this chapter, I confirm the central tenet of this 'rule': that relations of power-knowledge are linked to other social and political relations and that the inequalities experienced in these relations result in challenges to prevailing relations. Indeed, in this chapter, I show that the history of video is as much, and perhaps more, a history of activist than of artistic undertakings. In Chapter 2, I employed the 'rule of immanence,' which asserts that local centres provide an seat from which to analyse discourse, as relations of power and knowledge are directly experienced and are, therefore, best observed in these spaces. In this analysis, I confirm Foucault's assertion that in these spaces we can observe the repetition, interrogation and challenging of prevailing discourses. In applying this rule, I analysed 60 unit: Bruise in terms of what it said about local relations of gender, race and sexuality in relation to the local history of colonial discourses and to local challenges mounted in the face of these discourses. In Chapter 3, I used the 'rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses' to illustrate the fact that discourses are strategically deployed in numerous and sometimes conflicting manoeuvres. In my analysis of Confused: Sexual views and discourses of sexuality and censorship, I show that specific discourses are employed in the service of prevailing relations at the same time as they are employed in challenges to those relations. Finally, in Chapter 4, I applied Foucault's 'rules of continual variations,' which emphasize the constant changeability of relations of power-knowledge and of discourses to my analysis of So are you. Here, I consider Foucault's claim that it is not possible to isolate who has access to particular aspects of discourse and relations of power-knowledge and who does not. In this chapter, then, I chose to focus my analysis on the transformations that occur in specific discursive sites.
When compared with each other, *60 Unit: Bruise*, *Confused: Sexual views* and *So are you* are similar in that each addresses discourses of gender, race, sexuality and the intersections between these identities. Furthermore, each work can be connected to the changing social and political histories that inform experiences of these identities. By placing these discourses in their historical context, it is possible to chart the occurrence of discursive and material transformations. Importantly, the 2002 retrospective of Wong’s work at the Vancouver Art Gallery included parts of *Confused: Sexual views*, the very work considered so controversial that it was cancelled by the gallery nearly two decades earlier. That this work was exhibited in the retrospective points to the fact that it is no longer considered too risqué to show, nor is it contested as a piece of art. Importantly, it was the discourses and actions initiated through this work and in response to the cancellation which contributed to changing understandings of the discourses it presents. The inclusion of this work in the VAG retrospective also, then, points to its continued significance as a piece of activist/art.

As an activist/artist, Paul Wong has worked for more than 35 years, intently questioning mainstream representations and understandings of gender, race and sexuality through his video works. Through these interrogations, video artists aimed to “puncture the historical and popular texts through which cultural, racial and sexual identity has been defined and manipulated” (Zippay, 1991: 8). Works by artists such as Wong have troubled the “complex relationships between race, identity and stereotypes, commenting in different ways on a society largely blind not only to racist attitudes but non-white cultural practices in general” (Gilbert, 1993: 23). In this way, mainstream narratives have been re-written and re-imagined by artists marginalized by mainstream practices and ideologies. Through activist/artists’ work to chart social and political histories using anti-racist and queer initiatives and critical discourses, attempts to change the
power in Canada had begun. Despite these accomplishments, relations of power-knowledge established through racist, sexist and homophobic colonial discourses continue to function successfully today and affect the lives and work of videomakers in Vancouver.

While I was in the midst of writing this thesis, Paul Wong was awarded a 2005 Governor General's award in visual and media arts. For me, this event confirmed the importance of my research, as it pointed both to the enduring importance of Wong’s work, and also to the continued importance of emphasizing the activists dimensions of this work. While the Governor General’s award publication detailing Wong’s achievements does point briefly to the activist dimensions of his work, the extent of this activism is drastically underemphasized. Further, while Wong’s examinations of ‘Asian identities’ are mentioned, the catalogue completely ignores his engagement in discourses around homosexuality. I hope that in tying Wong’s work into the history and present of colonial relations and discourses on sexuality, I have asserted the continued significance of even his earliest works in the complex evolution of discourses and to the social relations tied to these discourses.
Scholarly sources


Art exhibit was offensive, court hears. (1986, February 8). Vancouver Sun, p. C14.


Ban damaged artists, court told. (1986, February 5). The Vancouver Sun, B6.


Moore, Mavor. (1987). To be more visible you have to be seen. Video Guide (8)40, number 5, p.6.


Pechawis, Archer. (1995). If all the trees in the Artist-run forest were clear-cut, would anyone give a shit? In Remick Ho, Henry Tsang & Beverly Yhap, (Eds.), Racy Sexy: Race, Culture, Sexuality [exhibition catalogue]. (pp. 23-26). Chinese Cultural Centre of Vancouver: Vancouver.


Archival sources


Satellite Video Exchange Society Archives (k). Video Out Distribution Files 1971-2000, A151-
Canada Council correspondence 1990-1991 folder, "The Implications of Communications and
Culture for Canadian Unity: Terms of Reference, September 26, 1991" (A paper from the
Canadian federal government's Standing Committee on Communications and Culture), n.p.

Daybook, 1986, (1 volume) (n.p.).

Satellite Video Exchange Society Archives (m). General Administrative Files 1973-1996, A044-
Daybook, 1984, (1 volume) (n.p.).

Satellite Video Exchange Society Archives (n). General Administrative Files 1973-1996, A044-
Daybook, 1983, (1 volume) (n.p.).

On-line sources


British Columbia Legislative Assembly. (1986a). May 21, 1986, Afternoon Legislative Session:

British Columbia Legislative Assembly. (1986b). June 12, 1986, Afternoon Legislative Session:

British Columbia Legislative Assembly. (1986c). June 17, 1986, Morning Legislative Session:


Video sources


Wong, Paul (Producer/Director). (1994). *So are you* [video]. Vancouver, B.C.