



TORONTO PHOTOGRAPHERS
are invited to submit
Discoveries in Phenomena of
Deadline: February 28, 1981

Image Nation, The Coach House Press, 401 rear 101
All submissions should include stamped self-addressed



About *image nation*, 1970–1982

MARTHA LANGFORD

Certain conversations keep busy in the mind. Surprise makes them memorable; mortification makes them sharp; the combination is decisive. These factors explain my clear recollection of a very brief conversation that I had some 35 years ago with Toronto artist and writer David Hlynsky (b. 1947), then editor of the photography magazine *image nation*, at an exhibition opening in Ottawa.

Who is this ‘I’? At that time, I was senior exhibition producer at the National Film Board, Still Photography Division – curator, in all but name, of the federal government agency charged with the collection and circulation in exhibitions and publications of contemporary Canadian photography. The NFB/SPD operated the Photo Gallery/Galerie de l’Image on Kent Street in Ottawa, which is where we were standing on the evening of 14 February 1980.

Hlynsky and I came together over an exhibition that I had organized to take a look at new photographic work being produced in a process commonly known as ‘Cibachrome’, which was also the title of my show.¹ Artists drawn to this material constituted an interesting sub-group of the photographic movement known as “new colour.”² Cibachrome had striking visual qualities – the colours were generally very bright, especially the reds – and the material was resistant to fading, making the collection of prints more defensible in terms of conservation. In addition to prints, there was also the option of making large-scale transparencies. Vancouver artist Jeff Wall (b. 1946) was coming to attention for his back-lit photographs; *Cibachrome* marked his first exhibition in Ottawa with the later repudiated *Faking Death* (1977). Long story short, Hlynsky had submitted work and been accepted to the exhibition which included 40 artists in all – an eclectic group, from landscape photographer Freeman Patterson (b. 1937) to conceptual and performance artist Paul Wong (b. 1954) – many of whom were present that night.

So I said to David Hlynsky that it might be good thing to collaborate, and possibly produce a special issue of *image nation* with the works that

Detail, Catherine MacTavish, “Toronto photographers are invited to submit/ Discoveries in Phenomena of Vision,” call for submissions, fall 1972? From *image nation* 12, 1973. David Hlynsky, ed. (Photo: courtesy of Coach House Press)

surrounded us on the gallery walls. And he replied, “Then it wouldn’t be an alternative publication, would it?” End of story, and the beginning of a puzzle that I hope to resolve here.

Alternative to *what*?

Hlynsky’s rhetorical reply assumes some shared level of understanding about the meaning of ‘alternative’ and how *image nation* occupied that position in Canadian photographic publishing. But what exactly constituted ‘alternative’ at that point in time for the photographic community?

In her introduction to *Alternative Art New York 1965–1985*, Julie Ault acknowledges that ‘alternative’ is a difficult word; likewise, its close equivalents, ‘marginal’ and ‘oppositional’. Looking to define a movement, she has opted for ‘alternative’, finding the term useful because “it declares historical and critical relations between the structures thus classified and the then-existing institutions and practices.”³ Her focus on New York, where differences between have and have-not communities and their clubhouses are legendarily writ large, offers plenty of scope. Ault’s “Chronology of Selected Alternative Structures, Spaces, Artists’ Groups, and Organizations in New York City, 1965–85” is a primer on two decades of collective action, political organization, and coalition-building – conditions inscribed in the longer title of the 1970 Art Strike: “Art Strike against Racism, War and Oppression.”⁴ Of particular interest here is Ault’s reference to an “alternative network.”⁵ This possibility is also recognized by AA Bronson, member of the collective General Idea (1967–1994), who places Canadian artists’ magazines under the heading of “connective tissue,” stating their importance in illuminating terms: *not* as a means of “artists’ communication” in the obvious sense (though this was the rationale that won federal funding for General Idea’s *FILE Magazine*⁶), but allowing a “scene” to be pictured: “to see ourselves, to know ourselves,” and, with considerable prescience, to archive the ephemera of “networking.”⁷ The motive force is evidentiary, in other words, and depends on an understanding of photography as indexical – a document, a ‘picture of’.

For some thirty years (1978–2008), alternative publishing had a voice in the person of Judith A. Hoffberg, editor and publisher of *Umbrella*, an art magazine for news, reviews, and resource information that championed printed matter. Hoffberg’s coverage of the Alternative Art Publishing Conference held at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York (6–9 November 1979) captures a robust, mutually supportive, and chronically underfunded sub-field of contemporary art that produced artists’ books, Mail Art, one-of-a-kind book projects, and sculptural bookworks.⁸ Canadian practice was represented by Torontonians David Buchan (1950–1994), bookstore manager of the artist-run publisher Art Metropole, and Eldon

Garnet (b. 1946), editor of the art and culture magazine *Impulse*. Intriguing in this context is the inclusion of Dada and Constructivist magazines, canonical one might think, yet equally secure in the alternativeness of their historical moment.⁹

Gwen Allen, who devotes a chapter of her *Artist's Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* to *FILE*, “The Magazine as Mirror,” captures some key characteristics of ‘alternativeness’ through the lens of Conceptual art: a “new site of display” for the concurrent tendencies toward site-specificity, process, and performance; a sense of “contingency;” the need to know “what was going on” because it was not happening in galleries. Allen underscores the “ephemerality” of the magazine as medium, “the very fleeting and precarious nature of the magazine itself,” whose embrace rejected the “standard measures of art world success,” reimagining “art’s power and potential.”¹⁰ A legitimate question for the editors of *image nation*, or any other photography magazine, was how much space would be allotted to their aspirations in this reimagined universe.

image nation was conceived in a different spirit, ‘alternative’ to both established and radical institutions that narrowly defined or took no notice of photography as an art form. There was banditry from the beginning, *image nation*, the photographic magazine, taking the name of an existent ‘alternative’ magazine that had already published seven issues. Then ensued a program of re-education. In fact, what can be seen in General Idea’s contribution to the re-inaugural issue of *image nation* (number 8) is a turn toward “photographic ideas,” as solicited in a call for submissions issued by the re-founding co-editors, Fletcher Starbuck (1945–2008) and Norman Bringsjord (b. 1946).¹¹ Photographic documents of three performances from the series *What Happened (General Idea)* (1970) were selected. The first, “Mary Gardner and Tim Rhodes hang the laundry bag from the Rochdale roof (1–3),” though plainly staged, is performed without undue reference to the instrument of record, a machine and its operator, at first co-present with the actors on the roof (1–2), then moving to a neighbouring building’s higher vantage point to capture the results (3). The second and third excerpts from *What Happened (General Idea)* are somewhat different, as performances directed at and for a camera in a fixed position: “Miss Paige faces the camera (1–4)” and “Michael Tims demonstrates trouser opening (1–6).” They mimic the modernist portrait and the photo-op – both essentially meaningless, but photogenic spectacles – blurring the boundaries between documents (of performance) and (performative) works of art. In the same rich vein, Hlynsky produced the first cover illustration for *FILE Magazine* (April 1972), featuring the conceptual art personality Mr. Peanut (Vincent Trasov, b. 1947) posing against the Toronto skyline. The dialogue between uses of photography was ongoing: General Idea would return to *image nation* in Hlynsky’s number 15.



