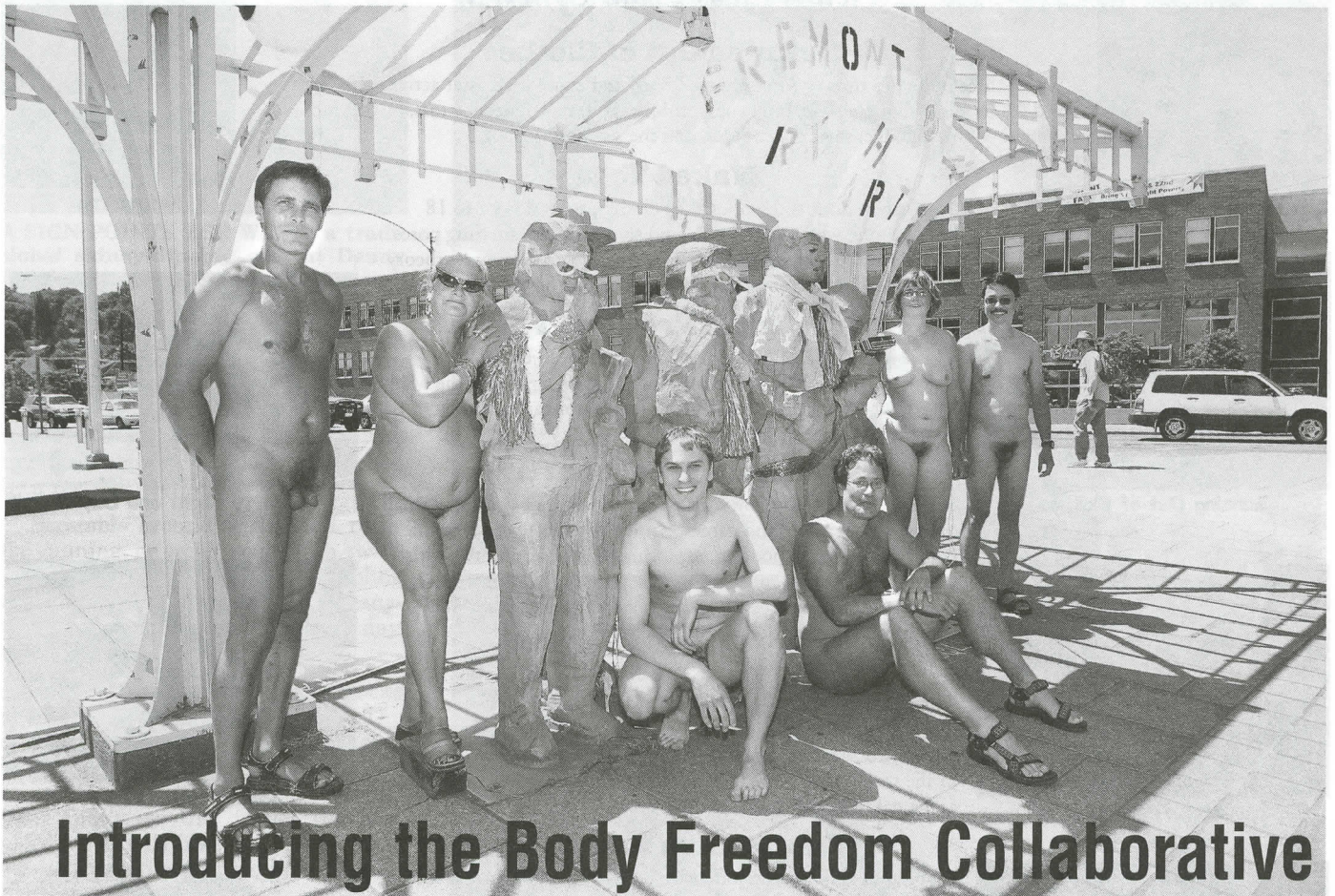


WAVE MAKERS



Introducing the Body Freedom Collaborative

John Cornicello

MEMBERS OF THE BODY FREEDOM COLLABORATIVE pose in front of Seattle's most famous statue, *Waiting for the Interurban*, during the Fremont Fresh Art Festival in June.

