political economy for the subaltern (as pointed out by Michelle Wallace's "The Search for the 'Good Enough' Mammy: Multiculturalism, Popular Culture, and Psychoanalysis" [in Goldberg, Multiculturalism]), it is not usually a particularly powerful one. Duhamel's federal statement echoes the discourse of "discovery" in the media; we bring performers from around the world to Winnipeg for our enjoyment, but there is no indication that they have any impact, critical or otherwise, upon us.

The provincial and civic representatives give more indication of an effect not only on Winnipeg, but also on the performers who come here (perhaps the Feds can only envision Winnipeg as a place to visit on the way to somewhere else!). But Pierre's statements invoking community, difference, and improving the world (n.b., not just Winnipeg!) suggest that the WFF is aiming (admirably) much higher than its funders.

And there is some indication that this notion is effective. A Winnipeg Free Press (July 6, 1995, People 8) article on local Chilean-Canadian musician Hugo Torres, who appeared at the WFF, refers to linkages between music and revolution activity in Chile, and to their connections to Winnipeg itself. The discussion of Torres's personal history and life suggests that perhaps the WFF's improvement of the world, contra Pierre, need not be confined only to the short period of the Festival. In keeping with current investigations of cultural politics, I hope next year to extend the research and investigation into exactly what possibilities for profound change might be immanent in a festival, particularly one like the WFF which seems to cater primarily to the affluent white middle class. The use of the term "community," so evident in media discussions but also in audience comments about the festival, may be a focus, as it is in the papers which follow.

On Your Mark ...
The Audience Place at the Winnipeg Folk Festival

Lisa Hagen-Smith

It's eight a.m. Saturday morning. My girlfriend Brenda and I are already up and showered. Finnigan, our large, hairy, black dog, has been fed and walked, and all that remains to be done before we head off to Bird's Hill Park for the 22nd annual Winnipeg Folk Festival is a quick inventory of our supplies: mosquito repellant, suntan lotion, fleeces and long pants for the night show, raincoats, a sleeping bag, tape, pen and paper for the message board. It's all there, crammed into a protesting backpack.

Struggling under the load, we stumble bleary-eyed out of the house, coffee mugs in hand. I rattle the doorknob just to make sure the door is securely locked behind me. This weekend morning the Wolsely neighbourhood where I live (better known as the Granola Belt), located in a trendy area of downtown Winnipeg, looks as empty as a Northern Manitoba town during fire season. I feel a bit like a refugee with all my prized possessions strapped to my back, headed for a fenced-in compound. Indeed, pictures of Bosnian refugees look similar to photos of the WFF in the local newspapers, until you look closely, past the ragged clothes and line ups, at the surviving faces of war, etched in despair, hardened by tragedy, creased by a fatigue incomprehensible to our minds and bodies. The oddity is that instead of evacuating because of economic and political hardship, we evacuate because of an economic affluence which allows us to seek political and cultural entertainment.

During the 45-minute ride out of the city, I lose myself in my thoughts. Where was I 14 years ago, in 1981, the first year I attended the Winnipeg Folk Festival? I was 19 years old, and had just said a heartbreaking goodbye to all of my fellow Katimavikers. Katimavik was a cultural exchange program that brought teenagers from all over the country to live and work together. We lived simply, surviving on a dollar a day, and formed an intense group bond over those nine months. We were hardly ever alone. By the end of the program, although we loved each other, we also couldn't wait to get away from each other.

The baby boom party was over, but we didn't know it yet. Reagan had recently been elected, but we weren't worried about jobs. We expected adventure and independence. We headed in every direction, thumbs out and packs on our backs. We spread the word to participants in other groups that some of us would be at the WFF. I arrived alone and found a site in the overflow camping. The next morning, as I entered the festival site, I was intent not on the music but instead on finding "family." There were no messages. I'd snatch a bit of music, but always with roving eyes, painfully aware of my new-found single self. Where was everyone? In a final act of desperation, I stood by the message board and simply yelled out their names. As if by magic, my best friend appeared behind me. We embraced, and then started the hunt for the tarp.

Would any of them be there in 1995?

We arrive at the parking lot by nine o'clock and are directed by one of the dedicated traffic volunteers to our spot. After loading up our gear, we glance around one last time, taking special note of our car's distance from the road and its proximity to clumps of trees or light standards. Every festival-goer eventually becomes accomplished at the art of orienteering—and not only in the parking lot. It isn't necessary to carry a compass. The trick is to find a relevant point of reference. That may be a program book, the stage with the largest crowd, the Whale’s Tails booth, the message board, all the workshops with Canadian content, women, humour, or labour,
the children’s area, shade, or a lounging pink pig.