1 | Fletcher Starbuck, *untitled*, n.d. From *image nation* 8. Norman Bringsjord and Fletcher Starbuck, eds. (Photo: courtesy of Coach House Press)

Mindful of their ideational differences, the magazines were good neighbours because of the proverbial fence.

To understand better the constitution of a photographic ‘alternative’, should we forego textual analysis and simply look to the imagery? The question is not silly, given the shortage of explanation, contextualization, or rationale in the first ten issues of *image nation* (8 to 17). This is not to say that there is no text. Starbuck and Bringsjord’s inaugural issue includes a series of photographs by West Coast photographer Dane Campbell (b. 1943) whose long captions appear in this avant-garde context to be parodying professional or Camera Club tech talk, as in “This photo was taken on 35mm Tri-X film at 1/60th of a second at f11 with a ‘Nikonos 11’ all-weather camera.” Words and signs are embedded, or cut-out, of images by Ian Carr-Harris (b. 1941). Michael (Mike) Semak (b. 1934) wrote a letter to Starbuck explaining how

and why he managed to photograph his *Nude Family* series, which includes the copulating couple and the genitals of their young children. The letter as reproduced is a montage: grey type over a ghostly photographic portrait of a Ghanaian elder. This appears to be Semak's stationery, overwriting his NFB/SPD commissioned exhibition *If This Is the Time: Photographed in Ghana* by Michael Semak, which was published in 1969 as *Image 4*.

This first photographic issue of *image nation*, more than any other, has both text and taboos, including a double-exposed portrait (self-portrait?) by Coach House Press founder Stan Bevington (b. 1943), filling a pipe and smoking it, and a beautifully choreographed series of figure and landscape by Tamio Wakayama (b. 1941), whose male nudity would have been censored by other printing houses at that time. Picture-making, as opposed to picture-taking, is plainly the watchword, sometimes through manipulation (Jack Mlynek, b. 1948) or montage (Starbuck) (Fig. 1). The issue's epilogue is from William Carlos Williams: "Only the imagination is real." Free association takes form in a number of works, and the surreal and sardonic possibilities of straight photography are represented by the photographs of Michel Saint-Jean (1937–2007), which juxtapose artisanal signage and mass culture – words and images colliding in the external world.

Text recedes over the next issues. Numbers 9 and 10, edited by Starbuck alone, are untitled. Number 11, "Photographs by Women About Women," edited by the Women's Photo Co-op, has no editorial, but includes statements about what it means to be a woman photographer. The integration of practice and motherhood is narrated in a diaristic image/text work by Lisa Steele (b. 1947) (Fig. 2). Once Hlynsky took over (no. 12), themes began to be proffered as a guide, though not always. No. 15, a subtle amalgam of statements about the nature of photography and photographic seeing, asks to be decoded page by page, spread by spread, and only on reflection, as a whole. Anointed by editorial decision, pegged to an unstated concept, the image ruled: uncaptioned, therefore placeless, timeless, sometimes even authorless, when the names of the photographers were listed at the front or back, making attribution a chore. The journal itself was undated from issues 8 (October 1970?) to 19/20 (1979) – a finger in the eye of librarians and future art historians. *image nation* was not alone in this equivocal affirmation of the image and its direct appeal to the spectator. The message was embedded in a range of photographic publications, including the NFB/SPD's *Image* series. The Division's deployment of photography as "the silent language" *could* be interpreted as bridge-building in a bilingual nation, and was eventually denounced as propaganda.¹²

Spoken or unspoken, editorial intent mattered because there were distinct similarities between images that appeared in 'alternative' and 'non-alternative'

I went over to Marnie's house one afternoon to visit her + her two daughters and we passed my camera around.



Dermody, who's 5, took this picture of her sister Cara, me in the middle, and her mother Marnie.



Cara, who's 3, took this one of Dermody and Marnie. I'm not in this one because Cara took the pictures so fast!

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2 | Lisa Steele. Photographs by Cara and Dermody Mumford, n.d. From *image nation* 11. Edited by the Women's Photo Co-op: June Greenberg, Pamela Harris, Judith Holman, Laura Jones, Lynn Murray, Liz Maunsell, Linda Rosenbaum, and Lisa Steele. (Photo: courtesy of Lisa Steele and Coach House Press)

publications – let's not say 'mainstream' for now. Indeed, they were not just similar, but quite a number of images reproduced in *image nation* also appeared in the NFB/SPD's *Image* series, or its successor, the *Signature* monographs, as well as the highbrow *artscanada*. This was happening on Hlynsky's watch, but migrations were occurring from the beginning. Tom

Gibson's (b. 1930) singular variations on the social landscape appeared (in very dark reproduction) in Starbuck's first solo issue (no. 9). Gibson would be featured in the first NFB/SPD *Signature* book (1975), including *My Shadow at Comber*, 1971, intrinsically valuable as an image, but also helpful in dating number 9 where it had also appeared (in or after 1971). More leaps between alternative and non-alternative magazines were made by Starbuck himself, whose work appeared regularly in issues of *image nation* edited by himself or Hlynsky, and was featured in *artscanada* in 1970, 1975, and 1977.¹³

There was, in other words, a history of cross-pollination, perhaps more meaningful in hindsight, as records of negotiation and exchange, barter and banter, subtle and not-so-subtle complaint. Semak's slighting reference to his NFB monograph *Image 4* in his portfolio of nudes for *image nation* 8 exemplifies the last. The Montreal issue (no. 14) is the next most interesting example. It was guest edited by NFB/SPD favourite John Max (1936–2011), assisted by Jorge Guerra (b. 1936), future editor of the documentary photography *Magazine OVO*, and photographer Peter Neville, and included work by all three, guaranteeing a high level of eclecticism.¹⁴ Their issue ranges between stagey confrontations with the body, especially the female nude, submerged, masked, or in bondage, and discreet black and white notations in the snapshot aesthetic, all in the name of camera vision – its distortion and clarification.¹⁵ Their unifying fascination is figured in a graphic *envoi*, a pale grey circle on a white field – this motif no doubt borrowed from Montreal-based multi-media artist Normand Grégoire (b. 1944), whose experimental work of the late 1960s through early 1970s was published by NFB/SPD as *Image 7* (1970), released by the NFB as a short animation, *Série 4* (1972), and quarried for both *Image 6* and *image nation*.¹⁴

Radical book design might have signalled alternative directions – Allen makes this a hallmark of artists' magazines¹⁶ – but styles across the spectrum of photography's printed matter were surprisingly homogeneous and imitations were not always ironic or consciously appropriated, as for example, when General Idea parodied the American mass media giant *LIFE* in *FILE Magazine*. Artists and designers borrowed from each other, and still do, though that wasn't the nut of it. The paper and printing industries imposed uniformities of scale and presentation that publishers of small runs adhered to for economic reasons. A desire for alternative expression ran smack up against practicalities, affecting size, orientation (portrait or landscape), and even the layout. These things had to be mailed, after all. For most of its existence, *image nation* held to a squarish landscape format, 20.3 cm × 20.95 cm (8" × 8¼"); binding was Saddle Stitch, or wire-stapling, a process typically limited to 64 pages or less, though sometimes stretched by one or two signatures. With one exception (7), NFB/SPD's *Image* series measured 22.2 cm

× 22.8 cm; signatures were sewn and the book was perfect-bound, allowing twice the number of pages. There was no shame in conforming; indeed, these designs put both *image nation* and *Image* into the company they actively desired. Catalogues from the George Eastman House, designed by American photographer and educator Nathan Lyons, looked very much the same – *Toward a Social Landscape* (1966), *The Persistence of Vision* (1967), and *Vision and Expression* (1969). Lyons’s own monograph, *Notations in Passing* (1974) did not deviate: 20.3 cm × 22.9 cm, stitched, perfect-bound, 124 pages. In technical terms, these are small-format books, the opposite of coffee table books or grand exhibition catalogues. Alternative form followed function: these books afforded the reader a comfortable experience of paging through a volume at one sitting.

