



fig.1 Joyce Wieland performing as Laura Secord in **True Patriot Love**, 1971, artist's bookwork, p.191, NGC.
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JOYCE WIELAND AT THE BORDER

Nationalism, the New Left, and the Question of Political Art in Canada

In an interview given to *Miss Chatelaine* magazine in 1973, Joyce Wieland explained her return to Canada after having spent most of the 1960s living in the United States: "I felt I couldn't make aesthetic statements in New York any more. I didn't want to be part of the corporate structure which makes Vietnam."¹ This statement points to Wieland's shifting artistic identity from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies when she moved between the U.S.A. and Canada, and as she positioned herself strategically at the border. Many artists and intellectuals of her generation developed an anti-war, anti-corporate political consciousness, and this coincided with an assertion of Canadian identity on this side of the border. Wieland made counter-cultural values the very basis of an artistic project however. By the time of her solo exhibition *True Patriot Love/Veritable Amour Patriotique* at the National Gallery of Canada in 1971, she had forged an inventive and humourous political art that also challenged the norms of nationalist art. The artworks addressed Canada's political and economic sovereignty, ecological damage to the North, and the American war in Southeast Asia; and did so in the guise of conceptually-wrought photographs, cinematic fragments, objects that mimicked the plastic-wrapped world of commercial pop culture, as well as various stitched, hand-crafted, or otherwise feminized and "low-tech" artefacts. With this material heterogeneity, Wieland set in motion a process by which the attributes of nationhood could be continually unmade and remade. The exhibition received much attention although critics were split on its value as nationalist art, as political art, or as any kind of meaningful art. Some authors would remark on its anti-American stance while ironically others suggested the opposite. I will return to these critical responses and particularly to the writing of Barry Lord, who refused to regard Wieland's exhibition at the National Gallery as a legitimate political intervention. In his opinion, "this burlesque of our national symbols was a slap in the face to patriotic Canadians."² For Lord, the artwork looked too much like Pop Art and therefore represented a capitulation to American cultural imperialism.

This article analyzes the new kind of political art Wieland presented to the nation in 1971. It can be argued that Wieland's work remains fascinating and relevant because ecology, feminism, social justice, and nationalism are so thoroughly entwined and these issues are all components of her politicized art practice. Much of the best scholarship on Wieland's visual art has been informed by feminism;³

I want to investigate how Wieland's artwork also resonated with the "New Left" articulation of nationalism, and with a radical critique of U.S. economic and foreign policies. To some extent, this means returning to those critical voices that most immediately framed Wieland's 1971 exhibition. But it is also an opportune time to revisit the anti-American rhetoric in Wieland's art because ideological differences between the U.S.A. and Canada are once more being debated against a backdrop of war, while post-9/11 border-crossing has become a potentially fraught and politicized action. Ten years after the National Gallery exhibition, Wieland would observe that her compatriots "didn't like my sense of humour in relation to nationalist politics."⁴ If we find ourselves equally reluctant to joke about these matters today, this is another reason to look anew at an art practiced on the border.

The Canada – U.S. border was indeed a recurring motif in Wieland's art practice during the 1960s and 70s. On more than one occasion the historical figure of Laura Secord provided the artist with a kind of imaginary alter ego through which she could negotiate a space between the two countries. The *True Patriot Love* exhibition of 1971 included black and white photographs of the artist reenacting Secord's trek through enemy lines during the War of 1812, as she alerted fellow-Canadians to an imminent American invasion.⁵ All we actually see in these images is the artist wearing a semblance of nineteenth-century dress (fig.1), striding across a snowy field. The cow that comically hovers nearby was supposedly Secord's decoy. Wieland's performance and the resulting documentary-style photographs, apparently provide "proof" of an individual woman's small contribution to a collective effort to keep Americans off Canadian soil. The actual border is not evident in this imagery and the background scenery might well correspond to any number of northerly places on the continent. And yet, Secord's presence in this otherwise anonymous locale makes it a politicized border-zone.

Wieland evidently considered it important to resurrect this historical episode, when the sovereignty of Canada was threatened and the border was unmistakably contested. The artist's gleeful incarnation as the anti-American heroine Laura Secord linked past to present, and certainly Wieland's contemporaries would have been highly attuned to these issues. Greg Curnoe is notable amongst other Canadian artists of this generation because he also made the looming presence of the U.S.A. the very subject-matter of his art. His censured *Dorval Mural* of 1968 is key in this respect as the large anti-war painting would have been seen by thousands of people entering or leaving the country through the Montreal airport.⁶ For both artists, developing a critique of the United States was essential to their understanding of themselves as politicized Canadian artists. Wieland called herself a "protective nationalist,"⁷ and Curnoe would similarly comment that, "I have a sense of nationalism but it's simply protective.... My sense of nationalism is simply Anti-Americanism, just fuck the Americans."⁸ Whereas Curnoe remained sceptical about the benefits

of any form of national art and was more inclined to champion regional or provincial culture, Wieland became committed to the idea that a new kind of nationalist art was possible. It is important to note that Wieland began to tackle the question of what "Canadian Art" might eventually become while living in New York City during the 1960s when her work was also responding to the excesses of American nationalism/patriotism. Even when it appears to be most Canadian, therefore, Wieland's artwork must also be understood in relation to the intersection of art and politics as it was being played out in the U.S.A.

During her New York years, Wieland made a series of assemblages and short films dealing with the Vietnam War. This body of work aligns her with that generation of American artists, intellectuals, students and activists who sought to express their moral outrage about the war, and their alienation from governmental and institutional authority. Vietnam was *the* issue around which a countercultural political consciousness was forged. Despite the near unanimity of anti-war sentiment within the art world, however, there would be no consensus about the role that art should play. Indeed, the 1960s art-world was fractured by disagreements about whether or not it was possible to make effective political art, and scholars continue to debate the issue up to the present day. Tony Godfrey has asserted that, "given the political furore of the time, it is surprising how little art addressed the political situation directly."⁹ Francis Frascina argues that overtly political art was marginalized or silenced during the sixties, and discusses collaborative efforts that were staged outside of the museum/gallery circuit such as the 1966 *Peace Tower* in Los Angeles and the 1967 *Angry Arts Week* in New York City.¹⁰ What is striking about this model of political art is how it attempted to integrate artists' individual contributions into the collective gestures of activism: demonstrations with their jumble of banners and signage, crowds of people chanting or singing, and theatrical actions like burning draft cards. Other artists were uncomfortable with the very idea of refashioning their art for a political cause and attempted to come up with alternative strategies. In 1968, for instance, Lucy Lippard helped organize "a striking show of major Minimal art whose content had nothing to do with the war," as a benefit for the "Student Mobilization Against the War" group.¹¹ Donald Judd, Carl André, Sol LeWitt and the other participants decided to exhibit examples of their usual (apparently apolitical and relatively autonomous) art practices while still raising their voices as artists in support of the anti-war movement. André, as spokesman for the New York-based *Art Workers' Coalition*, tried to convince his peers that "artists could politicize themselves rather than their art."¹² Some artists did make explicitly anti-war art that was meant to be exhibited on its own merit; for example Leon Golub's *Napalm* and *Vietnam* series of paintings featured flayed and dismembered victims of the war. It can be argued that works such as these were a legitimate prolongation of the old-left tradition of socially engaged realism that

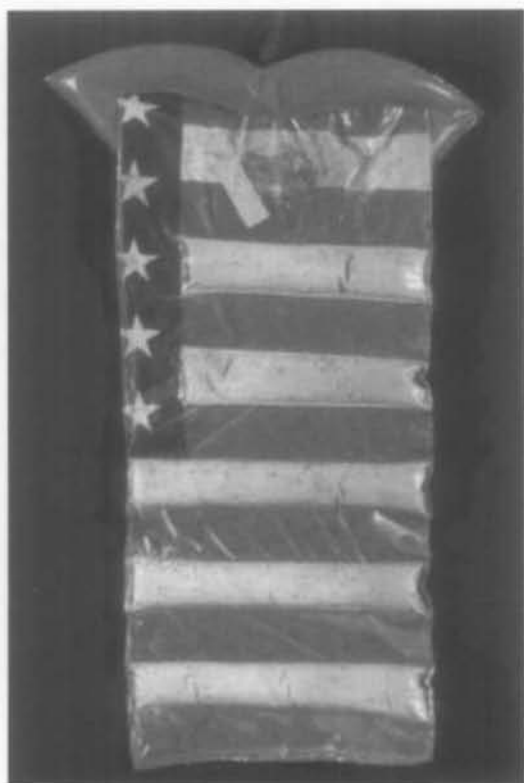


fig.2 Joyce Wieland, **Betsy Ross, look what they've done to the flag you made with such care**, 1966, mixed media, 56 x 34 cm, Edie and Morden Yolles, Toronto. (Photo: Courtesy of M. Yolles)
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had historically taken the form of easel painting, murals or printmaking. But for many more artists of the sixties, the heroic legacy of the Mexican muralists and the powerful American realism of the WPA years no longer seemed to offer an appropriate aesthetic vocabulary for their political concerns.