In years past, we counted off the rows of cars to the front gate as we walked the distance from our car to the festival entrance. This year it wasn’t necessary; festival organizers have placed large Super-Valu-yellow banners in front of each row, marking the numbers clearly above the names of corporate sponsors. I empathize with all those who have emerged from the euphoria of an exciting main stage event at two a.m. to a parking lot swallowed up by darkness, followed by the horrible realization that you have no idea where your car is. Nevertheless, I found this new efficiency disturbing. Those yellow banners seemed to be markers pointing in a direction that I come to festivals to escape. I come to have the order of my everyday life challenged. The problem with making everything efficient, predictable, and manageable is that we stop paying attention. And when we do, the festival experience becomes an empty ritual. We are no longer guided by our own observations, moved by our own experiences, attracted by our own desires; instead, we follow the signs, only looking up occasionally to be sure we’re on the right track. While I acknowledge that the sheer numbers of participants dictate that superior organization is imperative for their comfort and safety, I can’t help feeling it’s like trying to capture the wilderness experience from a Winnebago.

The workshops don’t start until 11:30, but after spending Friday evening straining to hear the main stage concert from the drainage ditch at the back, behind 10,000 people, we’ve decided to participate in the morning “tarp run,” when people sprint from the gate to secure the best possible spot in front of the main stage. I take Brenda’s pack and abandon her at the front gate. She takes her place in line with the other “real estate barons” while I go in search of a good vantage point to photograph what one participant dubbed the “running of the bulls” (quoted by Bartley Kives, Winnipeg Free Press, July 8, 1995, 2).

Some experienced groups secure their spot at the front of the line by approaching the event as a kind of relay. At five a.m., the first placeholder arrives to claim a choice spot. S/he is relieved in an hour by a teammate. This continues until the runner arrives in time for the ten a.m. gate opening. While the runner faces the most gruelling task of the group, it is not without its rewards. S/he gets to sleep in the longest after a long night of partying. One woman, who has participated in the tarp run for approximately ten of her 18 years at the folk festival, described the consciousness of the front runners as a kind of mass fear.

As ten o’clock approaches, the area beyond the turnstiles begins to buzz with security. Volunteers, media, and onlookers are warned to stay clear of the area. A volunteer from the security crew numbers off people in line, creating a kind of lottery system, and offering an unwarranted advantage to some runners who advance to the front of the empty turnstiles. Brenda described this experience as akin to a cattle run.

Any minor advantage is taken very seriously by some front runners. Security has tied a yellow rope to a tree on one side of the narrow entrance path. A volunteer holds the other end. A discussion takes place between a runner and the volunteer over his concern that the runners closest to her will have a slight edge because her side of rope will hit the ground earlier than the side attached to the tree. He also raises the possibility that someone might trip. The rope is untied so that another volunteer can hold the other end. At ten o’clock sharp, the rope is dropped, and the runners burst onto a narrow path that leads to an open field. Despite taking
precautions, one man trips and for one sickening moment, as he disappears from my view, I fear that he has been trampled by the crowd. However, by the time the last stragglers jog past the starting line, he is gone. Unbelievably, somehow in that thunder of bodies, he managed to pick himself back up.

The runners cover about 500 metres from the gate to the main stage. The field swarms with bodies that are soon lost in a sea of billowing blue and orange tarps. The grass in front of the main stage is transformed into a colourful, plastic patchwork quilt as people quickly stake out their territory. High-fives and enthusiastic embraces follow as friends and strangers congratulate each other on their excellent locations. Gathered in a circle, a group of men wave their arms and exchange survival stories. I imagine them embellishing details and reliving past victories, and I overhear them reminding themselves about the virtues of quitting smoking.

Brenda scores a respectable place for us, not in the laps of the performers perhaps, but a substantial improvement over last night. Content with our spot, we drop off our packs (trusting that no one will steal them) and head for coffee at Grabbajabba. Then it’s off to the message board to alert our friends to our whereabouts.

Satisfied that our physical needs have been met, we go in search of some food for the soul. I am drawn to this festival primarily by my desire to affirm my commitment to social justice. What I hope to bring back to the "real world" are the memories of some inspirational songs and a confirmation that the political swing to the right, we are not alone. I am not looking for safety, security, or comfort. What I want is music that challenges the status quo. What I find is a superficial atmosphere that interprets respect for diversity to mean using good manners when encountering difference. As one woman said, "It’s so diverse, I can sit next to that guy with the pink hair and not go ugg!" I did find some music that was new and entertaining aesthetically, but I was disappointed generally by the lack of content.

One of my favourite workshops, "The Irresistible Desire to be Desired Irresistibly," was a welcome relief. One performer got up and publicly picked her underwear out of her bum. I mean really, the crowd seemed as relieved as I that someone had stopped being so damned polite! My tolerance for goodness hit bottom at Veda Hille’s workshop when she started apologizing to the "big, black bugs" (dragonflies). Everyone at the festival is very, very nice. Everyone, that is, but Loudon Wainwright III. He succeeded in being offensive, just not very politically inspiring. In the midst of all the sweetness, Wainwright is marketed as humorous and on the edge. But being obnoxious and ridiculing marginalised groups is not radical or funny. We kept waiting for the bittersweet humour or the ironic joke that would include us. It never came.

At the end of the day, we head back to the main stage to find our tarp. At first glance, it seems hopelessly lost. This is one place where order thrives while maintaining chaos. There are no numbered rows, but plenty of outstanding markers. We search for the silver flamingo and the pink lounging pig. Stretched out between them, we find our tarp, and our friends already snuggled beneath sleeping bags.

Many festival-goers announce their location at the main stage to friends and family by attaching colourful and bizarre creations to poles above their tarps. A very large pig had been our homing device all weekend, and I was curious to know the story behind it. It turns out that the she pig is the mascot for a group of women who call themselves "The Pigs." Four times a year, they gather just to have a good time. When they’re together, they don’t wear make-up or clean up any one’s messes. The original pig was depicted on a plastic placemat. When it was replaced by the lawn ornament, the group kept the placemat stapled to the pole for sentimental reasons. When the big pig isn’t travelling, she spends her time lounging beside one of The Pigs’ sister’s pool.

Behind us, a modified version of the Starship Enterprise hovers peacefully over the heads of its creator and his friends. The designer had painted it black and drilled holes into the body and engines so that a battery-operated light can shine through at night. (Glow-in-the-dark markers are invaluable when you find yourself loaded down with Whale’s Tails and picking your way through the crowd after sundown.) The belly boasts a large peace sign. The group’s creative talents didn’t end here. Back at festival camping, they have also constructed a cart to help carry supplies.

From half a field away, I am drawn by the brilliant colours and eeriness of another creation. At first I thought it belonged to a young man sitting by the pole, but he sheepishly denies it and tells me it belongs to his father. The artist, inspired by a song from the Rolling Stones, painted a halloween mask black and neon green. In the middle of the forehead he drew a star and then drilled holes on the face, which light up using a photo cell.

One woman introduces me to Flauna the Flamingo, which she said is "ridden proudly by lazy-eyed Rasta Ted." Rasta Ted is a white plastic doll with dreadlocks, a mustache, and no genitalia, who, judging by the angle he is riding Flauna, has had one too many drinks. This is the fourth year that Flauna and Ted have attended the festival. Each year their creator adds a
little something. Flauna has been painted red and lit up with a flash light; Ted has been decked out with "dingle balls." This woman says she likes her companions because they're just plain ugly.

One of the most attractive markers is two masks placed back-to-back, showing the sun and moon. The moon is a cornflower blue with a soft yellow stripe across the nose and eyes. The forehead is flecked with gold stars, and ribbons ripple in the wind. The music this close to the stage is very loud which makes it difficult to talk, but between sets a woman on the tarp explains that these were only two of a number of masks created by her family and friends. The youngest mask-maker is only three years old. Everyone designs their own, and when they go camping, all of the masks are grouped together to make a totem pole. Most masks are stored in one place, but those belonging to people who are especially attached to them stay in the creators' homes.

There is no formal contest for the markers, but there is an informal one run by some Folk Festival volunteers. Last year, a couple who had been volunteering for six years won. Their classic folk marker was a pair of water buffalo sandals and a yellow flower. The sandals came from The Olive Branch, a non-profit gift store they founded together to support families in low-income countries. Each year, they use the same symbol so that friends that they only encounter at the Folk Festival can find them.

The main stage is truly festive. On one side of the field, people dance wildly. In the centre aisle, children impressively display their talents with devilsticks. At the back field, there are informal soccer and frisbee games, hackey sack circles, and children mud-fighting in the drainage ditch. Next year, I definitely have to remember to bring some toys. Before the last act, we roll up the sleeping bags and start heading for the parking lot to beat the rush. Tomorrow it starts all over again and we want to make it in time for the tarp run again. Maybe tomorrow I'll find some of my old Katimavikers....

La Cuisine/Art:?

Knowing My Place as a Volunteer at the Winnipeg Folk Festival

Danielle Carignan Svenne

I know my place as a volunteer at the WFF. The question is, do I want to be there? I feel more than somewhat awkward approaching this discussion in the first place. The WFF is a sacred cow in my life, not to be jostled, poked, or prodded—and certainly not to be butchered—by anyone, including me. I do want to perform "niceness" in this review, and to brush over problems that, for me, blemished this year's festival. However, if I am going to be honest about what happened, I cannot ignore the events or the emotions. If I am going to publicly address what I felt and experienced, a dilemma faces me. I had problems, and I continue to struggle with the issues that arose. How can I provide the rosy view of the WFF that I want everyone to uphold, yet also face my reality that it was disappointing and frustrating? This review is an exploration of my profound level of ambivalence, as a long-serving, and now high-ranking, volunteer.