In a wordless universe, the layout of a photography book becomes a statement of plans. Lyons was never at a loss for words, but having framed his project and introduced the participant-photographers, he let the photographs speak. His layouts in double-page spreads adopt the visual language of sequence, as opposed to directing attention onto a single image by leaving the recto side blank.¹⁷ Minor White, American photographer, teacher, and editor of *Aperture* magazine from its foundation in 1952 to his death in 1976, had asked the big question: “Which is more creative, seeing or sequencing?”¹⁸ Some photographers and editors felt quite strongly about these matters, though they might alternate between alternatives. American photographer and teacher Carl Chiarenza, who edited the last three issues (1967–1969) of *Contemporary Photographer* (20.3 cm × 23 cm), suggests that even White, who famously encouraged close, meditative inspection of the singular image, “did convey both ideas – the reading of one picture and of a sequence . . . [these mental processes] are different, but they’re very closely related.”¹⁹ In the period under discussion, they represent schools of thought about the photograph and states of reception, as surely as the purist approach and manipulative techniques appealed to different sensibilities.²⁰ Their combination in a single volume signalled a desire for visual dialogue, perhaps toward a third way, whose direction was not always clear.

In his 1977 *artscanada* feature article on Starbuck, composer Peter Perrin imports the idea of “counterpoint” to the organization of Starbuck’s pictures.²¹ Musical analogies were hardly foreign to photographic discourse – at the heart-point of photographic modernism, Alfred Stieglitz’s dearest hope for his cloud series was that composer Ernest Bloch recognize its equivalence to music.²² Principles of counterpoint, which are polyphony and independence, are active in Lyons’s selection and sequencing of his survey publication *Vision and Expression*; he explains his editorial process as a coming to grips with the photographer’s whole submission in order to choose a single representative

image to put into his sequence: “While the process was essentially non-verbal, the questioning became intense.”²³ Indeed, non-verbal communication of the integrity and importance of a photographer’s work might best be effected by pairings and sequences of individual images that did not echo each other, but spoke to each other across the gutter – separate but equal. In this way, each double-page spread became an argument for the diversity and vitality of the medium, no matter how conventional the individual image. In other musical terms, one image riffed off the other, and this approach ran counter to the harmonizing thematic of Edward Steichen’s humanist monument *The Family of Man* (Museum of Modern Art, 1955). Examining *image nation* with these structures in mind is quite helpful. Hlynsky’s number 15, which I keep coming back to, avoids any kind of simplistic pairing or narrative undertow. There is no heavy-handed ‘making meaning’ or ideological humanist echoing – all people the same – which certainly bedevils most of the *Image* series.²⁴

This preliminary search for alternatives is coming full circle to the human actors – should we look no further than the makers of *image nation*? This is perhaps more promising, though not by scrutinizing them as individuals whose alternativeness or radicalism must be put to the test, but by examining their roles in circles and networks – those institutional formations that we are focusing on here. Consideration of those structures (visible and invisible; administrative and affective) naturally leads to the question of infrastructure, which in capitalist societies manifests in the form of opportunities for fortune and/or fame, and in Canada, summons up a once-upon-a-time of government-funded artist-run culture whose lustre as ‘alternative’ has certainly faded, but which dazzled most onlookers at the time. As I have argued elsewhere, in the late 1960s, “taking up photography as a form of artistic expression was at root somewhat rebellious, for the medium, while immensely popular, was effectively marginalised, still uncollected by most museums and art galleries, still untaught in faculties of fine arts.”²⁵ An art market for modernist photography began to develop in the 1970s, followed by a boom in the 1980s; this was marked by the arrival of postmodern product, “large, colourful, visually dramatic and expensively framed.”²⁶ Ironically, photography’s status as an alternative or maverick means of expression was already in jeopardy by the time Hlynsky and I had our lightning exchange, which might explain his allergy to federal co-optation. *image nation* (1970–1982) is a product of the long 1970s, a decade now sliding into history, as the backstory of contemporary photographic art in the late twentieth century. All the more reason, I would argue, for reopening the discussion of what constituted ‘alternative’ and for considering why being ‘alternative’ was such an attractive and productive stance for a Canadian photographic magazine; we need to look at *image nation* through that compound lens.

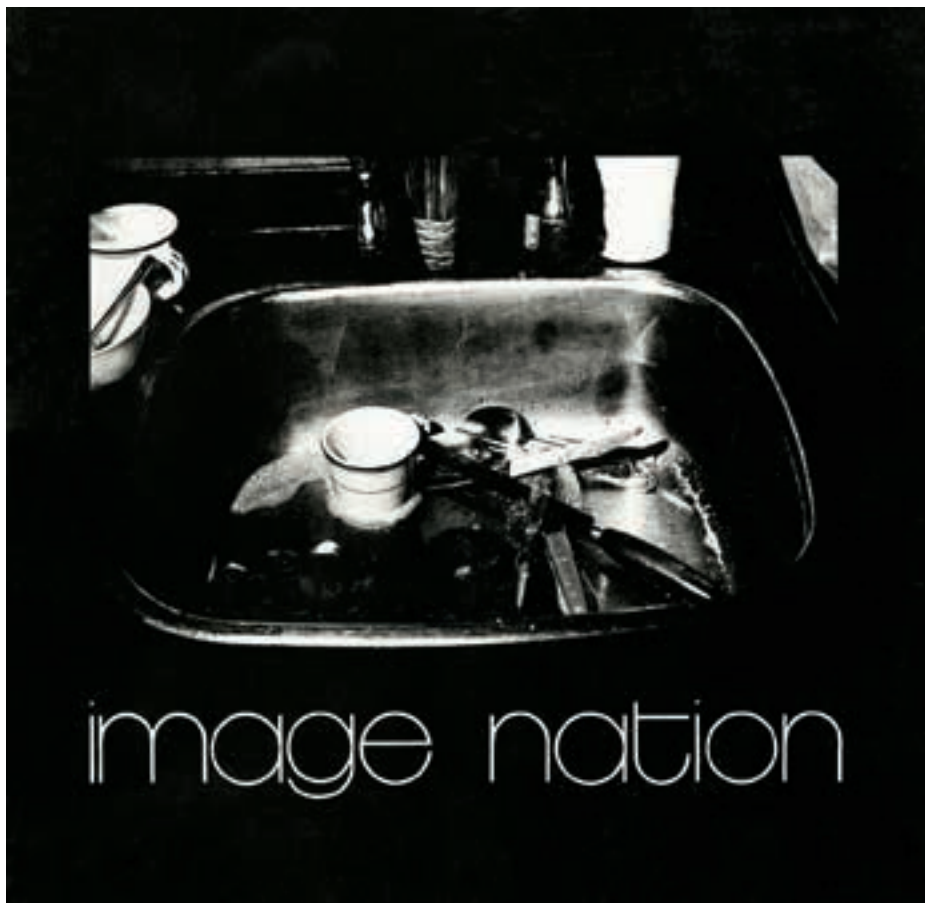
What precisely was *image nation*?