Mark Storey

I HAD BEEN LOOKING for a handful of friends who were interested in pushing the envelope of naturist activism. I was and remain highly satisfied with the activist opportunities afforded me as a Naturist Action Committee board member, but I also wanted to hook up with a small, creative, rather brassy group of naturists in the Seattle area who were interested in taking effective, practical, and artistically intriguing steps to changing the public's perception of social nudity.

Daniel Johnson, also of Seattle, had been following the actions of British body freedom activist Vincent Bethell, and was looking for people with similar goals here in the United States. Daniel and I got in touch with each other early in 2002, and found that we shared a desire to tap into the vitality of Seattle area arts- and activist-oriented communities to advance acceptance of non-sexualized public nudity. Johnson and I decided to form the Body Freedom Collaborative.

I knew from my experience with NAC that there is much good that can be done through traditional means of working with legislative systems. This line of promotion and defense of naturist liberties must continue. Still, I was not alone on the NAC board in sensing

that the day had come to stir things up just a little, to use creativity and artistry both rationally and pragmatically to shift society's ideology of the body.

The Body Freedom Collaborative (BFC) was originally called the Body Freedom Cooperative. When we applied to the State of Washington for not-for-profit incorporation, however, they said that we were not technically a "cooperative." Thus the name change.

Johnson and I agreed that it would take at least a summer to meet naturists and non-naturists who wished to work with us. BFC is not a membership group. We are a loose coalition of individuals and groups—not always necessarily seeing eye to eye—who



TOP: Kathy Blanchard, Mark Storey, and Daniel Johnson quickly dress after the Jan. 18 BFC Polar Bare Swim at Mercer Island's Luther Burbank Park. The swim caught the attention of the regional media and generated much interest in BFC's mission and tactics. **Bottom:** Johnson and Storey sit in the early morning hours waiting to submit BFC's *Free Beach Trilogy* application to the Seattle Fringe Theatre Festival.

want to work together, if only temporarily, on specific projects. We particularly hoped to team up with non-naturists who were used to challenging social norms for the good of all.

To that end, BFC planned a handful of simple, non-threatening, enjoyable outings in which Johnson and I could meet folks and determine who might be good to work with on the more interesting projects we had in mind. We thus hosted a nude day hike and two evening discussions at a pub and a coffee shop.

Johnson also set up a BFC Web site (www.bodyfreedom.org) and a Yahoo online discussion group where like-minded people could introduce themselves and discuss ideas. Johnson became a NAC Area Representative, and BFC joined the Naturist Society Network, which helped raise awareness of the group among TNS members. At an early stage, Shirley Gauthier (then the Northwest Government Affairs Team Chair for the American Association for Nude Recreation) was also involved, and helped tell AANR clubs in the region about our goals. By this spring, BFC had enough people to move forward.

BFC Mission and Tactics

More than once this year, naturists from both TNS and AANR have asked Johnson and me what BFC is all about. The question arises because of the surreal amount of media attention this year over what little BFC has done so far. Regional newspaper, radio, and television networks apparently have an unquenchable appetite for stories about naked people appearing in public. So far, the media has been fairly good at articulating our goals and the tactics we propose to achieve them.

BFC's mission is simple. Our ultimate goal is to see the development of an officially sanctioned public clothing-optional beach in Washington, preferably in or near Seattle. Still more generally, we aim to shift the perception of the nude human body as shameful, morally wrong, or offensive, slowly reshaping it to be more accepting of non-sexual nudity on public lands. More generally, we wish to pursue our aims creatively, with art, with flair, and in such a manner that observers—at least the textiles—will smile and cheer.



URBAN NUDDITY: Johnson and Claudia Kellersch finishing a nude photo shoot at Hale's Brewery in Seattle (left); and together at the Seattle Arboretum Visitor's Center.