Perhaps the body of work that can be most profitably compared to Wieland's Vietnam-inspired artwork is Martha Rosler's *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* (1967-72). The series juxtaposed images of the war and home decor, using the photographic imagery readily available to the American public on television or in the successive pages of picture magazines. Cutting and pasting, Rosler made this proximity obscene: horrific scenes from the war appear at the windows of elegantly decorated suburban homes, or soldiers brandish guns right there on the sparkling kitchen floor. Wieland also made a significant body of work in 1966 and 1967 which, like Rosler's, brought mass-media images of the Vietnam War up against the colourful, mood-enhancing world of America's consumer culture. In works such as *N.U.C.* (1966), *War and Peace: 8mm Home Movie* (1966-67), *Patriotism* (1966), and *Betsy Ross, look what they've done to the flag you made with such care* (fig.2), ephemeral and grayish newspaper images are encased in shiny, multi-coloured plastic shapes hand-sewn by the artist. This series of work is Pop-like, not so much because it borrows the iconography of popular culture but rather because the artworks mimic its semiotic and sensory impact – the polychrome, sheen and glamour of post-war plastic objects and appliances. In *N.U.C.* (which could stand for "Navy Unit Citation," a Vietnam-era military award), a plastic dollar sign frames a newspaper image of wounded soldiers in a field, while a dangling star-covered heart can be opened up to reveal additional clippings about Vietnam. In *Betsy Ross, look what they've done to the flag you made with such care*, large red lips disgorge a tongue-like American flag, on which a circle of Vietnam imagery is revealed like a canker sore. "Vietnam" thus becomes a malignant blot impeding the flag's role as a genuine patriotic symbol.

With such works, Wieland joined the many other artists who treated the American flag as something contaminated by a shameful war; but what is remarkable about *Betsy Ross* is that the artist summoned up the spectre of the woman reknowned for having hand-stitched the first U.S. flag. If Wieland could urge Canadians to commemorate Laura Secord for her historic anti-imperialist walk, so too this work suggested, should Americans take care to appreciate Ross and the emancipatory spirit that accompanied the first material incarnation of the Stars and Stripes. Wieland obviously admired this seamstress/heroine and a few years later she would make the feminized home-made flag a privileged object for her own nationalist-art project in Canada.

Rosler and Wieland seemed to show how easily the disconnected fragments and detritus of the contemporary image-world could be reassembled to create new images and new meanings. The Vietnam art of Wieland and Rosler is also awash

with feminist connotations, since “bringing the war home” implied a gendered distinction between public and private realms. Rosler’s photomontages point to the ideological role played by home-and-garden photography while Wieland challenged the public status of the newspaper photograph by inserting it into personalized, fetish-like objects. This re-framing demonstrated how a mediatized war becomes lodged in subjective experience and in everyday domestic spaces.¹³ If the ambition to breach the boundaries between art and everyday life goes back to the historic avant-garde, the implications of such a gesture would be different for the “neo-avant garde” of the 1960s and 70s. As Andreas Huyssen explains: “the earlier avant-garde was confronted with the culture industry in its stage of inception while postmodernism had to face a technologically and economically fully developed media culture.”¹⁴ These interventions into the technocratic visual culture of the time represent a key transitional moment in the understanding of what politically-engaged art could be in a North-American context. Crucially they indicated a new development beyond social realism’s apparent demise.

Not long after making her anti-war assemblages, Wieland completed the 14-minute film *Rat Life and Diet in North America*, an animal allegory which evokes the anti-war movement, draft-dodgers, American imperialism, Canadian nationhood, and ecological concerns, etc. At the time of its first screening, Jonas Mekas said that, “It may be about the best (or richest) political movie around.”¹⁵ Lucy Lippard would later remark that Wieland was “perhaps fortunate not to be characterized as a ‘political artist’ although several of her short films are among the best political art of the 1960s.”¹⁶ Notwithstanding Lippard’s ambivalence about the term, it could be said that *Rat Life and Diet in North America* more than any other work earned Wieland the “political artist” label. It is somewhat ironic that around this time Wieland was affiliated with the so-called “structural” side of the experimental film scene that has been described as “a ‘process’-orientated endeavour, eschewing content, narrative and illusionistic techniques.”¹⁷ If Wieland’s films (and other artworks) set out to deconstruct conventional narrative, they are far from “eschewing content” because the narrative fragments inevitably point to complex socio-political questions.

The gesture of border-crossing in *Rat Life and Diet in North America* (fig.3) is both funny and ideologically incisive, prefiguring the serio-comedy of the later Laura Secord impersonation, but the point-of-view is different. While the Secord figure is positioned on the Canadian side of the border looking across empty fields toward the U.S., the film’s protagonists initially regard the border from a beleaguered position within the States. We are told that *Rat Life*’s rat-heroes are political prisoners who manage to escape over the border into Canada where they proceed to take up organic farming, only to have their dream of a new life shattered by the end of the film when Canada is invaded by America. The various episodes in this rudimentary story are made intelligible through a sequence of intertitles and

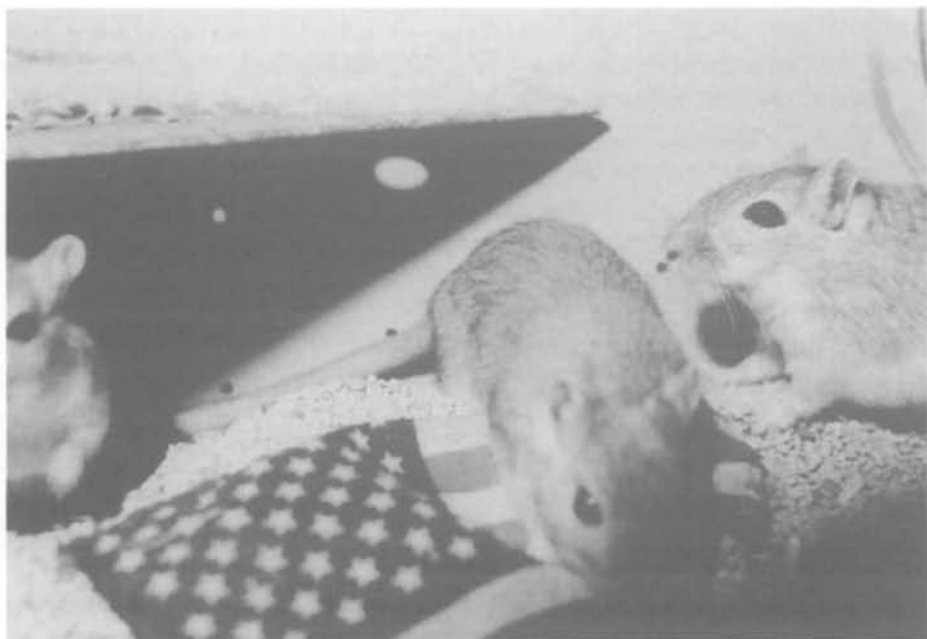


fig.3 Joyce Wieland, still from the film **Rat Life and Diet in North America**, 1968,
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subtitles. Otherwise the film is characterized by its sequence of artful, colourful compositions that usually involve eating: we see the heros gnawing away at an American flag, nibbling away at a richly-appointed dinner table when they are on the run and have broken into a millionaire's home, or munching away amidst a splendid natural landscape of fruit and flowers north of the border. There is a conspicuous difference between this film and the anti-war assemblages, because now Canada comes into focus as an escape route, a vision of healthy fecundity, and ultimately as a political alternative.

