

By Nancy Lanthier

PUBLIC ENEMY NO. 1

Weimar, Germany: about 1920. Walter Gropius scratched some bold lines across a blueprint. He did more of the same for about forty years and now his work is evident in cities all over.

He is the extraordinarily influential rector behind the Bauhaus school of architecture, a regnant institute which constructed buildings of stark efficiency and took the world by storm. The new esthetic stripped design in favor of minimalized structure. It ripped down decorative architecture of the Victorian era, erecting huge, cement filing cabinets in their place. It was fast and low-budget and when Bauhaus hit America, city planners OD'd on it.

Of course, the concrete jungle syndrome has had its effect: overcrowdedness, pollution, alienation, the same, bland appearance of cities everywhere. In an attempt to de-grey city cores, alternative construction matter materialized. Ludwic Miesvanderrohe, a student of Bauhaus, introduced glass and like the founder, his influence has been world-wide.

The amazing rubble splattered on the walls in New York City is largely a result of revolution against Bauhaus. Underlying a great deal of early graffiti writing, in all its artistic, polemic, filthy glory, is a reaction against massive amounts of exposed cement. More recently, graffiti has become a rather hip pass time as well as a communicative forum.

In Toronto, (concrete capitol of the world), the small amount of graffiti is indicative of two factors: it's called Destruction of Public Property in the Criminal Code (in New York, it's legal), and, whether stemming from this law or not, potential sprainters are a much more conservative lot north of the border.

"Personally, I don't have that much nerve," said Andrew 01, one of about six graffiti writers in Toronto. "I usually drink a lot, then I'll go out and do about 110 pieces in one night."

A01 is vehemently against the Bauhouse academy ("it killed American architecture — Gropius was

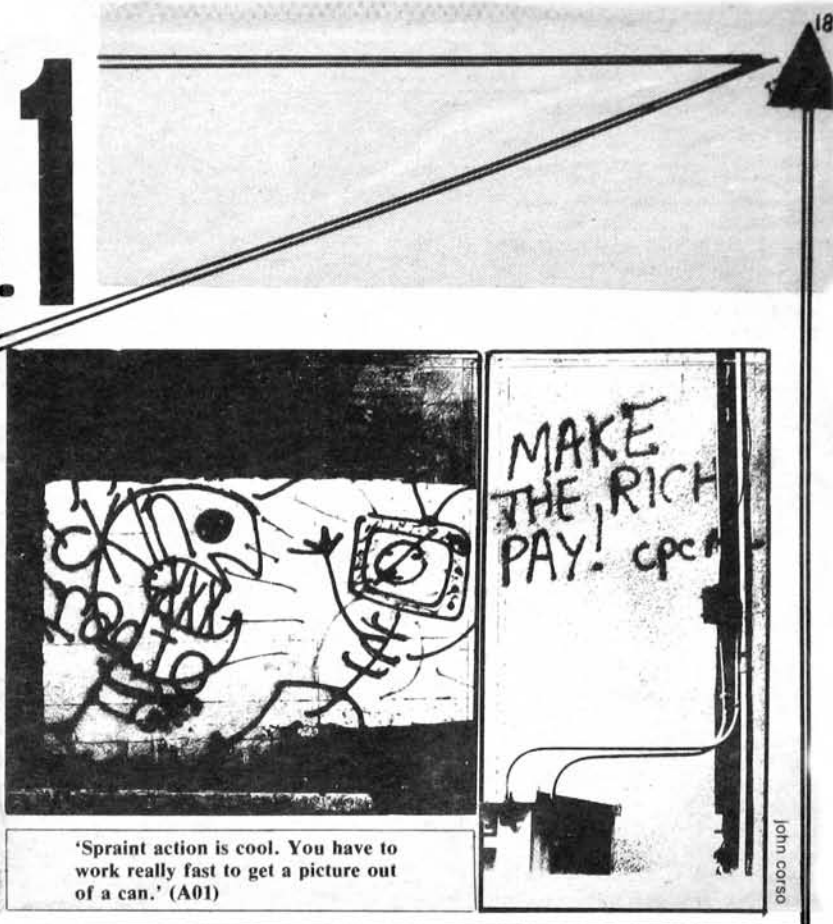
a demon!"), and his sprainting, for the most part, is an effort to add esthetics to downtown development. His weird, joyous mural in Kensington Market, for which he received permission to do, typifies the type of graffiti he would like to do on walls all over Toronto.

His next mural will be painted on the side of the Bamboo Club. When he's finished, A01 plans to start the "Outer Space Gallery," which would "turn the whole city into a grand art gallery." Despite pending legislation that could change the status of graffiti writing from mere vandalism to "violence to a building," A01 is trying to receive permission to make various walls throughout the city devoted to artwork. The gallery would be a possible solution to the concrete jungle syndrome and, to what he terms, "the introverted arts community," a phenomena of subsidized art.

"So many artists who receive grants work on their own show, couped up in their studio. They have private showings — if they have one at all — and the average citizen never sees a finished product." He says fine art for public viewing should be prioritized more.

Graffiti writing is found mainly around Queen St. W., where people are more likely to respond, says A01. Nevertheless, he's "not trying to ram messages down people's throat." His TV drawings are supposed to make people think about the "nature of television," he says. "The stuff I do is ambiguous. I don't like blaring messages — like advertising for a band — that kind of stuff grates me. Symbols are much more subtle and reach a wider range of people."

Inspiration behind graffiti isn't necessarily the urge to be artistic. "Most graffiti isn't art. It's more like an anonymous act," says A01. He adds the impulse to write on a wall is often connected with a private, relaxed mood — much like the atmosphere in the washroom. "Private state can make the squarest guy profoundly pornographic."



'Spraint action is cool. You have to work really fast to get a picture out of a can.' (A01)

John Corso