The short answer is ‘many things’. The magazine defies definition, which is itself a position, and presents as a series of conjectures about photography – ontological, technological, and experiential – ideas in the air at that time.

image nation began as the in-house organ of Rochdale College, a cooperative housing project and free university that operated in Toronto, adjacent to the University of Toronto campus, from 1968 to 1975. It was the weekend supplement to the Rochdale *Daily*, which brought news and opinion to the residents and beyond. The supplement’s title was inspired by the “Image-Nations” series, which the American-born poet Robin Blaser (1925–2009) had begun to write in 1963–64, some four years before immigrating to Canada.²⁷ As Miriam Nichols explains these poems, “they pick up the task of tracking the scattered content of the sacred.”²⁸ Art historian Robin Simpson notes that the first issues of *image nation* (1–7) combined Rochdale’s current affairs with literature and poetry; the editors included Boston-born science-fiction writer and activist Judith Merril (Judith Josephine Grossman, 1923–1997) and Toronto-born poet Victor Coleman (b. 1944). The designers were Ken Coupland and others affiliated with Coach House Press.²⁹

Founded by an Edmonton-born printer, typesetter, and photographer, Stan Bevington, Coach House Press had been operating in Toronto since 1965.³⁰ Bevington was a visionary, in the best sense of the word, whose publishing house and work for audacious cultural enterprises, such as the Isaacs Gallery, encouraged alliances between literary and visual arts circles, and their respective technologies. By the seventh issue, 21 June 1969, *image nation* was being published in association with Coach House Press and paying more attention to literature. The next issue, number 8, published in the fall of 1970, marked the magazine’s decisive move into photography. Simpson cites the redirection of this publication as an example of Rochdale College’s history as an institutional actor in Toronto’s arts milieu.³¹ This is the function that interests us here, though the serial’s pre-photographic history is important. It makes the point that, title notwithstanding, *image nation*’s origins were at first local and practical, then rooted in the aspirant cosmopolitanism of socio-political activism, avant-garde literature, and serious play. Coleman was plainly supportive of the change and deeply committed to photography as an act of the imagination, which he later connected with the “information . . . special language [and] humour” of Correspondence Art.³² Overall, the shift was not seen as a loss for literature, but as a gain for visual poetics.

Knowing the source of the title underscores another key point, that the magazine as founded had nothing to do with defining or circumscribing a national profile, either in literature or photography; this was destined to



3 | David Hlynsky, *untitled*, c. 1971. Cover of *image nation* 12, 1973. David Hlynsky, ed. (Photo: courtesy of David Hlynsky and Coach House Press)

change, though not for the first four photographic issues, as co-edited by Starbuck and Bringsjord (no. 8), then by Starbuck alone (nos. 9 and 10), then by the Women's Photo Co-op (established at the Baldwin Street Gallery, Toronto, in 1971), whose special issue also served as the catalogue for a touring exhibition of work by contemporary Canadian and American photographers (no. 11).³³ Canadianization was driven by practical considerations: funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, and, by number 15, the Ontario Arts Council, was predicated on contributors being Canadians or immigrants with resident status in Canada.³⁴ Starbuck, who would eventually return to the United States, saw this as an unacceptable restraint and left the journal.³⁵ Hlynsky, who took over, saw it as “an exuberant celebration of Canadian liberalism . . . If there was a thread of Canadian nationalism in it at all, I saw it as a modest defence against American mass media.”³⁶ His nationalization of *image nation* passed through localization – the “Toronto Photography

Issue” (no. 12) (Fig. 3) and “Montreal Photographers” (no. 14). Number 13 was meta-local – based on vernacular photography. The journal was suddenly party to the territorialisation and institutionalization of Canadian photographic practice.

A focus on Canadian photography might represent an alternative to the behemoth of United States cultural imperialism, though applying this rule to *image nation* circa 1970 is complicated by the fact that Bringsjord, Starbuck, and Hlynsky had only recently arrived in Canada as resisters to the Vietnam War.³⁷ They came with a bit of luggage. Bringsjord was a graduate of the Graphic Arts School at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), where he studied printing and photography. Toward the end of his studies, he had attended weekly evening critiques at the home of Nathan Lyons, which made a lasting impression. The war altered his career path, which was leading to a job arranged by his father at the publishing house McGraw-Hill. In Toronto, he gravitated toward Coach House Press where he met Bevington, who introduced him to Starbuck. They organized their own critiques, expanding the group to include Japanese Canadian activist Tamio Wakayama who had photographed the Civil Rights Movement alongside Bob Adelman in the United States.³⁸ They also worked with Chris Youngs, another expatriate American artist, to found Nightingale Gallery (later the non-profit Nightingale Arts Council, and later still, A Space). Starbuck had started photographing in San Francisco. As Bringsjord remembers, he and Starbuck shared a “purist” approach, which meant diminished interest in the content emphasized by documentary photography or photojournalism. They both went for “object about,” not “picture of,” which Bringsjord remembers as one of Lyons’s axioms.³⁹ The slogan was likely borrowed from California-based camera artist Robert Heineken who published a statement to that effect in 1965 in which he compared photography to a “found object.”⁴⁰ One could say that Heineken’s own collages literalize the Dadaist collector’s spirit. But the “object about” axiom is also consonant with the teachings of White, as another leading constructed-image-maker, Jerry N. Uelsmann, also connected to Lyons, was saying at the time.⁴¹

The push-pull of American influence on Canadian photographic practice and institutionalization is a very complex story, more of which will be told elsewhere.⁴² In the case of *image nation*; most of the actors were young, in their twenties or thirties, and those who were not self-taught were fresh out of school where they *might* have studied with the first generation of photo-educators, but were just as likely to have been educated in traditional studio arts. Dane Campbell is an interesting example. He grew up on a cattle ranch in Alberta before moving to the West Coast at age 15. He picked up photography and studied for a time in the Department of Fine Arts



4 | Catherine MacTavish, “Toronto photographers are invited to submit/Discoveries in Phenomena of Vision,” call for submissions, fall 1972? From *image nation* 12, 1973. David Hlynsky, ed. (Photo: courtesy of Coach House Press)

at the University of Victoria. There he met Toronto-born, US-educated art and architectural historian Alan Gowans (1923–2001), who hired him to work on the slide collection and encouraged him to attend a summer course at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York.⁴³ Two of Campbell’s photographs in *image nation* 8 were taken during his workshop in Rochester.⁴⁴ These cross-border networks cannot be neglected, especially as they generate their own sets of alternatives.