It must be remembered that this film was made at the height of the Vietnam War, when anti-war protests were increasing and tens of thousands of draft-dodgers and army deserters found refuge in Canada. The film does not deliver a happy ending: the final inter-title and a loud thud announce that the U.S. has invaded the country, and

an earlier inter-title had already informed viewers that “Canada is seventy-two per cent owned by the U.S. industrial complex.” However, crossing the American/Canadian border was not a meaningless gesture. Although the little animals would not ultimately escape their persecutors and Canadians were not truly in control of their own territory, somehow moving northward was still emancipatory and “Canada” could function as a signifier of freedom and pleasure. Considering that 1968, the year *Rat Life and Diet in North America* was made, was the culminating moment of the decade’s revolutionary youth movement, it could be said that Wieland’s rodent flower-children are the very embodiments of that countercultural impulse. When Wieland refused to remain “part of the corporate structure which makes Vietnam,” this was a sentiment she shared with many Americans of her generation. But for Wieland this meant she would turn to Canada with a new-found nationalist fervour and the volition to make a different kind of political art. When Wieland claimed she “couldn’t make aesthetic statements in New York any more,” this was not because other artists in the U.S. did not share her political views, as we have already seen. Circa 1971, it seemed that politicized artists in the U.S. had no choice, however, but to make art that was critical, angry, and oppositional. In Canada, Wieland foresaw the possibility of making art that was equally politically-engaged, yet profoundly different because it was affirmative and utopian, and because it was participating in a larger project to reinvent the nation. *Rat Life and Diet in North America* announced the emergence of a different kind of political art.

Wieland’s *True Patriot Love* opened at the National Gallery on Canada Day 1971 and initially it might seem that the whole event was overdetermined: nationalistic art in the national gallery in the nation’s capital on the national holiday. But it is fascinating that no two reviewers would concur on whether Wieland’s project was serious or a farce, sophisticated art or the opposite, whether it was celebrating or mocking Canada, whether it was anti-American or proto-American. In order to make sense of these critical voices, it is important to address the phenomenon of Canadian nationalism. By the time she returned to Canada for the 1971 exhibition, Wieland was highly involved with an alternative, New Left nationalist position and so her art must be considered in relation to a particular set of beliefs and propositions about the nation. In fact, multiple and often contradictory forms of nationalism were in play in Canada during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1967 the federal government had celebrated the centenary with great fanfare; Expo 67, the world’s fair held in Montreal, was the culminating event meant to spectacularize Canadian nationhood for local and global audiences alike. The main opposition to this official story of a unified and stable nation was, of course, the massive surge of Quebecois nationalism; but challenges to Ottawa’s upbeat version of nationhood emerged in English Canada as well. For a time it even seemed that the goals of leftist

Canadian and Quebecois nationalists would not be mutually exclusive, because they shared a similar discourse of emancipation that also linked these local quests for self-determination with post-colonial liberation struggles elsewhere in the world, particularly in Africa and Latin America.¹⁸

By the latter part of the 1960s, while still living in New York home, Wieland was receiving the journal *Canadian Forum*, edited by her friend Abe Rotstein, and becoming acquainted with this “alternative” Canadian nationalism.¹⁹ Certainly Pierre-Elliott Trudeau’s charismatic leadership impressed her for awhile and her feature length film *Reason Over Passion* (1969) visually imprinted his face onto the national territory. But by the time of the 1971 exhibition the effects of Trudeaumania had seemingly worn off,²⁰ and the artist was instead affiliated with the renegades within the New Democratic Party known as the “Waffle” caucus who wrote a “Manifesto for an Independent Socialist Canada.” The Manifesto called attention to the extent of American influence, investment and ownership in Canada and argued for Canadian public ownership of natural resources and basic industries. Wieland invited the economist and Waffle leader Mel Watkins to be the guest of honour at her National Gallery opening. The important work *Water Quilt* (1970) was a *de facto* collaboration with James Laxer, another Waffle leader and an important figure in the New Left.

During this period many other small parties, ad-hoc committees, and journals would contribute to the debate about nationalism, and crucially this discussion often took place alongside other New Left concerns such as the youth, anti-war, and global liberation movements, civil rights, women’s rights, ecological issues, and so on. In this context, the question of nationalism could thus emerge dialectically in relation to a range of social and political issues. Indeed, this kind of New Left politicking was very different from the “old left” concept of political action which was inexorably linked to political parties and labour unions, and with proletarian revolution as its ultimate goal. In the words of Stanley Aronowitz, the emergence of the New Left marked a break with the “doctrine(s) according to which the working class was anointed with sacred historical powers.”²¹

For nationalists on the New Left, Canada had to be understood as a doubly colonized territory – historically by the British, and more practically and recently by the Americans. What was therefore now required was an intensified process of decolonization before true nationhood could be achieved. A period of consciousness-raising was needed so that Canadian’s could re-educate themselves as post-colonial subjects. As Laxer explained, “an inability to perceive the reality of conditions in one’s country is quite naturally endemic to colonialism.”²² Canadian nationalism was thus reconceived as something more subversive than the country’s 1967 birthday party, and as something other than an affirmation of the economic and geo-political status quo. The New Left emphatically asserted that nationalism

in a Canadian context could be progressive, emancipatory, countercultural, and ultimately socialist. The nation was not to be regarded as a *fait accompli*; it was this activist attitude towards nationalism which Wieland's 1971 *True Patriot Love* exhibition translated into an aesthetic attitude.

This New Left movement does not simply constitute background or context to Wieland's art activity, as the artist was fully immersed in the vocabulary and ideals of left-wing nationalism.²³ As Lauren Rabinowitz has so astutely commented, "the superficial charm and naiveté of Wieland's show mask a rigorous intellectualism."²⁴ This understanding of the artist is key because some of Wieland's supporters have over-emphasized her feminine intuition and emotiveness, as if the artist had simply chosen "passion" over "reason."²⁵ While Wieland was attuned to the economic and political issues being debated by Canadian intellectuals and activists, her particular concern as an artist was to investigate how this radical nationalism could be transformed into visual, material, and symbolic forms.

True Patriot Love can be thought of as the culmination of Wieland's efforts to artistically intervene in the discussion about nationhood. The exhibition displayed an array of "Canadiana" appropriate to the late twentieth century – not the usual display of rustic stuff that would nostalgically bespeak bygone days – but rather, colourful, urbane, ironic objects crafted out of plastic, cloth and other ordinary materials. She emphasized stitched, quilted, and embroidered objects, along with a preponderance of texts, words, and linguistic signifiers. Wieland also created a bookwork *cum* catalogue for the exhibition that has in itself been recognized as a significant contribution to the international phenomenon of Conceptual Art.²⁶ The opening day of the exhibition was an extravaganza with music, a pond with live ducks, and as mentioned, a special appearance by the Socialist/Waffle leader Mel Watkins. A massive white-frosted confection, the *Arctic Passion Cake*, was on display while the gift shop sold a custom-made scent labelled *Sweet Beaver*, "the perfume of liberation." Is there an obligation for patriotic art to be tasty and sexy as well as visually pleasing? *True Patriot Love*'s multi-sensorial and comedic gestures unsettled the usual markers of national identity. It was as if Wieland had set up a kind of aesthetic laboratory where she could modify readymade signifiers of nationalism, or else take everyday things and magically endow them with symbolic or heraldic significance. Commonplace emblems of Canadian-ness such as the maple leaf flag or the national anthem would be de-familiarized, and animals like beavers and polar bears took on a new allegorical significance. When iconic images of Canada's natural environment appeared, it was only so that these could be visibly overwritten and re-inhabited. This was Wieland's signature contribution to a new kind of Canadian art; liberating the nation also meant freeing its signs and symbols, and allowing them to take on a new metaphoric life. In the artist's words, "everything

from the trillium to the name of the country must be re-translated in order to renew and begin to invent the country's future."²⁷