Mark Storey

Johnson describes BFC in the following terms: "The Body Freedom Collaborative is a grassroots network of artists, writers, outdoor enthusiasts, citizen activists, pranksters, students, educators, and entrepreneurs aggressively advancing opportunities on appropriate public lands for body-positive, clothing-free recreation and creative expression, in non-sexual contexts."

Johnson adds, "Our aim is to replace body-negative unawareness with a celebrative passion for wholesome and diverse free expression to help forge a major shift in the way we will live and relate to each other after centuries of unwarranted repression."

Some nudists have deep reservations about any individual or group speaking up or appearing nude publicly for body freedom. They do not wish to make waves, fearing a social or legal backlash that could curtail the meager liberties we presently enjoy. These concerns are often well founded, as witnessed by city councils enacting

stricter anti-nudity laws due to one person's uninformed and untimely public nakedness.

On the other hand, we cannot gain acceptance of social nudity unless we crawl out of the dark and make a logical, compelling case for body freedom. BFC is committed to thinking out activist projects, to giving prima facie respect for law, to acknowledging the moral parameters of civil disobedience, and to recognizing the relevance (or irrelevance) of offense, before stepping out naked in public. The types of actions BFC hopes to employ will—to the best of our ability—be effective, considered, and proportionate to their intended aim. BFC likes to make waves...as long as we can surf them nude.

The Polar Bare Swim

Once the BFC Web site was up, Johnson and I decided we needed to generate awareness of our wish to pro-

mote body freedom actively and aggressively. On Jan. 1, I read about a polar bare swim at Wreck Beach, in Vancouver. I thought it a great idea, but it was too late that afternoon to organize one New Year's Day for BFC.

Looking through the calendar for a winter holiday associated with nudity, I found a second option: Jan. 17, Benjamin Franklin's birthday. Franklin is well known for enjoying a daily nude "air bath." So in honor of Benjamin Franklin's proto-body freedom, we inaugurated the BFC Polar Bare Swim the following Saturday. How much more American could we get?

Kathy Blanchard and I checked out my proposed early-morning site: Luther Burbank Park on Mercer Island near Seattle. We walked all over the park at the same time in the morning as we planned to do our swim the following week. This way we knew just when to pull it off to minimize altercations with local police, yawning joggers, and bleary-eyed people walking their dogs. We wanted neither to



John Cornicello

ON THE TRAIL OF NUDITY ACCEPTANCE: Russ Riddell, Storey and Johnson strolling the Burke-Gilman Trail in Seattle.

cause a riot nor to get arrested over such a minor event.

Johnson's friend Kari joined us to help photograph the swim. The whole thing went off perfectly, with few people observing us or seeming to care. That the skinny-dip was only yards away from the King County Parks and Recreation administrative offices lent the event an extra flair that many in the media picked up.

At least one newspaper reporter, Kathy George of the Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*, had been visiting our Web site. She got wind of our little swim, and wrote a story about these crazy people with an agenda to advance body freedom.

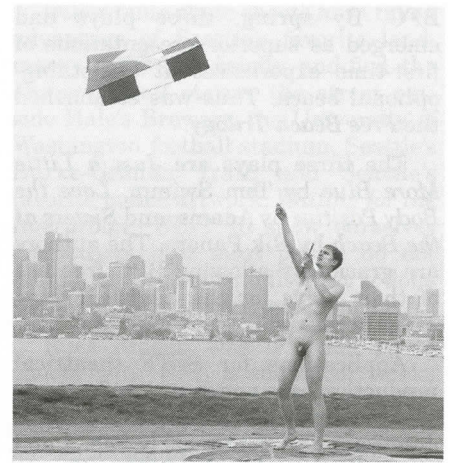
She contacted Johnson and me to ask us what we were about. She quoted me accurately as saying that I wished to use "guerrilla pranksterism" to advance our goals. I illustrated what I had in mind with an image that has taken on a life of its own.

Civil disobedience is usually understood in terms of breaking the law and irritating people. I suppose that breaking a law is usually a bad thing, but I

now believe that civil disobedience—perhaps in the spirit of Gandhi and King—can be done differently. Why do bad to achieve a good? Why not do good to achieve good?