Hlynsky studied painting and printmaking at Ohio State University, where his primary professors were Charles Csuri and Sid Chafetz. Csuri was a pioneer in digital arts. As his studio assistant, Hlynsky produced computer-assisted drawings, photographs, prints, and animated films. Chafetz was

an artist of conscience and a political satirist, using printmaking (woodcuts and lithographs) as a tool to promote critical engagement. Through the off-campus ‘free university’, Hlynsky joined a collective of artists and writers in a silkscreen workshop, film processing lab, and darkroom. There were no photographic orthodoxies in this education, just a raft of possibilities that Hlynsky brought with him when he came to Toronto in late 1970 and went to work for Coach House Press in the multiple capacities of designer, darkroom technician, layout artist, typesetter, and editor. Fellow workers included Michael Ondaatje and bp Nichol, and later Michael Sowdon.⁴⁵ Hlynsky put his ideas about photography into the Toronto issue (no. 12), subtitled “The Phenomena of Vision.”

A sea change is evident in Hlynsky’s first table of contents, which is a *mise-en-abyme* and a meditation on the nature of photography in reproduction: at one remove from the image-object; itself an object that can only be read obliquely; an object revealed by a light that also casts shadows. On the second page, the thrust and constructedness of the issue is developed in a photomontage or table top still life of the poster/call for submissions from Toronto photographers (Deadline February 28, 1973) – a work credited to Catherine MacTavish (b. 1952) (Fig. 4). “Discoveries in Phenomena of Vision” is figured by two appropriated images from different eras, one of a little boy in sailor suit, one of a man in a tweed jacket, both wearing eyeglasses, and the process of mechanical reproduction is symbolized by two tools of the trade, a combined grey scale and colour bar and a transparency guide, used to take the red, green, and blue density readings from internegative film. Accessible and arcane, then, in one message, and the issue develops themes of visibility, mutability, refraction, reflection, layering, and language, with much improvisation and appropriation along the way.

Hlynsky and a series of guest editors and co-editors would continue this exploration, in edited collections of vernacular photography (no. 13) (Fig. 5); trickery and fakery (16); arresting ordinariness (17); portraiture (of ‘scenes’) (18); stereo or 3-D photography (22); mutilated photography (23); and agit-prop (25). He frequently worked in collaboration and the magazine displays this open spirit.⁴⁶ Writing on photography will start to trickle in by number 16 – an oracular statement, more poetic than discursive – and the flow will increase, ending on a speculative note in number 26. Some issues could be read as catalogues or translations of exhibitions (19/20; 24; 26). There is one artists’ book, *Murder Research* by Kenneth Fletcher and Paul Wong (21). Any one of these issues rewards a close reading. Here I will focus on Hlynsky’s number 15, which has proven resistant to thumbnail description.

I have stressed the lack of text, but that is not entirely true – you have to know where to look. As a photographer, Hlynsky was and still is drawn



5 | Anon. n.d. *image nation* 13. Flavio Belli, Ken Doll, Kenneth Gist, Isobel Harry, Marien Lewis, and Michel Sowdon, eds. David Hlynsky, managing editor. (Photo: courtesy of Coach House Press)

to the play of language in the environment. Pointers, shifters, puns, and exclamations are embedded in his images, and as an editor, he was attracted to the same. Number 15 opens with an urban landscape by Aubie Golombek (b. 1956). A city bus, with door ajar, thrusts into the middle ground from the left edge, activating the Kodak billboard in the background; a giant hand pushing out of the front of the bus is fingering the latest model of the pocket camera; the slogan is “Hold it” – a double-entendre on the miraculous



Aubie Golombek

6 | Aubie Golombek, *untitled*, n.d. From *image nation* 15. David Hlynsky, ed. (Photo: courtesy of Aubie Golombek and Coach House Press)

lightness of Kodak's latest instrument and authorial command that stops action (Fig. 6).⁴⁷ This split-second social landscape helps me to interpret a very different photograph that Hlynsky has placed on the cover: "Flight Impression. Interference between bird and aircraft wing by I. MacTavish" (the only titled image in the book). This picture depicts a fuselage that is vigorously painted with the figure of a bird in flight. Online research, unavailable to contemporaneous readers, attaches one Ian MacTavish, test pilot, to the design history and testing (13 January 1961) of the Tutor Jet, which was the training plane for the Royal Canadian Air Force Air demonstration squadron, the Snowbirds.⁴⁸ Is this the making of a theme? Is number 15 an ironic backward look at the military industrial complex and its propensity for subjugation of other species, or just otherness? Another photograph, also

attributed to Ian MacTavish, depicts a gauzily costumed woman posing in front of a giant paper heart that she, presumably, has just burst through. She is not of the feminist seventies, one thinks (one hopes), but a throwback to the patriarchy. In terms of time-travel or arrested development, something similar is happening across the gutter in an ironic portrait by Barbara Astman (b. 1950), *Jank Z. Being a Cowboy* (1973). “Hold it,” indeed.

But the issue as a whole refuses to be held to a single theme, and it is only by thinking about the heterogeneity of the collection, as opposed to (marginalized by, alternative to) others of the same transformative years, that the uniqueness of *image nation* can be understood and appreciated. An earlier occasion for that kind of reflection was the Canadian Perspectives conference, organized in Toronto by Ryerson Polytechnical Institute (now Ryerson University) in March 1979. On the program was an “Open Forum on Canadian Publications Dealing with Photography.”⁴⁹ Onstage were Naima Aer, *Camera Canada*; Isaac Applebaum, *Impressions*; Pat Fleisher, *artmagazine*; Gail Fisher-Taylor, *Photo Communiqué*; David Hlynsky, *image nation*; and Jorge Guerra, *OVO*. These editors represented a wide range of interest, from amateur to experimental practice, from exposure tips to elitist insouciance. The transcript suggests that Hlynsky held up a copy of *image nation* to the audience, but eager for the open forum, declined to introduce it: “You’ve all had a chance to see it out in the lobby. It is very difficult to talk about it.”⁵⁰ During the question period, he characterized the magazine’s readership as photographic artists; their work constituted “published exhibitions” and the magazine was “a mechanism for the photographer, for the artist.”⁵¹ Commenting on the lack of text, Hlynsky predicted that the magazine would “publish more and more writing. I hope it is critical writing. For the simple purpose of adding gray space to the magazine so that people don’t read it from cover to cover in the bookstores.”⁵² Another panellist quipped, “Of course, you could use plastic bags.”⁵³