It is important to remember that at the time of the *True Patriot Love* exhibition, in 1971, Canada was emblemized in a new way to itself and to the world. Only six years earlier the new maple-leaf flag had been designed and officially unfurled, while the anthem was approved by Parliament during the centenary celebration of Canadian confederation in 1967. While the New Left seized upon this newness as an opportunity to re-negotiate the terms of nationalism, for Wieland it literally meant grabbing hold of the signs of national identity, rather than allowing them to lie inert within institutions or leaving them in the opportunistic hands of politicians. Thus, *O Canada Animation*, a cloth embroidered with a sequence of cartoony red lips apparently singing the "O Canada" anthem, can be thought of as a clever twist on the ubiquitous use of words and slogans in political art. No words are spelled out, but rather each freeze-frame invites the viewer to perform one of the key rituals of nationalism. If the nation is usually invoked publicly, this artwork reminds us that it is also registered in specific bodies. As John O'Brian has noted, these hyper-feminine lips cannot belong to the gender-neutral body of a generic citizen.²⁸

The *True Patriot Love* exhibition also has art historical significance as a critical intervention into the museum environment. Wieland treated the gallery as a social space, that is only provisionally isolated from a larger world of politics and everyday life. A contemporaneous project that bears comparison with the *True Patriot Love* exhibition is Hans Haacke's *MoMA-Poll* (1970), which consisted simply of wall text and a voting box, with the request that visitors to New York's Museum of Modern Art answer yes or no to a question about elected officials who supported the Vietnam War.²⁹ Both Haacke and Wieland disputed the notion that art should occupy a rarefied, interiorized space, even while their critiques were articulated from within the institution. When one newspaper critic sneered that "Joyce the housewife empties out her attic and her barnyard and fills...the National Gallery with pillows and quilts,"³⁰ he was actually close to understanding the artist's intent. She was urging the nation's most prestigious art institution to enter into a dialogue with everyday life (even that of housewives!) and to engage with the important political issues of the day.

Since Wieland was operating in the context of a national museum and as Group of Seven paintings were available for viewing in adjoining rooms, her exhibition also begged comparison with those paragons of national art. The artworks in *True Patriot Love* could not be mistaken for a simple affirmation of nationhood because viewers were being asked to become participants in the imaginative dimension of nationalism; they were being asked to help reinvent the nation. This attitude towards nationhood is in agreement with recent scholarship on the "imaginary"



fig.4 Joyce Wieland, **Flag Arrangement**, 1970-71, knitted wool in four pieces, *True Patriot Love* installation at the National Gallery of Canada. (Photo: Courtesy of NGC) © National Gallery of Canada, Estate of Joyce Wieland

character of nationalism whereby the nation is understood to be a cultural artifact, invented and imagined under particular historic conditions. Challenging the concept that an authentic nation is based on ethnicity or birthright or a singular historical narrative, Benedict Anderson has asserted that, "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."³¹ The question of "style" is not fully developed by Anderson, but David Carroll has more recently argued that analyzing the aesthetics of nationalism is absolutely crucial if we want to understand how so many nationalist discourses that are initially affirmative and emancipatory, are transformed into oppressive and xenophobic ideologies.³²

Maple leaf flags and maple leaves appear in various guises throughout the exhibition and inside the *True Patriot Love* bookwork. The book of black and white photographic images has a real silky red-and-white flag attached to its inside cover; the

first full-page image is a close-up photo of a knitted maple-leaf flag and the second is a lone, slightly dried maple leaf set against a white background. Thus, throughout the book the maple leaf morphs from symbol to botanical object and back again, and in semiotic terms from symbol to iconic representation to indexical mark. Like the evoking of subjective experience in *O Canada Animation*, the flag which is ostensibly the most privileged and public of national signs, reappears as a hand-knit, home-crafted object, or as a mass-produced article of consumption. If Wieland and Martha Rosler, had both attempted to “bring the war home,” it can be said that here, Wieland was convincingly “bringing nationalism home” through her insistence on everyday objects. This is also true of Wieland’s *Flag Arrangement* (fig.4) which presents four versions of the maple leaf flag in knit form. The flag is stretched and absurdly distended as if people of different shapes and sizes had all been wearing the same flag-sweater, or as if the flag were reflected in a sequence of fun-house mirrors. Wieland showed how the meaning of the flag as sign could be subtly altered through a material metaphormosis. This is somewhat reminiscent of Jasper Johns’s flag “paintings,” begun in the 1950s, which were actually built from many layers of newspaper and wax. Wieland’s flags also endow the symbol with a surfeit of material substance, insisting on its presence as a thing in the world, an object amongst other objects. How far should artists go in this direction? At what point does a modification of colour or texture become a potential obliteration of the flag’s patriotic meaning? By the time Wieland set about playfully distorting the Canadian flag, the American artist’s right to tamper with his or her own flag was going before the Supreme Court.³³

As already mentioned, Wieland’s earlier artwork had used American flags in a satirical way: *Rat Life and Diet in North America* had shown the rodent-heroes chewing on the stars and stripes; the *Betsy Ross* assemblage had a canker/hole cut right out of the flag, while another work, the film *Patriotism, Part II* (1964), made a comic phallus out of the American emblem. Wieland’s approach to the maple leaf flag was different, partly because no trauma comparable to the Vietnam War was undermining the flag’s legitimacy as a national symbol. In Canada, it was instead a matter of figuring out which narratives, histories, and responses might be appropriate to a new flag. On both sides of the border, however, certain fundamental questions could be posed about the process whereby people learn to admire, respect, or adulate such bits of coloured cloth, and about the role these symbolic objects play in the everyday life of the nation-state. The artist’s answer to the question of what could be done with the flag was also a kind of cautionary tale; the flag was not simply something to wave in response to politicians’ speeches or as the tanks roll by in a military parade. *True Patriot Love* showed that the state’s imprimatur need not be passively accepted, but rather that all aspects of national culture could and should be periodically appropriated and reinterpreted by its citizens.

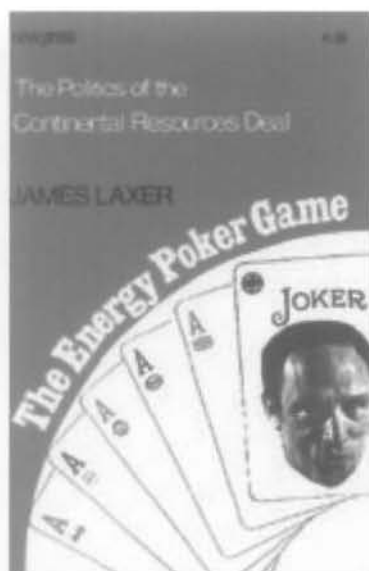


fig.5 Cover of James Laxer, *The Energy Poker Game: The Politics of the Continental Resources Deal* (Toronto: New Press, 1970). (Photo: Courtesy of J. Laxer)

The *True Patriot Love* artworks featured an array of plant and animal species that had the potential to bespeak the re-emergent nation. In *Arctic Day*, flora and fauna appear as delicately drawn motifs on cushion-like objects, bringing natural history into the feminized domestic sphere. At first, *Water Quilt* appears to be an innocuous blanket-like object, covered with meticulously embroidered, botanically-accurate Arctic flowers. Each square of embroidered fabric could be lifted up, however, to reveal a page from James Laxer's book *The Energy Poker Game* (fig.5) published in 1970. As mentioned, Laxer had been a signatory to the Waffle manifesto and his publication called attention to the exploitation of Canada's natural resources, criticizing the plan to redirect huge quantities of water from northern lakes and rivers towards thirsty Americans.¹⁴ In Wieland's artwork as in Laxer's book, the newly emerging "picture" of environmental damage challenged artistic representations of the Canadian north – as a vast region of untouched wilderness, forever beautiful in its wildness and forever a treasure-house of untapped natural resources. In the conventionally aestheticized formulation of the Canadian North, the most important

border is not the political border separating Canada from the U.S., but rather an invisible, vaguely defined Northern frontier. The border that Northrop Frye linked genealogically to a “garrison mentality” supposedly affects cultural production in a more elemental manner.³⁵ With *Water Quilt*, Wieland historicized the representation of nature and showed how contemporary border politics could have repercussions throughout the national territory, even hundreds of miles north of the 49th parallel. Wieland’s work can be thought of as a kind of landscape representation, even if the artist provided neither scenery nor spatial illusionism. Viewers were alerted to how the delicate ecosystem of the north, epitomised by those minute and evanescent flowers, was in danger of being irreparably altered if Canadian sovereignty was relinquished. Photographs of these same embroidered flowers appear in the *True Patriot Love* bookwork, where the artist used a scientific volume on Arctic flowers as a kind of scrapbook and superimposed photographic images, drawings, and handwritten marginalia in English, French, and occasional Inuktitut or Gaelic. The bookwork certainly did not shore up the museum’s usual role of explaining and contextualizing, or imposing order and system onto an artist’s work. In this remarkable production, the northern landscape is quite evidently not a barren wilderness because the artist shows it to us crisscrossed by many gazes and presences, words and images, by footprints in the snow and stitches across a page. Christine Conley’s recent interpretation of Wieland’s *True Patriot Love* bookwork further develops the concept of the palimpsest in feminist terms, proposing that the artist’s semiotic play allows feminine desire to be superimposed onto “‘phallic’ social texts.”³⁶