Seattle still has the WTO riots clearly in mind. Most folks around here think of civil disobedience in terms of street blockades, graffiti, and broken windows. Why not, I contend, fight injustice by doing good? Why not fight for body freedom by doing good in public while naked? I told George my plan was to work with a group of five to eight people, to arrive at a pre-selected public site in a van, to have us leap out of the van nude (the media turned it into a "black van" somewhere along the line), take five minutes to clean up a city park or scrub away some graffiti, jump back into the van, and drive away.

Observers would not know what to make of it. We would clearly be doing something good for the city, yet we would be naked. I can imagine that observers might pause a minute or two before calling 911, thinking, "Let's let them clean that mess up before we call the cops." The media would love it, as



Daniel Johnson

JOHNSON FLYING a kite at Seattle's Gas Works Park, with the city skyline in the background.

is clear by one newspaper and the Associated Press requesting we tell them when and where we are going to pull this sequence of stunts.

After the first *Post-Intelligencer* article, other newspapers, the AP, nearly a dozen radio stations, and two television stations contacted us for stories. One polar bare swim and a Gandhiesque theory of civil disobedience do not a story make, so we did our best to tell them to wait until the drippy Northwest weather cleared and we could pursue more actions. Our biggest project of the year was only then taking shape.

The Free Beach Trilogy

Naturists applauded Johnna Adams and Martin E. Williams's one-act play, *Nude On the Beach*, when it was performed at the 2002 Western Gathering. I contacted Adams last fall to ask if she and her Southern California playwright peers would like to try something bigger at the 2003 Seattle Fringe Theatre Festival (SFTF), the town's largest theatrical event of the year. Over 20,000 people come from all over the Northwest to attend nearly 500 performances during the SFTF.

Adams agreed that if BFC could get their work into the festival, that she would do her best to come up with original plays about nude beaches, the actors, and a director.

Over the course of the next several months, Adams and some peers from the Orange County Playwright Association submitted their work to

BFC. By spring, three plays had emerged as superior presentations of first-time experiences at a clothing-optional beach. Thus was established the *Free Beach Trilogy*.

The three plays are *Just a Little More Blue* by Tom Swimm, *Love the Body Positive* by Adams, and *Sisters at the Beach* by Rik Panero. The authors are graciously allowing BFC free use of their plays for the Seattle Fringe Theatre Festival.

Applications for SFTF theatrical productions are non-juried and accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. Johnson and I got up early Feb. 1 and sat in line outside the SFTF office to make sure the *Free Beach Trilogy* would get into the festival. In a line that wrapped around the block, we were number eight.

The three performances of the trilogy will contain full male and female nudity, and BFC plans to inject as much nakedness into the audience's experience as possible. Plans are in the works to include nude ushers, a nude stage crew, a nude female emcee, and possibly some nudity in select portions of the audience.

BFC is deeply gratified at the number of people who have bribed, demanded, cajoled, or whined their way onto the list of potential naked volunteers. It appears that there is no shortage of men and women in the region who would like to get naked in public as part of an artistic production.

BFC is also grateful to the Naturist Education Foundation for providing the major financial support for this production; The Northwest Nudist Association for its generous contribution, allowing BFC to meet its budget almost from the beginning; Lake Bronson Club, and various anonymous individual donors. Neither BFC nor the trilogy's backers will make any money from these performances. All money collected at the gate will be given to the actors and director to help defray travel costs.

BFC is working with local naturists to market this production, and in the process, educate people in the region about non-lewd clothing-optional use of public lands, as well as about their opportunity to enjoy nude recreation at regional nudist clubs. The *Free Beach Trilogy* should be an aesthetically pleasing promotional tool for clothing-optional recreation in the Northwest.



John Cornicello

IN THE NAME OF ART: Johnson, Riddell and Storey pose as nude cyclists at the Fremont Fresh Art Festival.