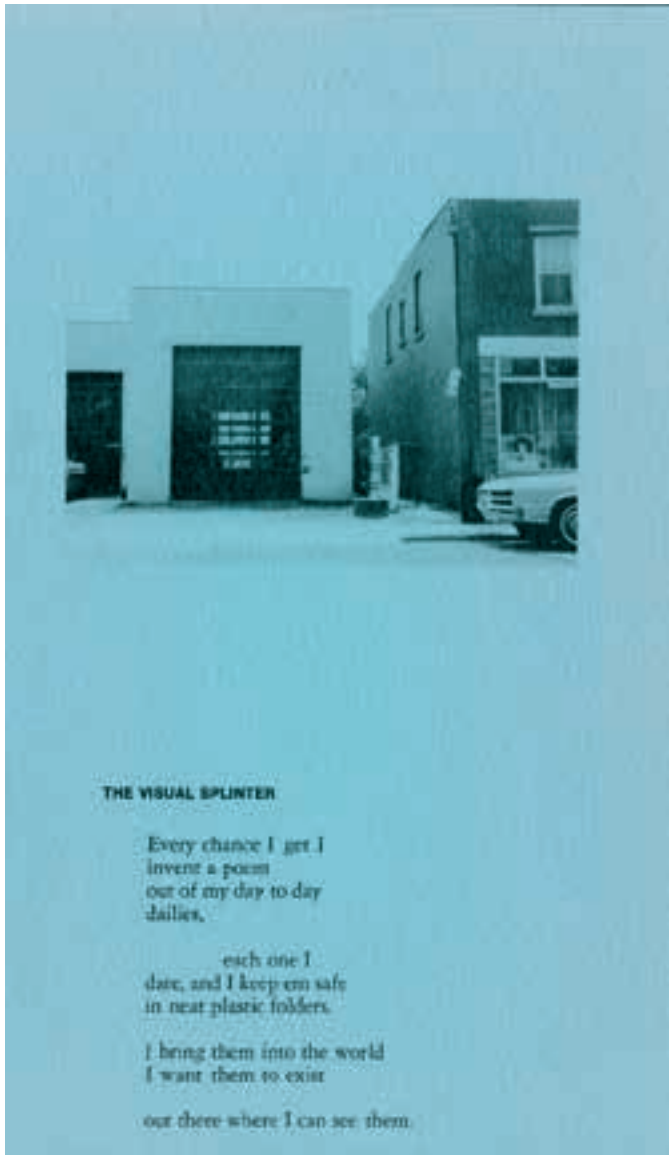
Contributors to *image nation* tended to be fascinated with camera vision, whether the split-second of a decisive moment, the extended present of the blur, the performance-enhancement of the flash. A recurrent motif of number 15 is framing within the frame, whether through windows, mirrors, picture frames, a TV dinner, a tattooed belly, or painted cut-outs, a popular photo prop revived by General Idea for their *Bar Nun* series (1973) – two of these “portraits” are reproduced, A.S.A. Harrison (a.k.a. Susan Harrison, 1948–2013) and Felix Partz (born Ronald Gabe, 1945–1994).⁵⁴ But these members of “the scene” cohabit this issue with anonymous performers who present things or themselves to the camera, some of these objects returning from oblivion via cartes-de-visite or postcards. Scientific evidence is mixed in with playful parodies, obvious tricks, and tender demonstrations of a photographic nature,

catching a shadow, a ripple, or a smoke ring. This photographic ‘come one, come all’ is, of course, a democracy effect created by Hlynsky’s studied selection and organization, but it nevertheless remains convincing of a collective imagination alive and engaged. As an editor, this was Hlynsky’s gift and we shall not see its like again.

Coda

The first book under the Coach House imprint was *Man in a Window* (1965), poems by Wayne Clifford and images (the cover and interior series of high-contrast female nudes) by future art historian and curator Dennis Reid (b. 1943); Bevington printed each of the double-page spreads in a two-stage process, silkscreening each image in a different colour and hand-typesetting the poems. Pulling another Coach House book down from the shelf – the choice is not accidental – encapsulates what I think of as a mutuality of formations cultivated by the Coach House environment. *Letters from the Earth to the Earth* (1968) by David McFadden (b. 1940) is both a book of poems and a photographic compilation – the forms cohabit between covers. Neither medium is sharp or explicit. The letters are not black on white, but black on a very soft robin’s egg blue, and the once black and white photographs are likewise ‘cyanotypes’ and further distanced from the orthodoxies of modernist photographic reproduction because of the toothy stock. Some affect the guilelessness of family snapshots, while others are notations of everyday photographic experience – personal replies to very simple questions. What would that piece of the world look like cut away from its surround? How would the photographic act transform it? How am I transformed in the process? Hence the picture of a neighbourhood garage and the shop next door shares the page with “The Visual Splinter,” a short poem about daily creative output and its systematic archiving in “neat plastic folders” (Fig. 7). Impossible to say which form McFadden is describing – poetry, one might guess, because of the process, but then he wants these works “out there where I can see them,” translated into visual form.⁵⁵

This sudden and belated introduction to a single book of poems is not meant to explain *image nation*, but to propose that this essay is only making a start at canvassing the ‘alternativeness’ of this photographic project as it sprang from the head of Coach House Press. Between *Letters from the Earth to the Earth* and *image nation* 8 – an eventful two years – we might see a shift from the melding of text and image to their purist separation. But neither centre would hold in perpetuity; meetings between media – were they increasingly clarified media? – continued and questions remain. What conversations took place on the shop floor – I mean, upon and between



7 | David McFadden,
excerpt from *Letters from
the Earth to the Earth*.
Coach House Press, 1968.
(Photo: courtesy of David
McFadden and Coach
House Press)

the sheets? What influences, conscious or unconscious, were at work? What definitions of alternativeness continued to matter? All kinds of photographies are jostled together, under uncommon laws that make everyday photography arresting and also domesticate the wild. But as Coleman wrote in a virtual elegy to the *image nation* he had helped create, this was never the magazine of the people: “It is distributed to an elite which is defined by the system of dissemination that it is caught in.”⁵⁶ Textbook ‘alternative’, *image nation* lived fast, died young, and left a beautiful corpus.

NOTES

- 1 Cibachrome, or more properly, Ilfochrome, is defined as a dye destruction positive-to-positive process, meaning that a colour transparency would be printed without going through an internegative – a degree of separation from the original that tended to reduce sharpness and chromatic fidelity – a process nevertheless favoured by most new-colour photographers who produced what were sometimes confusingly called ‘type-c prints.’
- 2 Sally EAUCLAIRE, *The New Color* (New York: Abbeville – Cross River Press, 1981).
- 3 Julie AULT, ed., “For the Record,” in *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 4.
- 4 AULT, “A Chronology of Selected Alternative Structures, Spaces, Artists’ Groups, and Organizations in New York City, 1965–85,” in *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, 17–76; “Art Strike,” 29.
- 5 AULT, “For the Record,” in *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, 9.
- 6 AA BRONSON, René BLOUIN, Peggy GALE, and Glenn LEWIS, “Chronology of Artist-initiated Activity in Canada, 1939–1987,” in their *From Sea to Shining Sea* (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1987), 60.
- 7 AA BRONSON, “The Humiliation of the Bureaucrat: Artist-run Spaces as Museums by Artists,” in *ibid.*, 168.
- 8 Judith A. HOFFBERG, “Art Publishing Conference to Be Held in Rochester,” *Umbrella* 2:5 (September 1979): cover; Judith A. HOFFBERG, “Alternative Art Publishing Conference,” *Umbrella* 2:6 (November 1979): 128–31.
- 9 Worth noting, however, that the presentation of these magazines was given by Clive Phillpott, director of the MOMA library, where the collection was held. See HOFFBERG, “Alternative Art Publishing Conference,” 129.
- 10 Gwen ALLEN, *Artists’ Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 1–2.
- 11 The announcement/call for submissions is doubly reproduced on the last page of *image nation* 8: “This is to announce the first issue of a magazine dealing with photographic ideas.” See Fletcher STARBUCK and Norman BRINGSJORD, eds., *image nation* 8 (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1970), 48.
- 12 I discuss the NFB/SPD’s interventions in the thorny question of official languages in “Calm, Cool, and Collected: Canadian Multiculturalism (Domestic Globalism) through a Cold War Lens,” *Visual Studies* 30:2 (2015): 166–81; see 177–78.
- 13 See: “A Photography Show at Nightingale Galleries. June–July 1970,” *artscanada* (August 1970): 66–67; Geoffrey JAMES, ed., “An Inquiry into the Aesthetics of Photography,” *artscanada* 31:3–4, issue nos 192/193/194/195 (December 1974); reissued as *An Inquiry into the Aesthetics of Photography* (Toronto: Society for Art Publications, 1975): 5; portfolio, 14–17; Peter PERRIN, “Fletcher Starbuck: Recent Works,” *artscanada* 216/17 (October/November 1977): 35–38.
- 14 Jorge Guerra and Denyse Gérin-Lajoie became co-editors of *OVO* in 1974. See Jean LAUZON, “Magazine *OVO*,” *Intervention* 18 (1983): 20.
- 15 Between covers (both images by Max), we traverse the gulf between the tethered body (Guy Borremans [1934–2012]) and the restless eye (David Evans [b. 1948]), with much graphic excitation in between. Borremans’s bondage, it must be said, seems

- to have been too rich for the NFB/SPD's blood – his work was neither acquired, nor exhibited. Evans was included in *Photography 25/Photographie 25* (1972) co-curated by landscape photographer Robert Bourdeau and NFB/SPD photo editor Ron Solomon.
- 16 ALLEN, *Artists' Magazines*, 6.
- 17 Nathan Lyons had worked in this manner when he co-edited, with Syl Labrot and Walter Chappell, a book of their own landscape photographs. The photographers described their book as “an illuminated journey through thirty-six states of mind, a simultaneous narrative of a search for and authentic vision independently explored by three artists working in the singular realm of camera vision.” See Nathan LYONS, Syl LABROT, and Walter CHAPPELL, *Under the Sun* (New York: George Braziller, 1960); citation from the introduction, “Intuitions of Reality,” n.p.
- 18 Minor WHITE, “Statement (1959),” in, *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicky Goldberg (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981) 398–99; citation, 399.
- 19 David BRITTAİN, “Carl Chiarenza: Contemporary Photographer,” *Inside Photography: Ten Interviews with Editors*, ed. David Brittain and Clinton Cahill (Stockport, UK: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2013), 5.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 21 PERRIN, “Fletcher Starbuck,” 35–38.
- 22 Herbert J. SELIGMAN, “291: A Vision Through Photography,” *America & Alfred Stieglitz*, eds. Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, Dorothy Norman, Paul Rosenfield and Harold Rugg, revised edition (New York: Aperture, 1979), 58–66; citation, 63.
- 23 Nathan LYONS, ed, “Introduction,” in *Vision and Expression* (Rochester: George Eastman House, 1969), 3.
- 24 An example of this is the Cold War-infected layout of *Image 3: Other Places/Sous d'autres lieux*, which I discuss in “Calm, Cool, and Collected,” 174–75.
- 25 LANGFORD, “Calm, Cool, and Collected,” 171.
- 26 Lucy SOUTTER, *Why Art Photography?* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013), 4.
- 27 Miriam NICHOLS, *Radical Affections: Essays on the Poetics of Outside* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 178, 192.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 192.
- 29 Robin SIMPSON, “What We Got Away With: Rochdale College and Canadian Art in the Sixties,” unpublished MA thesis, Concordia University, 86, n. 209. Accessed 24 Apr. 2015, http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/35752/1/Simpson_MA_F2011.pdf.
- 30 See and hear the history of Coach House Press in Sarah HIPWORTH, “Stan Bevington: The Making of a Master Printer with Audio Interview,” *Historic Perspectives on Canadian Publishing*. The interview took place on 30–31 Jan. 2009. Accessed 25 Apr. 2015, <http://hpcanpub.mcmaster.ca/case-study/stan-bevington-making-master-printer-audio-interview>.
- 31 SIMPSON, “What We Got Away With,” 65–66, n. 152.
- 32 Victor COLEMAN, “Cost of Living: *Image Nation* 25,” *Vanguard* 11:8/9 (October/November 1982): 22.
- 33 Members of the Women's Photo Co-op and co-editors of *image nation* 11 were June Greenberg, Pamela Harris, Judith Holman, Laura Jones, Lynn Murray, Liz Maunsell, Linda Rosenbaum, and Lisa Steele. Organizers paid no heed to *image nation*'s requirement that the contributors be Canadian or Canadian residents, a rule

emblazoned on the inside title. Half the organizers were American expatriates; half the works are by American expatriates or simply American photographers, such as Betty Hahn, Abigail Heyman, and Sylvia Plachy.

- 34 These were survival rations that did not grow. In 1972, The Canada Council awarded \$4,500 to *image nation*. *artscanada* received \$130,000; *The B.C. Photographer*, \$4,000; *Impulse*, \$4,000; and *Magazine OVO*, \$5,000. Conseil des Arts du Canada, *15e Rapport annuel 1971–1972*. Accessed 4 May 2015, <http://canadacouncil.ca/~media/files/annual%20reports/1972/1971-1972%20annual%20report.pdf?mw=1382>.
In 1982, *image nation* was awarded only \$4,250. *Impulse* received \$25,000; *Magazine OVO*, \$45,000; *Parachute*, \$143,750; and *Photo Communiqué*, \$41,000. The Canada Council/Conseil des Arts du Canada, *26th Annual Report Supplement*. Accessed 4 May 2015, <http://canadacouncil.ca/~media/files/annual%20reports/1983/1982-1983%20supplement.pdf>
- 35 Mary MULLINS, interview with Fletcher Starbuck, Toronto, 5 Nov. 1978. Multicultural History Society of Ontario Oral History Collection. AME-5009-STA.
- 36 David Hlynsky interviewed by Brittain, “David Hlynsky: *image nation*,” in BRITTAİN and CAHILL, *Inside Photography*, 38.
- 37 ‘Resisters’ is a capacious category, which includes ‘draft-dodgers’ and ‘deserters,’ as well as Americans who left the United States to accompany members of the aforementioned categories, or people of conscience who immigrated to Canada out of disillusionment with American militarism, abroad and at home. Bringsjord, Hlynsky, and Starbuck represent three different answers to the question: why are you in Canada? Bringsjord graduated from university, losing his student deferment, and left for Canada, but as it turned out, his number in the 1969 draft lottery was high, so he was never called, leaving him free to return to the United States, which he did after less than two years. Hlynsky completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (painting and printmaking) at Ohio State University in 1970; later the same year, he followed a friend, Jerry Emerick, to a job at Coach House Press because he felt isolated in the American Midwest and was strongly opposed to the war. He settled permanently in Canada. Starbuck, who was a few years older, was never politically involved. He passed the draft board physical, received what he took to be his draft notice, and left for Canada the next day. Until 1967, he felt safe working in Alaska under an assumed name, but that ended when his parents were contacted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, at which point he decided to stay in Canada, moving between Vancouver and Montreal, before settling in Toronto where he lived until 1978.
- 38 Leslie G. KELEN, ed., *This Light of Ours: Activist Photographers of the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).
- 39 Norman Bringsjord, personal correspondence with the author, 25 Apr. 2015.
- 40 Robert HEINECKEN, “The Photograph: Not a Picture Of, but an Object About Something.” Published in *21st Annual Art Directors Show* (Los Angeles: Art Directors Club of Los Angeles, 1965). Reprinted in Eva RESPINI, ed., *Robert Heinecken: Object Matter* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 155.
- 41 Jerry N. Uelsmann remembers Minor White’s dictum: “One should photograph objects, not only for what they are but for what else they are.” An excerpt from Uelsmann’s “Some Humanistic Considerations of Photography” (1971), in GOLDBERG, *Photography in Print*, 442–51; citation, 443.

- 42 See Martha LANGFORD, “Hitching a Ride: American Know-How in the Engineering of Canadian Photographic Institutions,” in Langford, ed., *Narratives Unfolding: National Art Histories in an Unfinished World* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, forthcoming 2017).
- 43 Born in Toronto, Alan Gowans received an MA from the University of Toronto (1946), which he followed with an MFA (1948) and a PhD (1950) from Princeton. He taught in the United States before returning to Canada as Chair of the Division of Art History in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Victoria. See University of Victoria, Alan Gowans fonds. Accessed 10 May 2015, <http://www.memorybc.ca/alan-gowans-fonds>.
- 44 Dane Campbell, personal correspondence with the author, 9 May 2015.
- 45 David HLYNSKY, “Biography and CV,” *David Hlynsky Photographs*. Accessed 6 May 2015, <http://davidhlynsky.com/BioCV.html>.
- 46 Guest editors and collaborators include Flavio Belli, Ken Doll, Kenneth Gist, Jorge Guerra, Isobel Harry, Thaddeus Holownia, Ben Mark Holzberg, Sandra Janz, Susan King, Marien Lewis, John Max, Peter Neville, Shirley Puckering, Chris Reed, Jayce Salloum, Michael Sowdon, and Kim Tomczak.
- 47 Aubie Golombek remembers that he was about 15 when he took this photograph. Personal correspondence with the author, 5 August 2015. It is less representative of Golombek’s work than of the magazine’s anti-elitist editorial policy.
- 48 See *Canadian Wings*, “The Aircraft: The Canadair CT-114 Tutor,” Accessed 6 May 2015, <http://www.canadianwings.com/Snowbirds/aircraft.php>.
- 49 Gary HALL, Phil BERGERSON, and Bill MORGAN, eds., “Open Forum on Canadian Publications Dealing with Photography,” *Transcript. Canadian Perspectives: A National Conference on Canadian Photography, March 1–4, 1979* (Toronto: Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, Photographic Arts Department, 1979), 285–307. The conference program (441–46) indicates that the forum was part of a session on “Criticism and Photographic Periodicals” that included papers by John Ward, University of Florida, Gainesville, and Byron Henderson, University of Calgary, held on Saturday, 3 March. Thanks to Paul Roth, director of the Ryerson Image Centre, for sharing this material.
- 50 HALL, BERGERSON, and MORGAN, eds., “Open Forum on Canadian Publications Dealing with Photography,” 289.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 292.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 298.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 The photo prop, a Masonite cut-out, was painted by Eric Metcalfe (Dr. Brute) while visiting the General Idea (GI) studio. GI did a photo collage of the resulting portraits and published it in *FILE Magazine*’s “IFEL Special Paris Issue” (September 1973). I am grateful to Fern Bayer, who is preparing the GI catalogue raisonné, for her help in identifying and describing this work. Personal correspondence with the author, 4 May 2015.
- 55 David MCFADDEN, *Letters from the Earth to the Earth* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1968), n.p.
- 56 COLEMAN, “*Cost of Living*,” 22.

À propos d'*image nation*, 1970–1982

MARTHA LANGFORD

Cet article explore le contexte et les motifs qui ont conduit à la création d'*image nation*, cette revue « alternative » de photographie publiée par Coach House Press à Toronto, de 1970 à 1982. L'étude s'inscrit dans le contexte canadien des pratiques artistiques en réseau (centres, publications et événements gérés par des artistes), tel que relaté par AA Bronson, René Blouin et Peggy Gale dans *From Sea to Shining Sea* (1987). Une perspective transnationale, particulièrement pertinente pour cette époque marquée par une vague migratoire américaine au Canada, encourage le recours à la collection *Alternative Art New York 1965–1985* (2002), dirigée par Julie Ault, et à l'ouvrage de Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (2011). Ault et Allen contribuent à creuser le sens même de l'art « alternatif » tel qu'il était perçu et pratiqué au cours de cette période. Leurs études présentent la revue comme une « vitrine » alternative, en lien avec la spécificité locale et la dématérialisation de l'art conceptuel ainsi que l'héritage néo-dadaïste de l'assemblage, de la sérialisation et de l'art de récupération.

La revue *image nation* incarne l'esprit rebelle de l'époque, et cela doublement, en ce sens qu'elle était également « alternative » pour les institutions établies aussi bien que radicales, qui définissent la photographie de façon très étroite ou ne lui attribuent aucune crédibilité en tant que forme d'art. À la fois contestataire et déterminée à faire de la photo une forme d'art légitime, *image nation* se situe aux limites de la culture de l'autogestion artistique et des publications photo plus classiques, comme les monographies et les catalogues d'exposition. L'historien britannique David Brittain fait ressortir des différences explicites ainsi que d'étonnantes similitudes dans son anthologie *Inside Photography: Ten Interviews with Editors* (2013). L'ouvrage renferme des transcriptions d'entretiens avec David Hlynsky, le rédacteur en chef comptant le plus grand nombre d'années de service à *image nation* (1973 à 1982), et un large éventail de rédacteurs en chef de diverses publications, dont la série *Image* de l'Office national du film du Canada, publiée à peu près à la même époque.

L'histoire d'*image nation* se raconte en plusieurs volets. La publication est lancée à titre de supplément week-end du *Daily*, journal d'opinion

et de nouvelles internes des résidents et amis du Collège Rochdale, projet d'hébergement autogéré et d'université libre voisin du campus de l'Université de Toronto, qui a fonctionné de 1968 à 1975. Le titre du supplément s'inspire de la série « Image-Nations » que le poète d'origine américaine Robin Blaser (1925–2009) commence à écrire en 1963–1964, environ quatre ans avant d'immigrer au Canada. Dès le septième numéro, paru le 21 juin 1969, *image nation*, désormais publiée conjointement avec Coach House Press, s'intéresse davantage à la littérature. Le numéro suivant, paru à l'automne 1970, marque le changement de cap décisif de la revue vers la photographie. S'il est clair, vu les origines de la revue, que son nom ne renvoie pas au départ à une démarche nationaliste, *image nation* en vient tout de même à mettre l'accent sur la scène canadienne, d'abord pour des raisons de financement, puis par conviction politique.

Les numéros étaient thématiques, le plus souvent réalisés par des rédacteurs en chef invités. Par exemple, le numéro consacré à Montréal (n° 14) était dirigé par le photographe John Max en collaboration avec Jorge Guerra, futur rédacteur en chef du *Magazine ovo* dédié à la photographie documentaire, et le photographe Peter Neville. L'objectivité n'était jamais une caractéristique. Ainsi, les rédacteurs en chef publiaient des œuvres de leur cru dans les dossiers où ils exprimaient leurs prises de position sur la photographie et qui pouvaient comprendre des portraits d'auteur ainsi que des instantanés anonymes. La revue *image nation* témoigne de plusieurs des préoccupations photographiques de l'époque, non sans un mépris certain pour les valeurs modernistes et la validation institutionnelle.