Wieland’s iconographic revision of the beaver was particularly striking, especially since this creature has appeared on innumerable crests, badges, coins and commercial products as the quintessentially productive Canadian beast. The small bronze statuette of a woman with a beaver at each breast, entitled *Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers*, might be absurd, but the inverted Romulus-and-Remus grouping suggests that a new nation needs to mythologize its origins. This is the work that Barry Lord would term “an insult to both nations,” while he deemed the perfume *Sweet Beaver* “degrading.”³⁷ Although it was not included in the exhibition, another beaver image worth mentioning here is a cartoon-type drawing depicting a serious-looking beaver carrying a gun, surrounded by the words “Don’t Tread on Me Or! Else!”³⁸ This logo-like image (fig.6) was evidently Wieland’s Canadian version of an early American flag, the so-called “Rattlesnake Flag,” that was similarly inscribed with the challenge, “Don’t Tread on Me.” In Wieland’s alternate universe, the table is turned on the Americans. The normally well-behaved beaver has been transformed into a creature that is lusty, dangerous, and fiercely protective of the Canadian nation.

Wieland’s 1971 exhibition provoked a surge of commentary in the Canadian press, not only in the art pages, but also in newspaper editorials and discussions of national affairs. It was certainly not clear to everyone that the *True Patriot Love*



fig.6 Joyce Wieland, *Don't Tread On Me Or! Else!*, n.d, ink on paper, 27 x 21 cm, Fonds Joyce Wieland, 1993-009/005 (030), Clara Thomas Archives, York University, Downsview. (Photo: Courtesy of York Univ.) © National Gallery of Canada, Estate of Joyce Wieland

exhibition was effective political art, or that it was genuinely patriotic art, or that viewers were being interpellated as citizens. "Ardent art for unity's sake" was the headline of a positive, full-page review in the *Globe and Mail*.³⁹ Another sympathetic review referred to the exhibition as "mind-blowing," and asked, "Can we dig her epiphany of North before time runs out?"⁴⁰ But there were many contrary voices: "The new wave of Canadian nationalism taken to its ultimate absurdity,"⁴¹ is how one writer characterized the exhibition, while an editorial opined that the National Gallery "is allowing itself to be conned...it seems to have lost the capacity to separate fads, banality, and quackery from art."⁴² Montreal's French-language newspaper *La Presse* published a long review but concluded that the exhibition, "asks us to accept that a country amounts to no more than its symbols."⁴³ A political columnist for the *Toronto Star* said that the Wieland show was "a depressing reminder of all that is least attractive about Canadian nationalism; hatred of U.S. values," and went on to comment that the artwork was "cheap patriotic claptrap

expressed in indifferent workmanship.”⁴⁴ The exhibition was deemed worthy of a review in the *New York Times*. The art critic Jay Walz expressed interest in the artist’s multi media practice, but seemed most concerned to unmask the exhibition’s anti-American essence: “Miss Wieland...lets Canadian anti-Americanism show in places. There are denunciations of ‘US imperialism’ here and there, and subtle references to Vietnam in innocuous-looking pillows.”⁴⁵ This remark was in reference to works such as the white-on-white quilted cloth assemblage *I Love Canada – J’aime le Canada* (1970) where the slogans “Death to U.S. Technological Imperialism/A bas l’imperialisme technologique americain” appear as small hand-written add-ons between the lines of larger text. A few years later, in his 1974 book, *The History of Painting in Canada: Towards a People’s Art*, Barry Lord went to great lengths to explain how Wieland’s style and content were too Americanized, warning the public to be suspicious of this kind of ersatz or “cosmetic” nationalism. Lord was by then a member of the Canadian Liberation Movement (CLM), a Maoist group active during the years 1969-76, which dramatically called for the annihilation of both capitalism and American imperialism as prerequisites to the formation of a new nationhood. A similarly damning critique of Wieland’s exhibition had appeared in the CLM’s newspaper, signed only “a Canadian art worker,” and anticipated Lord’s later comments in proclaiming that “at heart Wieland is loyal only to the Americanized avant-garde.”⁴⁶ This might well have been penned by Lord himself or by his wife Gail Dexter Lord, also a writer and member of the CLM, who had herself come down hard on Canadian artists’ “cultural servitude” to empty American style.⁴⁷

Barry Lord’s comments are worth investigating more closely, especially because his discussion of Wieland came at the end of a book which ambitiously attempted to re-narrate Canada’s art history in left-wing terms. Lord was an unusual figure in the Canadian art world, having been editor of the country’s primary art magazine, *artscanada*, in the late sixties and also the organizer of the “Painting in Canada” section at Expo 67, an exhibition which included Wieland amongst the artists selected. As a member of the Canadian establishment during the centenary celebration, Lord’s job was to showcase art in such a way that it would appear to enhance Ottawa’s message of national unity. A few years later, however, Lord would become a marginalized and radical figure, no longer affiliated with any art institution, and a committed member of the Canadian Liberation Movement;⁴⁸ it was the CLM-affiliated publishing house New Canada Press that would publish Lord’s book. While *The History of Painting in Canada: Towards a People’s Art* covered much of the same historical material as more mainstream surveys by Dennis Reid or J. Russell Harper, Lord insisted on the importance of underlying class interests and affiliations in the narrativization and interpretation of art in Canada. Lord’s book is often insightful, although at times his propositions are provocative or outrageous,

such as when he makes the reclusive Emily Carr a mouthpiece for Mao Tse-tung maxims.⁴⁹ The year before his own book on Canadian art appeared, Lord had written a scathing review in *Canadian Forum* of William Withrow's *Contemporary Canadian Painting*.⁵⁰ He accused the author of a "comprador" stance on Canadian art; this derogatory term referred to the dutiful type of colonial servant who never challenges the supremacy of the foreign master. In contrast to that of other scholars who were considered to be afflicted with a residual "colonial mentality," Lord's book set out to confront the country's colonial legacy, to promote a de-colonized consciousness, and assert the legitimacy of art as part of a national liberation struggle. "Knowing the history of our art...is a powerful weapon in the hands of a colonial people," he wrote in the introduction.⁵¹ Whereas artists from the historical past could be half-excused for their false consciousness about the role of art, Lord was unwavering in his expectation that contemporary artists and art writers should serve the cause of the imminent liberation of Canada.