The 13th annual Seattle Fringe Theatre Festival will be held in the Capitol Hill district on Sept. 18-28. The *Free Beach Trilogy*—to be performed at the 70-seat Union Garage

Two—will last 90 minutes, and have no intermission. The plays make up a comedy/drama triptych, each cast with two women and a man. The dates and times of the trilogy performances are

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John Cornicello

BFC contributed a public “Nudes Painting Nudes” program for the Fremont Fresh Art Festival, where both artists and models could choose nudity.

Saturday, Sept. 20 at 5:45 p.m.;
 Sunday, Sept. 21 at 2 p.m.; and
 Tuesday, Sept. 23 at 8 p.m. Tickets will
 go on sale through the SFTF Web site
 in September (www.seattlefringe.org).

Nude Photo Shoots

Aside from the merely social nude hikes and coffeehouse discussions, BFC has had fun getting out in public and doing nude photo shoots. To date, no observer has done anything but smile and wave.

Various small groups of us have gone to the Seattle Arboretum for shots of ourselves appearing fully human walking the trails and at the

visitor’s center. For the latter shot, there were quite a few people around, so I went up to one man and asked if he’d mind doing the camera work so that I could get in the shot naked with Johnson and Claudia Kellersch. He smiled, but declined, saying that he had to go jogging. I snapped the pic, Johnson and Kellersch got dressed, and we calmly walked into the arboretum. No one seemed to mind.

That same day on Foster Island it was Johnson and Kellersch’s turn once again to be in the shot. A couple of guys with inflatable rafts had been following us, waiting to see what we were up to. After the shot, they raised their arms and cheered.

Other nude photo shoots have taken advantage of Seattle’s favorite landmarks. BFC has briefly nudified the *Fremont Troll* statue, the street outside Hale’s Brewery, the University of Washington football stadium, Seattle’s Burke-Gilman Trail, and Seattle’s favorite public artwork, *Waiting for the Interurban*. Why? To show ourselves and others that most people do not mind a bit of public nudity if it is done in a lighthearted, fun-loving spirit.

Russ Riddell was in some photo shoots with BFC a couple of weeks later. He explained to me that when he and his friend Alice Anderson go out for nude photo shoots in public, he rarely has any but pleasantly bemused responses from passersby as long as he just ignores them and goes on doing whatever he’s doing. That could be washing his car at a coin-op facility, riding his bike on a university campus, or getting a newspaper from a street-side machine.

Maybe, Riddell hypothesizes, people are not worried so much about nudity itself, as weird naked people foisting their nakedness onto them. A normal person acting normally, but who happens to be naked, does not seem to cause much of a stir. Perhaps, he concludes, society is not so offended by mere nudity as we believe.

Most people can instinctively and immediately tell the difference between an exhibitionist and someone who is just having fun prodding social norms to advance a social agenda. I’ve often hiked nude over the last decade, and as long as I remember to act as if nothing odd is happening, *no one* has appeared at all uneasy with my or my friends’ nudity.

The Fremont Fresh Art Festival Welcomes BFC

John Cornicello is both a naturist and an art lover with close ties to the art communities of the Fremont district of Seattle. (Many of his photos have appeared in *N*.) Cornicello told BFC that Shanon Askay, an organizer for the inaugural Fremont Fresh Art Festival, wanted three volunteers to pose “nearly naked” as Fremont Solstice Parade nude bicyclists for her June 15 event.

I contacted Askay to offer assistance from BFC. It turned out that Askay was open to the idea of nudity, but she and other festival organizers wanted their first event to go smooth-

ly. BFC agreed to ask the volunteer bike models to wear a scanty loin covering in the front. Johnson, Riddell, and I sat on the bikes for nearly two hours as artists young and old painted and photographed us. People walked, cycled, and drove by with waves and smiles, as the morning breeze made our nudity fully apparent under the flimsy bandannas draped over a string around our waists.

BFC also offered to host a nude modeling session for artists. We called it "Nudes Painting Nudes." Not only did BFC provide five nude models as part of the public festival, but artists (like Portland naturist Henry Yuen) could themselves sketch and paint nude. Festival attendees walked among the nude models and artists, giving us a chance to chat naked with clothed people in a public setting.

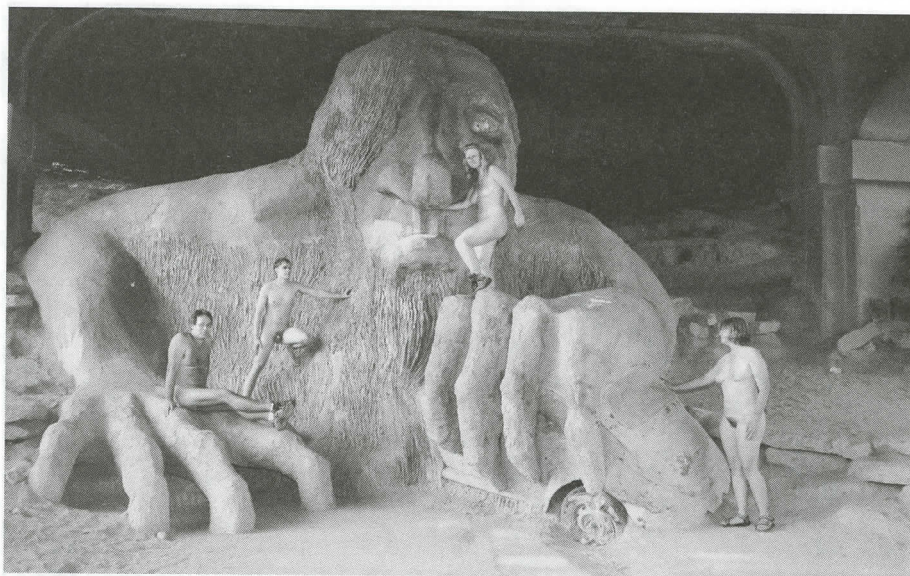
Askay asked BFC to take part in a similar festival in October, and in years to follow. She hopes in the future to allow us to inject more nudity closer to the center of public action. BFC was happy to be of service to this festival, and we look forward to working with similar local groups in making at least some forms of public nudity a normal thing in the Northwest.

Future Plans

BFC still has a long way to go. At least two newspaper reporters have distorted remarks Johnson made about nudist clubs to make it sound as though BFC is opposed to nude recreation at private settings. Although BFC's mission is directed primarily at public lands, both Johnson and I want to see the clubs in the area benefit from our efforts. We are not going to limit our quest for body freedom on public lands, however, to those few approaches the most cautious and timid nudist might employ.

In addition to the *Free Beach Trilogy*, BFC is beginning production of a Body Freedom Film Festival. Johnson is contacting independent filmmakers across North America who have produced or are producing films addressing naturism, social nudity, clothing-optional beaches, and related issues. Johnson has multiple college degrees in computer animation, and is pursuing his own video work in animation on these themes.

In addition, BFC looks forward to brief acts of mischievous creativity in



John Cornicello (top); Mark Storey (bottom)

AN EARLY BFC "Happening" at Seattle's famed Fremont Troll (top), and a casual walk along Seattle's Foster Island near Highway 520.

advancing body freedom on public lands. Call it "guerrilla pranksterism," "civil nudification," "naturist dramaturgy," or simply "naked silliness," BFC just wants to show the playfulness and normalcy of being human.

Rooted in the artistic creativity of the late 1960s are short performance art pieces called "happenings." For BFC, these events are to be seemingly unrehearsed, spontaneous displays of creative public nudity. BFC thus plans to engage the public from time to time, and from place to place, on humorous

and aesthetic levels, giving them pause to reconsider their antipathy to the human form.

The approaches embraced by the Body Freedom Collaborative are unique, we think, because they are grounded in both forethought and respect for law, are designed to actually accomplish something, even if only in an incremental fashion, and are imbued with a funky, creative spirit. BFC does not pretend that it will change the world by itself; we do hope, however, to be *part* of a change for the better.