It might be expected that Lord would have been sympathetic to Wieland's project, since from a present-day perspective it seems evident that they occupied similar political ground. They both denounced American militarism and economic hegemony and were committed to the redefinition of Canadian nationalism in socialist terms. Furthermore, Wieland and Lord shared the rather idiosyncratic desire to reclaim the legacy of Tom Thomson and the early twentieth-century landscape art of the Group of Seven as part of a necessary art-historical revisionism. And so Lord wrote admiringly that "Thomson at last solved the struggle for the Canadian landscape,"⁵² while Wieland's *True Patriot Love* bookwork included a film script that strategically re-presented Thomson's life and early death as moments of resistance to the bourgeois vision of Canada. However, Lord vilified Wieland's *True Patriot Love* exhibition and in the section of his book entitled "Decadent Phase II, 1968-74: Cosmetic Nationalism," Wieland is given centre-stage. Lord was resorting to a rather crude Marxist vocabulary when he used the concept of "decadence" to denigrate avant-garde art for its counter-revolutionary position; in this case Lord was specifically blaming the U.S. for unleashing contagious forms of Conceptual and Pop Art into the Canadian art world. He wrote: "This idea that 'painting is dead' is characteristic of the latest stages of decadence in U.S. imperialist culture."⁵³ Rejecting the demise of painting, he championed figurative painters such as John Boyle, Claude Breeze, and Greg Curnoe. Lord's allegiances here were surely linked to his bigger project to repair the ruptured connection to a longer history of socially-engaged realism. The contemporary multi-media art of Joyce Wieland could not be made to fit this narrowly-defined concept of Canadian political art, and her work was singled out for mocking the debate on nationalism, for putting the emphasis on "cultural" issues rather than political ones, and for implicitly emasculating the virile domain of nationalism. His use of the term "cosmetic" cannot escape a gendered

connotation. The worst thing Lord could say, finally, was that Wieland's art was only masquerading as Canadian; scratch the "cosmetic" nationalistic surface of her art and the underlying Americanism would become evident.⁵⁴ Lord's name-calling points to fissures in the Canadian art world, and also to the sectarianism of Canada's New Left. Like their American counterparts, by the mid 1970s politicized Canadians were apparently just as unable as to agree upon how art and politics should intersect. Yet what is striking when looking back at this period, is the passionate commitment of those involved and the liveliness of the debate about reinventing the nation. It could even be argued that *True Patriot Love's* ability to engender such an animated exchange in the public realm was actually a measure of its success as political art.⁵⁵

Was Wieland's experiment a failure as political art, though, because her definition of Canadian nationalism remained so elusive? Because her aesthetic vocabulary was not sufficiently home-grown? Because the humour got in the way? These apparent contradictions can be regarded as aesthetic strengths if we consider that Wieland's 1971 exhibition was in many respects the extension and culmination of her border art project. Although it was presented at the geographic and political epicentre of Canada, *True Patriot Love* cultivated artistic and political ambiguity in such a way that undermined Ottawa's ostensible position of centrality and cultural authority. The border was the place from which one could become stereoscopically aware of both the American and the Canadian political systems. Therefore Wieland positioned her audience within a border-zone so that the horrors of the Vietnam War and the toxic patriotism of America-at-war did not fade from view even when the vision of a new Canadian nation appeared on the horizon. Linked this way, the critique of the U.S. and the celebration of Canada could only be historically contingent. The border was something potentially internal as well. Wieland did not package the nation as something unified, seamless, and easy to consume; and it was impossible to deny the fractures caused by gender relations, economic interests and language. Wieland's extensive use of English and French throughout the exhibition, for example, did not serve as a simple affirmation of the bilingualism which had become official policy but rather it pointed to the linguistic borders within the country. This was made apparent in the very title of the exhibition, as Wieland literally and perversely translated the line "True Patriot Love," from the English version of the national anthem, into "Veritable Amour Patriotique." However, this phrase is not found in the French version of the anthem as the lyrics are entirely different. And so by imitating the federal government's decree that every document and utterance be issued in both official languages, Wieland's artistic gesture satirized an ongoing history of mistranslation and miscommunication.⁵⁶

Wieland would struggle to come to terms with art's national boundaries and to advocate a new national art, but with the understanding that this could only be

an elusive and fractured category. From the border, it is obvious that all art is impure. Lord had certainly been right to say that Wieland did not repudiate American art and culture when she returned to Canada. Indeed, her immersion in the New York art scene, and her exposure to American pop-culture nourished her art practice, allowing her to reimagine Canadian art. From the border, Joyce Wieland showed how the nation could remain always on the verge of being invented.

JOHANNE SLOAN
Department of Art History
Concordia University

Notes

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1 Wieland, quoted in Myrna KOSTASH, "Women as film-makers: hey, it's happening!," *Miss Chatelaine* (Winter 1973): n.p.

2 Barry LORD, *The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art* (Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1974), 214.

3 Lauren Rabinowitz and Kay Armatage both contributed important early essays and interviews with Wieland, and subsequently other scholars have continued to raise feminist issues of embodiment and subjective experience, the link between personal life and art practice, and Wieland's status within the institutionalized worlds of art. For an excellent bibliography of the early material, see Gerta MORAY, "Joyce Wieland," in *Dictionary of Women Artists*, ed. D. Gaze (London and Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 1451-54. More recently, Christine Conley has addressed questions of nationhood and the maternal body; see Christine CONLEY, "True Patriot Love: Joyce Wieland's Canada," in *Art, Nation and Gender: Ethnic Landscapes, Myths and Mother-Figures*, ed. T. Cusack & S. Bhreathnach-Lynch (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Press, 2003), 95-112.

4 Wieland, quoted in Lauren RABINOWITZ, "An Interview with Joyce Wieland," *Afterimage* (May 1981): 10.

5 Two of these photographs appear as part of the artist's bookwork, *True Patriot Love* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1971), published on the occasion of the similarly-titled exhibition. Ten years earlier Wieland had given an abstract painting the title *Laura Secord Saves Upper Canada* (1961), while in 1974 she made a large quilted assemblage entitled *Laura Secord*.

6 For a recent discussion of the controversy surrounding this mural, see Charles C. HILL, "Greg Curnoe's Hommage to the R34," *National Gallery of Canada Review* IV (2003): 84-104. Other artists such as Claude Breeze, Charles Pachter, John Boyle, and Jack Chamberlain adopted critical positions regarding American culture and/or developed Canadian subject-matter, but Curnoe and Wieland stand out for sustaining these interests across large bodies of work.

7 The phrase "protective nationalist" comes up in an interview in *The Pittsburgh Press*, 9 March 1972.

8 Greg Curnoe interview, *File* (1974): 46.

9 Tony GODFREY, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), 190.

10 Frascina comments that there was virtually no response to the Peace Tower in the national art press until five years later when *Art in America* very belatedly put it on its cover. Francis FRASCINA, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 68.

11 Lucy LIPPARD, *A Different War: Vietnam in Art* (Whatcom Museum of History and Art and The Real Comet Press, 1990), 18.

12 *Ibid.*, 22.

13 It is interesting too that both Wieland and Rosler made films that subvert the post-war "domestic goddess" figure: Wieland's *Water Sark* (1965) and Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) present the artist investigating and defamiliarizing the housewife's everyday world, opening it out to aesthetic, social, and sexual connotations.

14 Andreas HUYSEN, "The Search for Tradition: Avant-Garde and Postmodernism in the 1970s," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981): 32.

15 Jonas MEKAS, "Movie Journal," *The Village Voice*, 3 April 1969. This was his opinion after watching the film eight times.

16 Lucy LIPPARD, "Watershed: Contradiction, Communication and Canada in Joyce Wieland's Work," in Lucy LIPPARD et al., *Joyce Wieland* (Toronto: Key Porter Books and Art Gallery of Ontario, 1987), 3. Lippard goes on to suggest that "it may be that Wieland is not categorised as a political artist because she is not an ideologue." Wieland herself was anxious not to fall into the trap of didactic political art: "I want to reach out and help in Canada's spiritual and economic struggle but I don't want my art just to be propagandistic." Wieland, quoted in KOSTASH, "Women as film-makers," n.p.

17 Michael O'PRAY, "Framing Snow," *Afterimage* 11 (Winter 1982/3): 53.

18 The Waffle Manifesto described "two nations, one struggle," while insisting that "socialists in English Canada must ally themselves with socialists in Quebec in this common struggle." *The Waffle Manifesto: For an Independant Socialist Canada*, 1969 (www.notacolony.ca/Waffle%20Manifesto).

19 When she was interviewed by Anne Wordworth in January 1973, Wieland noted the importance of reading Rotsteins' *Canadian Forum*. Anne WORDSWORTH, *Descant* 8/9 (Summer 1974): 110. Indeed Wieland advertised her knowledge of the main players in the debate about nationalism; in 1971, she re-wrote the National Gallery newsletter about herself and her exhibition, and in a new section entitled "Canadians she admires," included the ex-Minister of

Finance Walter Gordon and the philosopher George Grant. Another category she added to the newsletter was "new Canadian recipes," which featured Canadian Independence Pancakes – a pun on Waffles? NGC Newsletter 1971, NGC Archives, True Patriot Love Exhibition Record 24-520.

20 In a recorded conversation that took place in the spring of 1971 between Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland, he asks her, "How do you feel about Trudeau now?" to which she responds, "I feel that he is not as much concerned and impassioned about Canada as I thought. I am the one who is." Hollis FRAMPTON and Joyce WIELAND, "I Don't Even Know about the Second Stanza," in *The Films of Joyce Wieland*, ed. Kathryn Elder (Toronto: Cinematheque Ontario Monographs, 1999), 178. Also, James Laxer's book *The Energy Poker Game*, which Wieland used for *Water Quilt*, is clearly critical of Prime Minister Trudeau's laissez-faire position regarding the sale of water and other northern resources.

21 Stanley ARONOWITZ, *The Death and Rebirth of American Radicalism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 38.

22 James LAXER, *The Energy Poker Game* (Toronto and Chicago: New Press, 1970), 47.

23 This is an important methodological point that can be linked to T.J. Clark's contemporaneous assertion about the social history of art: "I am not interested in the notion of works of art 'reflecting' ideologies, social relations, or history.... I do not want to talk about history as 'background.'" For Clark, as for Wieland, the work of art is considered an active piece of culture. T.J. CLARK, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 10.

24 Lauren RABINOWITZ, "Issues of Feminist Aesthetics: Judy Chicago and Joyce Wieland," *Woman's Art Journal* (Fall 1980/Winter 1981): 40.

25 Wieland's *Reason Over Passion* and *La Raison Avant la Passion* (1968) were quilted cloth assemblages based on a sound-bite by then-Prime Minister Trudeau in which he described his decision-making process; Wieland's heart-strewn text-works do suggest an ironic and feminist reversal of this dictum. *Reason Over Passion* was also the title of her 1969 film.

26 Wieland's *True Patriot Love* bookwork was included in the influential exhibition/catalogue, *Global Conceptualism: Politics of Origin, 1950s - 1980s* (New York: Queen's Museum of Art, 1999).

27 Wieland, quoted in CONLEY, "True Patriot Love: Joyce Wieland's Canada," 99.

28 John O'BRIAN, "Anthem lip-sync," *The Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* XXI, no.1-2 (2000): 140-51.

29 Haacke's MOMA-Poll question was: "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?" This was one of a series of polls Haacke conducted in art galleries and museums between 1969 and 1973. A 1973 poll asked "Does your notion of art favor, tolerate, or reject works that make deliberate reference to socio-political things?" *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York and Boston: New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 1986), 105.

30 Tom ROSSITER, "Weiland (*sic*) vs. Picasso: Patriotism's absurdities lose to art," *The Saturday Citizen* (Saturday version of *The Ottawa Citizen*), 7 Aug. 1971. The artist's name is misspelled throughout the article.

31 Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 15.

32 David CARROLL, "The aesthetics of nationalism and the limits of culture," in *Politics and Aesthetics in the Arts*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 112-38; see especially 127-29.

33 The Supreme Court case was linked to the artist Mark Morrell's disputed right to use the flag to construct "a phallus, a cannon barrel, a hanging figure and other expressions of Mr. Morrell's distaste for the Vietnam War." Fred GRAHAM, "The Supreme Court and the Flag," *Art in America* (March/April 1971): 27. Also, the 1970 "People's Flag Show" held at the Judson Memorial Church in New York City, had been shut down by the authorities and its organizing committee arrested.

34 This issue of "bulk water exports," as the sale of lakes and rivers to the U.S. is referred to euphemistically, continues to be raised in Parliament up to the present day.

35 Northrop Frye's concept of a "garrison mentality," prominent within Canada's literary and cultural theory at this time, implied that the Canadian psyche was somehow locked into shape when the first European settlers, barricaded inside a fort or garrison, confronted the terrors of nature in the new world. Northrop FRYE, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), 123. See also, Gaile MCGREGOR, *The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in the Canadian Landscape* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 5. She describes a "beleaguered human psyche attempting to preserve its integrity in the face of an alien, encompassing nature."

36 CONLEY, "True Patriot Love: Joyce Wieland's Canada," 110.

37 LORD, *The History of Painting in Canada*, 214.

38 This doodle/drawing is part of the Joyce Wieland Fonds in the York University Archives and Special Collections, 1993-0091005 (030).

39 Kay KRITZWISER, *Globe and Mail*, 3 July 1971. Her opening line is even more emphatic about Wieland's genuine nationalistic credentials: "All I can say is Canada hath need of Wieland at this hour."

40 Hugo MCPHERSON, "Wieland: An Epiphany of North," *artscanada* (Aug./Sept. 1971): 17-27.

41 Tom ROSSITER, "Patriotism's absurdities lose to art," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 7 Aug. 1971.

42 "The Put-On at the National Gallery," *The Ottawa Journal*, 10 July 1971.

43 "Le Canada, c'est du folklore," *La Presse*, 10 juillet 1971. "L'exposition... nous demande d'accepter qu'un pays ne soit pas plus que ses symboles."

44 Anthony WESTELL, "Insight/Politics," *The Toronto Star*, 10 July 1971.

45 Jay WALZ, "Canadian Gallery Show Strikes Nationalist Note," *The New York Times*, 16 July 1971.

46 "Official 'National Art' sees Canadian culture as folklore," *New Canada* (Sept. 1971): 11. The article is lavish in its damnation: "Joyce Wieland is a parasite who panders to a bored and exhausted elite... she can play the fool stitching chic coloured quilts."

47 Gail DEXTER, "Yes, Cultural Imperialism Too!," in *Close the 49th Parallel etc: The Americanization of Canada*, ed. Ian Lumsden (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 165-66.

48 The Maoist orientation of the organization was not disguised as is made clear in the extensive documentation in the *Canadian Liberation Movement Fonds*, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton Ontario. Mimicking Chinese communist party practices, Lord and other members wrote "self-criticisms," dissecting the remnants of bourgeois corruption in their own personalities and social behaviour.

49 Lord writes: "Dare to struggle! Dare to win!," Mao Tse-tung's motto would have appealed to Emily Carr." LORD, *The History of Painting in Canada*, 173.

50 Barry LORD, "Comprador Canadian Painting," *Canadian Forum* (Nov./Dec. 1973): 36-37.

51 LORD, *The History of Painting in Canada*, 9.

52 Ibid., 127. As a review of Lord's book pointed out, he strategically neglected to mention that Tom Thomson frequently came into contact with European and American art. See Joan LOWNDES, "Review of Barry Lord's *The History of Painting in Canada*," *artscanada* (June 1975): 76.

53 LORD, *The History of Painting in Canada*, 213.

54 Wieland and Snow were redeemed, however, once they moved permanently back to Canada: "Now in daily contact with the people again, they have become two of the patriotic personalities who are lending their support to anti-imperialist causes." Ibid., 215.

55 Writing about forms of "public art" that flourished primarily in the decades after Wieland's exhibition, Rosalyn Deutsche has suggested that the success of political art must be measured by its ability to reveal the fractures within an ostensibly democratic public space. Rosalyn DEUTSCHE, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1996). See especially the chapter entitled "Agoraphobia," 269-327.

56 Wieland would also juxtapose the two quite different version of the national anthem in her bookwork. Other bilingual works include two separate quilt-works, *Reason Over Passion* and *La Raison Avant la Passion* (1968), as well as *I Love Canada/J'aime le Canada*.

JOYCE WIELAND À LA FRONTIÈRE

Le nationalisme, la nouvelle gauche et la question de l'art politique au Canada

Cet article montre comment l'identité artistique de Joyce Wieland s'est transformée entre le milieu des années soixante et le milieu des années soixante-dix, alors qu'elle voyageait entre les États-Unis et le Canada et se positionnait stratégiquement à la frontière. L'art activiste et pacifiste des années new-yorkaises avait été remplacé par une sorte d'art politique plus utopique lors de son exposition solo *True Patriot Love/Véritable Amour Patriotique* à la Galerie nationale du Canada en 1971. Les œuvres d'art de cette exposition traitaient des importantes questions de la souveraineté politique et économique du Canada, des dommages écologiques dans le nord et de la guerre américaine en Asie du Sud-Est au moyen d'un assemblage conceptuel de photographies, de fragments cinématographiques, d'objets imitant l'univers enveloppé de plastique de la culture pop commerciale, ainsi que de divers artefacts tricotés, fabriqués à la main ou autrement féminisés et «low tech». Wieland met ainsi en mouvement un procédé par lequel les symboles de l'identité nationale sont continuellement déconstruits et reconstruits.

L'art de Wieland est en résonance avec le nationalisme de la nouvelle gauche et sa critique radicale des politiques économique et extérieure des États-Unis ainsi que sa conviction que les Canadiens doivent entreprendre un processus de décolonisation. Le moment est propice pour revisiter la rhétorique antiaméricaine dans l'art de Wieland. Les différences idéologiques entre les États-Unis et le Canada sont de nouveau objet de débat sur fond de guerre, et toute traversée de la frontière, depuis le 11 septembre 2001, est devenue une action potentiellement risquée et politisée.

Le thème de la frontière entre le Canada et les États-Unis revient périodiquement dans l'art de Wieland au cours des années soixante et soixante-dix. À plus d'une occasion, la figure historique de Laura Secord fournit à l'artiste une sorte d'alter ego imaginaire à travers lequel elle peut construire un espace entre les deux pays. Wieland croyait qu'il était important de reconnaître la petite part qu'une femme individuelle peut apporter à l'effort collectif pour garder les Américains en dehors du territoire canadien. La frontière est aussi un élément important du film de Wieland, *Rat Life and Diet in North America*, tourné en 1968, allégorie animale qui évoque le mouvement pacifiste, les réfractaires, l'impérialisme américain,

l'identité nationale canadienne et les problèmes écologiques. Les critiques ont décrit ce film expérimental comme un exemple d'art politique. Il marque aussi un tournant dans l'œuvre de Wieland. Même si, finalement, les petits animaux n'avaient pas pu échapper à leurs persécuteurs américains et même si les Canadiens n'étaient pas vraiment maîtres de leur propre territoire, monter vers le nord était tout de même, en quelque sorte, un geste émancipateur et le Canada pouvait signifier la liberté et le plaisir.

Tandis que Greg Curnoe et d'autres artistes partageaient les opinions anti-américaines de Wieland sur l'identité canadienne, il est également important de comprendre Wieland à l'intérieur de la grande scène de l'art politique dans les dernières années du XX^e siècle, alors qu'une génération d'artistes américains étaient aux prises avec le problème de la manière de faire de l'art politique. Ses œuvres de la dernière moitié des années soixante, *N.U.C.* (1966), *War and Peace: 8 mm Home Movie* (1966-67), *Patriotism* (1966), et *Betsy Ross, look what they've done to the flag you made with such care* (1966), peuvent être avantageusement comparées à celle de Martha Rosler *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* (1967-72). Les deux artistes ont montré des images médiatiques de la guerre du Viêt Nam sur un fond coloré et suggestif de culture consumériste américaine. Avec ces œuvres, Wieland rejoignait aussi les nombreux artistes des États-Unis qui traitaient le drapeau américain comme quelque chose de contaminé par une guerre honteuse. En faisant référence à Betsy Ross, qui a cousu à la main le premier drapeau américain, Wieland évoquait aussi l'esprit d'émancipation qui accompagnait à l'origine l'incarnation matérielle de la bannière étoilée. Quelques années plus tard, Wieland allait faire du drapeau artisanal féminisé un objet privilégié pour son projet artistique nationaliste au Canada.

L'exposition *True Patriot Love* de Wieland a été inaugurée le jour de la fête du Canada 1971, et l'événement semble avoir été entièrement surdéterminé : un art nationaliste, dans la Galerie nationale de la capitale du pays, le jour de la fête nationale. Il est pourtant fascinant de voir que les critiques n'aient pas été d'accord entre eux pour dire s'il s'agissait d'un projet sérieux ou d'une farce, d'un art recherché ou de son contraire, s'il célébrait le Canada ou s'en moquait, s'il était antiaméricain ou «proto américain». Il est important de se rappeler que des formes de nationalisme nombreuses et contradictoires étaient à l'œuvre au Canada vers la fin des années 1960 jusqu'au début des années 1970. La principale opposition à la théorie officielle d'une identité nationale stable et unifiée était, naturellement, la poussée massive du nationalisme québécois, mais des défis à la version optimiste d'Ottawa de l'identité nationale ont aussi émergé dans le Canada anglais. Même alors qu'elle vivait à New York, Wieland a eu connaissance de ce nationalisme canadien «alternatif». Si le leadership charismatique de Pierre Elliot Trudeau avait pu un moment séduire Wieland, les effets de la trudeaumanie semblaient avoir disparu au moment de l'exposition de 1971. Elle s'est plutôt associée de près aux membres radicaux du Nouveau parti démocratique (la faction Waffle) qui avait écrit un manifeste «Pour

un Canada indépendant et socialiste». Wieland a directement associé les chefs du Waffle, Mel Watkins et James Laxer, à sa pratique artistique, en faisant du premier l'invité d'honneur à son vernissage et en utilisant un livre du second dans son œuvre importante *Water Quilt*. La nouvelle gauche affirmait hautement que le nationalisme dans un contexte canadien devait être progressif, émancipateur, contreculturel et, finalement, socialiste. Il était crucial que la nation ne soit pas perçue comme un fait accompli, et c'est cette attitude activiste envers le nationalisme que Wieland a traduite en une attitude artistique pour l'exposition *True Patriot Love*. Les œuvres exposées adaptaient et transformaient le drapeau unifolié et l'hymne national qui venaient d'être adoptés. Elle montrait aussi qu'un étalage de plantes et d'animaux pouvaient devenir les symboles d'une nation en réémergence.

L'exposition a suscité une foule de commentaires dans la presse canadienne, non seulement dans les pages artistiques mais aussi dans les éditoriaux et les débats d'affaires nationales. Peu de critiques étaient d'accord pour dire si l'exposition était un art politique efficace, ou authentiquement patriotique, ou si les spectateurs étaient interpellés en tant que citoyens. Une des réponses les plus intéressantes à la nouvelle forme d'art nationaliste pratiquée par Wieland est venue de Barry Lord dans son livre de 1974 *The History of Painting in Canada: Towards a People's Art*. Il s'est donné beaucoup de mal pour expliquer comment le style et le contenu de l'art de Wieland étaient trop américanisés, mettant le public en garde contre cette sorte d'ersatz ou de maquillage du nationalisme. Le point de vue de Lord sur l'art canadien était influencé par ses idées politiques marxistes. Contrairement à d'autres intellectuels censément affligés d'un résidu de «mentalité coloniale», Lord visait à décoloniser la conscience et affirmait la légitimité de la contribution de l'art à la lutte pour la libération nationale. Il croyait fermement que les artistes et écrivains d'art contemporains devaient servir la cause de la prochaine libération du Canada et portait un jugement très dur sur Wieland, affirmant que sa première allégeance allait à l'avant-garde américaine. Au bout du compte, la pire chose que Lord pouvait imputer à l'art de Wieland, c'était qu'il se faisait passer pour canadien et que si on grattait la surface, l'américanisme sous-jacent devenait évident.

Les causes de la faillite de cet essai d'art politique par Wieland étaient-elles une définition trop vague du nationalisme canadien, un vocabulaire esthétique pas assez vernaculaire ou un humour intempestif? Ces contradictions apparentes peuvent être vues comme des forces esthétiques si nous considérons que son exposition de 1971 était, sous plusieurs rapports, l'extension et le sommet de son projet d'art frontière. Même situé à l'épicentre géographique et politique du Canada, *True Patriot Love* cultivait l'ambiguïté artistique et politique de telle manière qu'elle en minait la position évidente de centralité et d'autorité culturelle.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette