

THE CULTURAL NEWSMAGAZINE FALL 1984 \$2.50

FUSE

WHY MICHAEL JACKSON?
METAMORPHOSIS OF A MUSICIAN

NEW FILMS/NEW DIRECTORS
MOTHERHOOD IN CURRENT MOVIES

WOMEN, ART & ANTIMILITARISM
BRITISH VIDEO AND DEBERT DEBUNKING

SOCIALIZATION IN PROGRESS



CAUTION



FUSE
 FALL 1984 • VOL. VIII, NO. 3

MANAGING EDITOR
 Joyce Mason

EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE
 Ric Amis, Himani Bannerji, Lynne Fernie, Sandra Gregson, Jude Johnston, Kate Lushington, Frances Leeming, Marlene Philip, Pat Wilson, Lisa Wyndels, Bruce Barber (Halifax), Sara Diamond (Vancouver), Martha Fleming (Montreal).

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
 Clive Robertson, Lisa Steele

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 Ric Amis, Bruce Barber, Gary Betcherman,



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 CATHY BUSBY

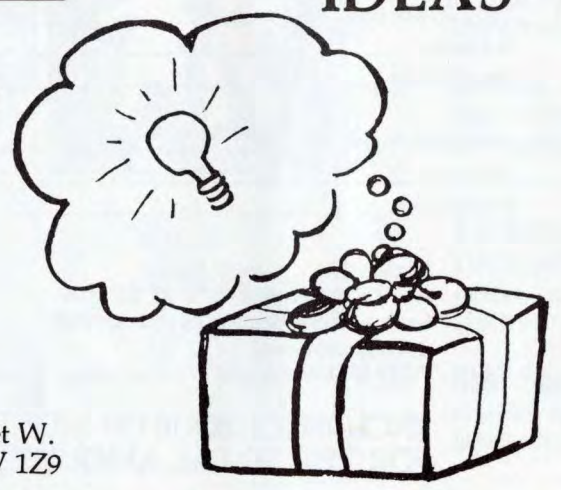
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DIDI HERMAN

COVER: Artwork concept and design by Chris Reed (with a little help from the Department of Highways).

No Easy Solutions

CHANCE LED TO THE DISCOVERY of FUSE and it was a delight to find such a magazine; one which takes a point of view not generally held in the mainstream of publications — and it's even Canadian! Whenever I pick up a magazine or newspaper I turn to the letters column first. I found those in the Spring/84 Fuse interesting; in particular the one written by Susan G. Cole.

My comments have to do with the writer's opinions on the porn issue.

According to Ms. Cole, "Researchers studying it (porn) are finding out that exactly this posture of pornographers causes viewers to trivialize rape. Prolonged exposure to these myths makes 'normal' men believe that women really ask for it (rape)." (Italics mine)

One of the first distinctions I noticed about FUSE is, though it takes the women's perspective, it does not follow "The Line". The Line says many things, one of which is that all the studies showing a causal relationship between pornography and rape are correct. There is a variety of research to choose from and depending on what is read and, more importantly, how it is read, will determine the conclusions one will draw from the research. I'm not sure what Cole means by "normal" men. I would think, from my readings and personal experiences, that due to present sexual perceptions that men have of themselves, of women and of their social roles that many more men than we think believe in the rape myths going into the experimental environment. These beliefs are more deeply ingrained in our culture than we are willing to admit but studies do not seem to test prior belief. Pornography, therefore, enforces these already present beliefs. Taking the porn away still leaves the belief.

However, Cole, to her credit, does not follow the line when she says that porn is the practice of sex discrimination and that she does not believe in prior restriction. I agree and have also distinguished between action and non-action in relation to pornography but after much thought on how regulations could be carried out I have come to the

conclusion that this method cannot work as such. More power to Cole if she can devise a means of legislating such suits for women to bring against coercing pornographers. As I understand, even if there was such a provision in law for such suits, they would be difficult cases to prove. What is needed, it seems to me, is a support network to encourage women to take men to court for all acts of violence. For example, in France a few years ago prostitutes grouped together and pressed serious charges against their pimps.

Women who take the line assume that other women share the same philosophy as themselves. This is obviously not so. Perhaps the sex industry should unionize. A union could serve as a consciousness raising group for these people as well as regulating money, acts of violence and health standards to name but a few concerns.

Another problem with those who toe the line is that they don't appear to appreciate the long term effects of actions taken today (though I've seen refutations of this criticism). They have no sense of history.

Cultural studies look at porn as a reflection of the culture. There now exists a great deal of confusion over rapidly changing sex roles which people cannot keep up with. There is also a loss of communication skills between men and women resulting in confused personal relationships. What porn does do is reflect and enhance, but does not cause, sexism and unhealthy relationships.

The whole cultural fabric must change and this can be accomplished with education in the schools, in the media, in the community and in the churches. These changes will not just happen the next day. Equality takes time. In Victorian days men tried to prevent women from going into office work. What today is considered women's work was 100 years ago men's work. Women had to fight to get out of sex stereotyped occupations such as nurse, governess and factory worker in order to be able to rise to the status of secretary.

We need changes in attitude and belief, changes in self perception, changes in our social roles, changes in how we communicate with others. All these changes will lead to positive

changes in social relationships.

We are the generation to continue the history and indicate the direction to take for equality between the sexes to become a reality.

Susan C. Koenig
London, Ontario

Higher Expectations

ALIX DOBKIN'S ARTICLE "SEXISM and Racism in Rock 'n' Roll" in the Summer '84 issue of FUSE, can hardly be contested in terms of its general thesis and analysis. Yes, sexism and racism exist in rock 'n' roll. Of course, *Lover Boy* and *The Cars* and *The Rolling Stones* and hundreds of other bands are grossly sexist and/or racist.

However, it seems to me that most people who would even consider reading such an article in FUSE are probably aware of this and it's unlikely that anyone who's truly into any of the above bands would take any notice of it. In other words, it's more or less preaching to the converted without really informing us of any of the alternatives. For this reason, the article would really be more suitable for *The Toronto Star* or even *Homemaker*, given the level of its analysis.

The alternatives that are offered in the article are fairly innocuous. Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun", for example, and Pat Benetar's "Love is a Battlefield" are hardly examples of strong feminist lyrics, and The Parachute Club's "Rise Up" — ("Womens time has come/Everybody's time has come") are ambiguous. I mean if "everybody's time has come" — does this mean Ronald Reagan's and Brian Mulroney's time has come? Is it a reference to nuclear war or what?

There are certainly many examples of strong feminist lyrics in rock music (yes, rock music) from women such as Vi Subversa of *Poison Girls* (who have several albums out in North America), Susan Sturman and Judith Quinlan, lyricists for *Mama Quilla II* and many other bands such as the *Au Pairs*, *The Raincoats*, *Crass*, *The Moral Lepers*, *Fifth Column*, *The Passions*, *Delta Five*, *Noh Special Effects* and others.

No mention has been made in this

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ARTEXTE

Letter from Québec

Cultural Politics Begin at Home

MARTHA FLEMING

ONE NEEDN'T GO ALL THE WAY to Nicaragua. There are other places in the hemisphere where latin-tongued revolutionaries grapple with multiple colonization and the problematic of their own Catholicism. Being made the target of an undeclared (at writing) war by a Reagan administration in collusion with NATO isn't the only criterion of certifiable political upheaval — with one Canadian Prime Ministerial hopeful a one-time Bechtel board member and the other a puppet of major U.S. steel and mining multinationals, Québec's uneasy 'socialism' is not immune. Living in Québec for almost four years has taught me this much. Remember the War Measures Act?

If you detect a note of derision, know that it is not at the expense of a Nicaraguan revolution, nor a Nicaraguan people called upon to physically defend not only their country but also, on our behalf, many beliefs which are so much easier for us to hold here in Canada. Rather, the barb is directed at the (mostly English) Canadians who have recently sought a pious, lefty refuge for themselves in Nicaragua's imminent danger, not bothering to explore a home-front situation of which they are an integral part, a grasp of which could well lead them to a profound, lived understanding of occidental oppression and colonization as something less local than South or Central America and more complex than any First World/Third World reduction. It is a comprehension which would serve a free Nicaragua better than lightning visits.

The relation of the English cultural left elite in Canada to French-



Death of Wolfe by Benjamin West, London, 1776; from publicity flyer for Royal Ontario Museum exhibition, *Georgian Canada: Conflict and Culture* (June 7 to October 21st) — "under the gracious patronage of Her Majesty the Queen with the generous support of the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture".

Canadians and the Indian Nations to play interpretive white-knight rather than to make a real contribution to the definition, dissection and dissolution of whatever patriarchy would be called if they would help us name it.

The point here is neither one to score for Federalism, nor for Québec separatism. In fact, the bitterest fruit of Québec's attempt to throw off a mantle of colonization has been just this polarization which entirely misses the mark of the lived experience of most Québécois, and opens up a huge chasm between Québec and the rest of French Canada from Tignish to Sudbury and Brandon. For if recent language law in Québec is the taste of the Stalinist edge

of the PQ mandate which Liberals love to make the country hate, what can one say about the century-long discrepancy between the constitutional rights of Manitoba's enormous French-speaking population and the contempt with which those rights have been ignored?

I'm certainly not the first to suggest that the model for colonization has been the successful exploitation of women, and the analogy between the situation of women and that of Québec is not really mine to extend — it is anchored in the very political process of a country that makes Québec *act* like all the other provinces, and yet always *treats* it differently. One has only to look at the blatant clue that is the similar way in which the three party leader debates were structured.

The ghettoization of "the woman question" and the "French debate", while appearing to address them, co-opted both issues as important and integral to both the campaign and the country. CBC television carried the English debate across the country. The French debate was carried on the state network's poor cousin *Radio Canada*. The divine irony of this bilingual logic is that *Radio Canada* stations are only licensed where the existence of a substantial quota of French speaking listeners has been proven, both in the CBC's budget and to the satisfaction of the CRTC. This leaves large portions of the country without French language state television service. This reduces, again, "the French question" to one of geography, much as "the woman question" is reduced to one of genitalia. For within her borders, La Belle Province shows the fading colours of French separatism, however self-admittedly outdated and distanced from electoral will. She displays, to the glee of federal propagandists, a xenophobia almost entirely constructed of their manipulation of her historic anger. Federal ideology wishes to contain the real *national* menace of the French Fact, rendering its caricature useful as the object of disdain with which to shame her allies and herself, giving English racism a righteous tint. All Canadian cultural workers should show that they want nothing of it.

The power that I use
Is the product of a culture
That kills and screws
All the people of the world
For the comfort of the few.
But you know I use their power
To scream against them louder!

R. Melas, CAPAC '82

Rock and roll can be used to "scream against them louder" and some women feel happiest playing this kind of music as opposed to folk or disco or pop — just as some people prefer the latter. In fact, a more useful analysis for *FUSE* might be a critique of some of the so-called "radical left" bands such as *The Parachute Club*, *Gang of Four*, *D.O.A.*, *The Dead Kennedys*, *Truth and Rights* and *The Clash*. Most of these bands have been heralded as the darlings of the radical left, but they are by no means entirely free of sexism/racism and/or flagrant opportunism. The readers of *FUSE* are moreover,

Martha Fleming has been *FUSE*'s Montreal editor for the last four years.

continued from page 2

article by Dobkin of the women who have been playing rock 'n roll for years, some of whom came out of *Rock Against Sexism* in England (eg. *The Raincoats*), some of whom have been ploughing away here in Canada and the U.S. One might almost suggest that such an omission is merely an example of the kind of sexism that makes the mainstream music industry ignore us.

Rock Against Sexism, after all, happened almost ten years ago now and came directly out of the *Rock Against Racism* movement in the U.K. Women have been all too aware of "sexism and racism in rock 'n roll" for many years and by refusing to acknowledge this and go beyond merely pointing this out yet again, Dobkin comes close to perpetuating ignorance on the subject. A great deal has happened in the past ten years but Dobkin mentions none of it, as if she's unaware of it. However, *FUSE* has published several articles about feminists playing rock music, so Dobkin's article is like reading about the invention of the wheel all over again. I think as readers of *FUSE*, we can expect a little more depth in an analysis of current issues.

Also, Dobkin implies that rock music is inherently sexist and racist. With this I disagree. As Vancouver feminist and rock musician Rachel Melas wrote in her song "Music Is Your Body":

The power that I use
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R. Melas, CAPAC '82

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more likely to be listeners of these bands and might benefit more from such an analysis. Some of the above band members might even read such an article and benefit from it too. (Whereas it's hardly likely that members of *Lover Boy* are going to look at Dobkin's article.)

I know in Vancouver, dialogue between feminists and such bands as *D.O.A.*, *The Subhumans* and *The Dead Kennedys* from San Francisco, hasn't fallen entirely on deaf ears (eg., *D.O.A.* and *The DK's* recently did benefits supporting The Wimmings Fire Brigade bombings of pornography outlets in Vancouver).

However, since I realize that Alix Dobkin's article is not intended to be a consciousness-raiser for male musicians on the radical left, I will stick to my contention that her analysis is shallow, greatly lacking in its knowledge of alternatives of why feminists continue to play rock music and of how much they have done and are doing to break down the stereotypes that exist.

Marian Lydbrooke
Toronto

Corrections

The following section was omitted from the article by Marusia Bociurkiw, "Women, Culture & Inaudibility" (Summer '84, V.8, N.1&2). Page 54 should have begun:

They maintain that there is a difference between "women making art in a male-dominated society...and feminist art working against patriarchy...Activism in itself in women's art has limited effects because it does not examine the representation of women in culture or the production of women as a social category."

'Essentialist', the first of the above categories, best describes much of the work in recent feminist shows. Its emphasis on body imagery, vaginal forms, and 'essential' femininity does not really challenge fixed and rigid categories of femininity that already exist; nor does it analyze the many social contradictions involved in femininity. At best it...

We apologize for the confusion which this final proofing oversight must have caused. □

**Mary, Mary Quite Arbitrary
Here's How Legislation Grows**

IN THE LAST YEAR BOTH THE Ontario Supreme Court and the Ontario Court of Appeal have ruled that the Censor Board of Ontario acts in violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and that it has no legal standards upon which to base decisions to cut, ban or rate films or tapes. In other words, such decisions are totally arbitrary. However, while the Ontario Government awaits its appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, its Censor Board continues to operate full tilt and this spring the Government introduced Bill 82. Bill 82 is a series of amendments to the Ontario Theatres Act increasing the powers of the Censor Board and would seem to be the Government's attempt to get around challenges in the courts.

Since the bill will be brought before the provincial legislature for second reading when the fall session begins we would like to offer *FUSE* readers the following assessment of this legislation.

P.W.

LIST OF OBJECTIONS

Section 1(1)(a) The Ontario Board of Censors will be re-named the Ontario Film Review Board.

Although this sounds less oppressive it is clearly euphemistic, since the Board will have even more power to censor than before.

Section 3(5)(a). **Section 1(2)(ba)** Under Bill 82, the Board will have the power to censor not only films and tapes that are exhibited, but also those that are distributed "for direct or indirect gain". "Indirect gain" is not defined. It could include other than monetary gain, for example gain in reputation as an artist, political gain, social gain, etc.

This section will mean that even films and tapes distributed for non-commercial or private viewing must be submitted for Board approval. Thus

the Board will have broad powers not only to classify, but also to cut, ban and restrict all material distributed in the province.

Section 35(2) Even though the Court of Appeal of Ontario stated that the lack of standards in the Act was unconstitutional, this section lays out no standards upon which the Board must make rulings. Instead it gives the Board the power to censor "in accordance with the criteria prescribed by the regulations". Regulations for the Theatres Act are decided by Cabinet, with no necessary input from the legislature or community and may be changed at any time.

No regulations have been issued at this time to indicate what criteria are to be used. However, current criteria for censorable material used by the Board includes such broad and vague terms as "explicit portrayal of sexual activity," and moralistic admonitions against such things as "scenes of urination."

Section 35(3) Bill 82 sets out the powers of the Censor Board to limit exhibition of a film or tape to a specific time and a specific place if they wish.

This power, although not stated in previous legislation, has been used consistently in the past to control smaller and non-commercial exhibitors.

Section 3(9) This section of Bill 82 exempts the Censor Board from Part I of the Statutory Powers Procedures Act.

This is an attempt by the Censor Board to avoid any obligation to provide a full and fair hearing such as one would receive in a court of law. This covers decisions regarding approval, censoring and classification of films or tapes.

Section 35(5)(6)(7) Under the amended Theatres Act, a Board decision may be appealed. In paying lip-service to a principle of fairness, the appeal panel

will consist of different Board members than those who made the original ruling. Never-the-less it is the Board itself that will hear appeals.

It should be noted that standard practice for legal appeals is that they are to be heard by a higher and different court altogether. The Board's appeal decision will be final, and a person who submits a film or tape to the appeal board must pay a second fee.

Section 40 (3) Like the standards for censoring films and tapes, standards for censoring of advertising of films will be set out in regulations which will be subject only to Cabinet approval. Bill 82 does not give any indication of the criteria that will be listed in the new regulations.

In the past advertising for the Canadian film *Surfacing* was censored for including a depiction of a bare-breasted woman diving into the water.

Section 4 (2)(c)(d)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7) Under Bill 82, the exact powers of inspectors are spelled out more clearly and

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specifically with regard to seizure of equipment or films and tapes. Seizure of goods is permitted even if no charges are laid.

This is an unnecessary and excessive control. It should be sufficient to lay charges if a law is violated. Seizure of goods does not serve any purpose and provides undue opportunity for harassment of selected organizations or individuals.

Section 10(2) The present Theatres Act requires that a theatre which exhibits "standard" film (35mm movies) must be licenced. Bill 82, however, will extend licencing requirements to include any "premise used primarily for the exhibition of other than standard film."

This means that any gallery, screening room, cinemateque or other establishment that shows primarily video, 16mm or 8mm film must be licenced.

Section 11.7.(2)(c) The amended Theatres Act will give the Theatres Branch Director (who is also the Chairman of the Censor Board) the power to refuse to issue a licence if "the applicant is a corporation and the past conduct of an officer, director or shareholder affords reasonable grounds for belief that the applicant will not comply with this Act and the regulations..."

Like the section of Bill 82 that deals with seizure of goods, this section is an unnecessary and excessive restriction. Since there is not even a definition in the Bill of "reasonable grounds for belief" the potential for discriminatory application of this section is immense. Further, the extended licencing requirements in Section 10(2) will make a much larger number of small or non-profit institutions vulnerable to discriminatory withholding of licences.

Section 10(1) If an organization does not primarily use their premises for the exhibition of film or video, the new law will require that any equipment itself will have to be licenced if used for public exhibition.

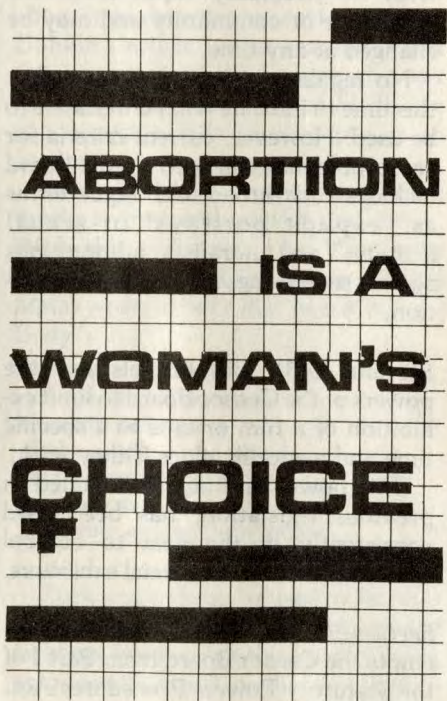
Thus Bill 82 will make it impossible for anyone to exhibit film or video without a licence, either for the equipment or for the premises.

Section 35a.(1) Although Bill 82 states that the Censor Board's decision

on an appeal that it hears is final from the point of view of the person submitting the tape or film, the Censor Board itself may require a film to be re-submitted under the new Act. This will happen when "...the chairman of the Board is of the opinion that the criteria prescribed by regulation respecting subject-matter or content in films have changed since a film was originally approved and classified..."

It is clear from this section that standards of rating are intended to remain a matter of opinion and subject to change with no concern for consistency. There will be substantial potential for harassment of selected organizations or individuals if this section becomes law.

The above critique was prepared by Lynn King and Anna Gronau, June, 1984



Choice Update

THE ONTARIO SUPREME COURT handed down its decision on July 20th, 1984 regarding the issue of whether a woman's right to choose not to have a child was guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights. Justice Parker's 96 page judgement ruled that while "marriage" was certainly a right

guaranteed to women under the Charter (because, according to him, it is "fundamental to our way of life") reproductive freedom was not. Those of us who were worried that our right to be married might be taken away from us can certainly breathe a sigh of relief.

This decision comes one year after Drs. Morgentaler, Scott and Smoling were arrested at their Toronto clinic on charges of "conspiracy to procure a miscarriage". Defense Counsel Morris Manning had attempted to test the constitutional validity of the present abortion law through an application which resulted in a delay of the Doctors' trial. Although Manning intends to appeal Justice Parker's decision to the Ontario Court of Appeal, the Doctors' trial date on the conspiracy charges has now been set for September 17.

The process of trial and appeal is estimated to cost the pro-choice movement a half million dollars. June Callwood, speaking for the Pro-Choice Defense Fund, has reported that the Fund has less than \$1,000 with accumulated bills of over \$150,000 already.

Notwithstanding financial woes and the negative judgement, the mood of the pro-choice workers was hopeful and enthusiastic. Judy Rebick, of the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (O.C.A.C.), vowed to "continue the fight in the streets, and in the election campaign".

At a rally and march outside the Toronto clinic that night, 300 people came out to show their support. The task, over the next couple of months, will be to mobilize thousands more. O.C.A.C., C.A.R.A.L., and other pro-choice groups expect that their supporters will participate actively in upcoming rallies, marches and demonstrations.

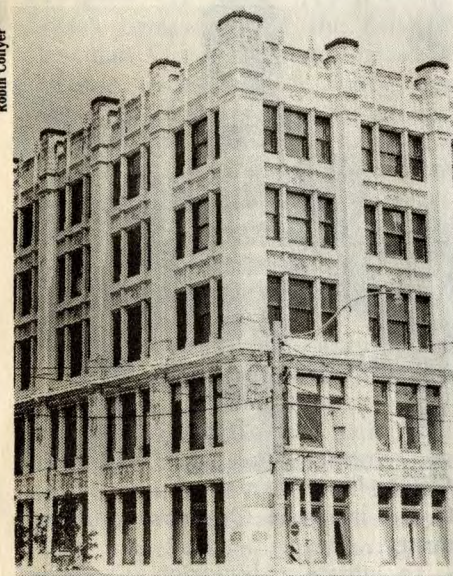
—Didi Herman

If you'll be in Toronto on September 15, come and demonstrate for Choice Before the Trial (phone 532-8193 for more information). To contribute to the Pro-Choice Defense Fund: Make cheques payable to the Pro-Choice Defense Fund and mail to O.C.A.C., P.O. Box 753, Station P, Toronto,

Doing Us Wrong

CITY-TV HAS BOUGHT THE Ryerson building (299 Queen St. West in downtown Toronto) and is evicting all of the tenants in order to make way for the expansion of CITY-TV and MuchMusic's services to the Canadian community.

In MuchMusic's application for a license to the CRTC their stated service



Ryerson Building

"...will be of the highest standards in picture and stereo sound and will provide:

The best of Canadian and international videos, surrounded and supported by music-related information: news, features, interviews, big ticket attractions... The latest experiments in video art, music in genres other than rock, videos, and video culture around the world." (Italics ours.)

On this basis MuchMusic received its license. The questions follow then:

Why does CITY-TV presently have only 10% Canadian content in its video programming?

Why does Moses Znaimer, Director of CITY-TV refuse to meet with producers from Trinity Square Video, Toronto Community Videotex and the Canadian Film Distribution Centre who are all tenants of the Ryerson building, who are Canadian cultural centers who either produce or distribute Canadian video art tapes,

videotex graphics, and experimental films?

As CITY-TV's sign-off music logo states, "Doing it right on the wrong side of Queen", CITY now seems to have decided on "Doing it wrong on the right side of Queen".

Pat Wilson & Ric Amis

Heritage of Resistance

THIS SUMMER IN TORONTO 3,000 people participated in the annual Lesbian and Gay Pride Day, held this year on July 1st. Organizers cordoned off an area of Church St. at Cawthra Park for the fair. There was food, displays, dance, music — including performances by David Sereda, Arlene Mantle, Bratty, and the Gayap Rhythm Drummers — and a riotous march up Yonge Street.

Holding Lesbian and Gay Pride Day on July 1 — "Canada Day" — seemed somewhat ironic. The idea of Canada Day celebrates the great straight, white, Christian heritage. We are supposed to feel proud to be Canadian. We are told that our country is 117 years old in 1984 even though Native Peoples have lived on this land for centuries. We are supposed to feel patriotic about a country that still refuses to apologize to Japanese-



Pride Day March

Canadians incarcerated during the second world war. Canada Day is also a 'family' day, but that description is not applied to lesbian mothers and gay fathers who are not considered fit parents for this day or any other.

For those who attended this year's Pride Day, the music of David Sereda, Arlene Mantle and the Gayap Rhythm Drummers rang far truer than a song about "true patriot love" or "the true north strong and free". Free for whom? Not for all the gay men who have been arrested in the past year through the increasing use of "bathroom entrapment". Not for all the lesbians and gays who suffer the daily repercussions of a heterosexist society. And so what is offered by events like Lesbian and Gay Pride Day is an opportunity for the communities to visibly celebrate a heritage of resistance.

Didi Herman

Last hired...

IN MARCH OF THIS YEAR, FOUR teachers were fired from their jobs at London's Fanshaw College. The teachers worked in the Fine Arts Department of the college, a department that has undergone major changes in the past two years.

In 1982, the dean of the department was manoeuvred out of his job through a process of "reorganization". This meant that his job description was changed, and he was replaced by a bureaucrat more friendly to the administration. A series of events finally culminated in the firing of four teachers this spring.

Justifications for the firings included declining enrollment (untrue, as Fine Arts was about to receive a number of transfer students) and over-staffing (debatable, as a number of teachers also taught in the Advertising Art program). Of the four teachers let go, one was a man one year away from retirement, another has since been rehired but demoted, a third has taken a job of a staff member who resigned over the firings, and one, Jane Buyers, was a woman with the least seniority of anyone in the Fine Arts Department.

Buyers was hired at Fanshaw seven years ago on a part-time basis to teach only one day a week. Two other part-

time people hired at the same time as her, both men, were given full-time positions after one year. Buyers remained part-time for another two more years before she was finally given full-time status. Therefore, although Buyers had worked at the college for seven years, she had only four years seniority and was the first fired. She was, at the time, the only female teacher in a department where 70% of the students were women.

The Ontario Human Rights Com-

mission has expressed an interest in pursuing Buyer's firing as a 'test case' in order to show that the concept of seniority can be discriminatory. In other words, Buyer's dismissal would be examined as an example of the 'last hired first fired' scenario. Human Rights is still in the process of investigating the situation. The teacher's union, OPSEU, is also protesting the firings. In addition to this support, students at the college have organized sit-ins, petitions, and letter-writing campaigns.



Jane Buyers on the line

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Clearly, the situation is indicative of what happens to so many women workers. Hired on a part-time basis, many never achieving full-time status, these women are always the first to go when lay-offs are based on seniority and unions are often reluctant to address this problem since seniority is a concept they have fought long and hard for.

The firings at Fanshaw also reflect the more subtle process of 'reorganization' taking place in many community colleges. Many programmes like Fine Arts, are gradually being phased out

because government and the corporations (whose representatives often sit on governing boards of educational institutions) believe that community colleges should be skill-training centres preparing people for business-related jobs. At Fanshaw, the Advertising Arts program, which used to be a part of Fine Arts, has now separated in what Buyers believes to be a step toward the eventual elimination of the Fine Arts Department altogether.

Didi Herman

Forbidden Films

IN 1976, THE YEAR THE MILITARY wrested power back from the Peronists, Argentine filmmaker Raymondo Gleyzer "disappeared". Other socially and politically conscious filmmakers took this abduction as a warning and fled the country. Gleyzer has not been heard of since...

In 1968, the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia, bringing to an abrupt halt one of the most creative periods in European cinema. The masterpieces of the Czech New Wave were banned, and many of its brightest stars went into exile. Vera Chytilova didn't flee, preferring to stay and work at home, but it is only in the past few years that she has been able to make films again. She is still not permitted to leave Czechoslovakia...

In 1974, Sergei Paradjanov, whose *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* won 16 international film awards on behalf of the USSR, was secretly tried on charges of "speculation in art objects, speculation in foreign currency, spreading venereal disease, homosexuality, and coercion to a homosexual liason". After six years in prison, he was released to his mother's house in Georgia, where he was not allowed to work in film again...

In 1977, Ousmane Sembene, a novelist and filmmaker of international significance, once again was subjected to the power of Senegal's censor board. His film *Ceddo*, which deals with resistance to colonialism and the role of women in African society, was banned...

In 1954 Herbert Biberman, one of the Hollywood Ten, and Michael Wilson, soon to be blacklisted himself,

made a film about the rights of zinc miners and women in New Mexico. *Salt of the Earth* was accompanied by violent right-wing demonstrations, and organized resistance in the industry kept it from general release for 12 years...

In 1971 N.F.B. chief Sydney Newman banned Denys Arcand's marxist critique of the textile industry, *On est au coton*. Newman claimed it was full of "untruths". Interestingly enough, he had just prior to this shown it privately



CEEDO, a film by Sembene

to the heads of Quebec's textile industry...

To initiate a discussion of censorship from the perspective of human rights is the major aim of *Forbidden Films*. One hundred films from around the world will be screened throughout Toronto between October 18th and 28th. The films, covering more than half a century in the history of what Lenin called "the most important art", were all suppressed in their countries of origin or were made by filmmakers who suffered repression in their own cultures. Canadian and International filmmakers will be present to talk about their own experiences, and public seminars and discussions will address some of the broader issues involved. Proceeds will be donated to Amnesty International (CS,ES).

Forbidden Films is a project of the Toronto Arts Group for Human Rights, who presented the 1981 International Writer & Human Rights Congress in support of Amnesty International. For more information write: *Forbidden Films*, 256 Queen St. W., Toronto M5V 1Z8. Or call: 862-7007.

Gary Betcherman

FALL 1984

FUSE

Mythologies and Militarism

"Just Some Women Trying to Change History"

LISA STEELE

IN MAY OF THIS YEAR, THE British component of the British/Canadian Video Exchange arrived in Toronto. Hosted by *A Space*, this survey of videotapes, installations and performances was organized and curated by video artists from both countries. * What follows here is a consideration of only two of the tapes which were part of this large exhibition. I chose these two works because they address — from very different positions — women's relationship to the peace movement. And given that almost one-third of the material which was selected by the British artists to be included in this survey of current video activity was concerned with the threat of nuclear war and/or the peace movement, it seemed important to take a detailed look at what is obviously an issue of deep concern to British artists.

The opening of Catherine Elwes' videotape is deceptively simple. A black text on a white background appears phrase at a time. It says: "There is a myth in which a woman creates the world by spontaneously giving birth to many sons. They become afraid. If she can give life, she may also have the power to take life. And so they kill her."

The title, *There Is A Myth*, seems at first to have been chosen by default. But as the tape unfolds, image by image — and it is primarily visual — the title is revealed to be less a convenience than an assertion. Men's fear of the power of the mother — the lethal power of woman — is a myth. It is an unfounded, irrational rationalization for violence against women, for domination of the Other in all its

*Jane Wright did the selection and organizing for the Canadian work which went to London, with Jeremy Welsh of London Video Arts performing similar duties for the British selection which came to Toronto with the aid of David Critchley, Stuart Marshall and Belinda Williams who are also video artists.

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manifestations, and, by implication, a justification for all forms of patriarchal rule, personal, social and political.

But before I continue, I should say that this tape is only 10 minutes long. It is neither an essay nor a lecture, but rather it is more closely aligned to that contemporary genre known as 'rock video' — visually aligned that is, particularly in Elwes' use of effects and sequencing of images to 'tell' a story. Thus, it appears to be more intuitive than discursive. *Appears to be* is the operative link to 'rock video', of course. Because Elwes packs every bit as much embedded message as Duran Duran could ever hope to. It just sits on the Other side of the fence, so to speak. Where Duran Duran — a group whose tapes cumulatively offer the most concentrated amount of sexually and racially confused imagery this side of Calvin Klein — can be seen as staunch supporters of the status quo (read *patriarchy* here), Catherine Elwes' *There Is A Myth* employs similar visual effects (freeze frames, repeat actions, mysterious, almost 'exotic' images) for very different ends. Elwes questions the very foundations of patriarchy and the extent of its control exerted in the name of "social order". She does this by taking a very simple premise — the above-quoted myth — and examining it, using excruciatingly specific images and sounds.

She begins her questioning immediately. While the text of the myth is on the screen, the soundtrack features a female voice, whispering in french, but the words are inaudible. The authority of the written words begins to be undermined. We cannot be certain we are getting the full account. Even this early in the tape, we begin to realize that "myth" could just as easily mean "a lie" as "a tale".

The image which follows is pre-

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dominant throughout the rest of the tape: a breast and a young infant's hand. The breast fills the screen. The baby's hand waves, with motion lacking apparent specificity. Occasionally the tiny hand jostles the breast; within seconds the nipple begins to drip milk. The sounds are the baby's breathing. There is no crying. Soon the baby's hand is wet with milk; the waving becomes more insistent, pushing the breast; more milk drips. This section of the tape ends with a repeat image of the baby's hand, fist clenched, delivering a little punch to the taut, dripping breast.

This image is extraordinarily explicit. No matter how common the act, representations of lactating breasts are almost completely absent from our collective visual experience. Visually, breastfeeding is present more as a 'feeling' than an activity, occupying a highly sentimentalized (and ideological) niche within photography, painting and sculpture, where representations of the blissful infant/mother bond are useful as well as artistic, pro-

all video stills by Sheena Gourlay

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viding on-going visual references for 'appropriate' women's roles, i.e. dependent on men and locked into family arrangements for better or worse. What is interesting within these 'classical' representations of breastfeeding is that, for the most part, the feeding infant *obscures* the maternal anatomy, thus obscuring the site of



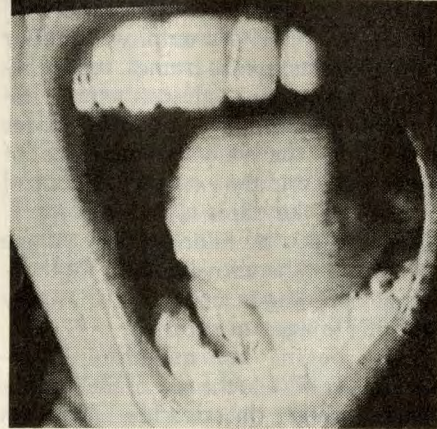
pleasure — pleasure felt by both parties engaged in the act. But I don't want to be misleading: Elwes' tape is not *about* breastfeeding; she uses this image in various forms throughout the tape as a metaphor for pleasure, human pleasure.

The next image in this tape begins in obscurity. A close-up of a woman's mouth; her lips part and she makes a sucking movement; the object of her oral attention disappears into her mouth. It's surprising how, despite the lack of definition of the object being sucked, one jumps to the obvious conclusion. But we have become accustomed to this 'reading'. After all, bananas, popsicles, lipstick...any number of benign, lozenge-shaped objects are quickly converted into 'phallic symbols' in cultures which are phallic-centric. But here, this is incorrect. As the camera draws back, we 'learn' that this woman is, in fact, sucking her own thumb. And not just sucking her thumb, but gently rubbing the bridge of her nose with the index finger of the same hand. And staring directly into the camera while doing so. She is also wearing glasses, keeping all her faculties functional while engaging in this shocking display of self-pleasuring.

But Elwes doesn't present this thumb-sucking sequence intact. Intercut throughout is an image of a woman's mouth, teeth bared, jaw

opening and snapping shut with an amplified, exaggerated soundtrack of gnashing teeth. Together, these two images coalesce into a powerful representation of the almost palpable fear experienced by "the sons" within the myth. What do they fear? Not the mother. They fear pleasure itself; the pleasure which the infant demands and often receives from the omnipotent mother, *as well as* the pleasure experienced by the adult woman. And in acknowledging the pleasure experienced by the mother, "the sons" must acknowledge the potential for women's autonomous pleasure. This is the double-edged source of the fear. And it's Eros vs. Thanatos all over again.

The next section of the tape would seem to be the mother's reflection on the myth. The texts "Give life" and "Take life" alternate on the screen, intercut with the image of the breast and the baby's hand in freeze frame. The soundtrack is a chorus of female voices chanting in spiritual cadence, ending with a harmonic "amen". This contemplative reflection is ruptured to the point of obliteration by the next two images. Close-up, a woman's mouth screams; the 'screams' are in fact short siren bursts. A warning. And then a collage of clipped movement and still frames sees this same female mouth aggressively attacking the infant's body. And the fear of "the sons" is visualized.



But the visualization is refuted in the final moments of this tape. Here, finally, the mother speaks, declaring "When I look at you I don't understand". And the child's face is viewed for the first time in the tape.

The connection of Elwes' tape to the concerns of the peace movement is quite rudimentary. A familiar chant of

THEY KILL HER

this movement — "Take the toys away from the boys" — stresses the infantile nature of military aggression. She has, I think, taken a particular strand of psychoanalytic theory — denial of the pleasure principle — and examined it from a personal point of view. She avoids the chicken-or-egg argument — which came first, violence against women or fear of women's violence? — through her systematic deconstruction and visualization of the myth. (This is the fear? This that you're seeing? Or this? No, I don't understand. I reject this as an excuse for my own murder, or the murder of women or the murder of the earth.)

Historically, of course, she's right. The infant has much more to fear from the male of the species, both familiarly and politically, than it has to fear from its own mother. Elwes returns "the fear" to its resting place in the here and now: fear of pleasure — chaotic, ambivalent pleasure. As the experience of pleasure is most likely to render the individual undifferentiated, it is a highly undesirable state from which to undertake military — or any other aggressive — action. (Capitalism has channelled pleasure into a modern commodity with all its attendant industries. It's called leisure. But that's another story.)

The second tape which I would like to discuss is *Carry Greenham Home* by Beeban Kidron and Amanda Richardson. To say that this is a tape made about the women who occupy the peace camp at Greenham Common might indicate a rather staid documentary-style examination of 'the phenomenon' known as Greenham. Interviews, statements, information and the like. But this tape is nothing of

the sort. Instead it is an experiential document of involvement which visually details the rarified environment of this particular women's organization and, by implication, exposes the way in which women organize in general. By this, I mean that the tape allows for — and incorporates — mess, lack of resolution, betrayal, joy, ingenuity and individual commitment within its very structure.

The 'events' of this tape are not unfamiliar to anyone who has had even minimal contact with this peace action (which has been going on since the fall of 1981). The women congregate together, cut fences, climb fences, dance on silos meant to house cruise missiles, are arrested, go to trial, talk, do civil disobedience, laugh, argue, are ar-



rested, go to jail, etc. etc.

The surprising element of this tape is the position and point of view of the 'camera' (Kidron and Richardson). Because they are co-conspirators — not only present but actively involved — this tape leaps effortlessly across the formidable hurdle known within left-filmaking as "engagement". (I don't, for a moment, wish to denigrate the efforts of those filmmakers and theoreticians who, prior to this tape, have posed the questions and possible answers to this problem of engagement between the documentary-maker and their subject; I am simply stating the obvious in terms of this particular work.)

This engagement becomes obvious in several ways. First through the choice of material included in the final tape. For example, as the tape opens, we are told that 30,000 women have gathered at Greenham for a mass action. We see a sit-in outside one of the gates. One woman reads from a newspaper account of the event. She draws a big laugh from the crowd when she

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gets to the part of the article which says, "Men have been confined to one location at Greenham...not allowed to directly participate...they have prepared 30,000 marmite sandwiches...told to mind the creche (nursery)..." In traditional political filmmaking, this scene, where the feeling gets uncomfortably close to separatism, would probably have been cut. The exclusion of men would simply have been *implied* by their absence. That Kidron and Richardson have opened this tape with a direct reference to the exclusion of men speaks clearly of their commitment to Greenham, their understanding of women's organizing and their belief in the positive aspects of both.

The way in which this tape is recorded also illustrates the involvement



of the women who made it. For example, in one section the camera is looking over the shoulders of a small group of women who are doing something at one of the gates, but the viewer can't quite see what's going on. As the small knot of women disperses, the camera 'sees' the Kryptonite-type bicycle lock which they have fastened around the gate and also records the results of this action — which are hilarious. When the guards inside the gate see the lock; they bring out the wire-cutters nonchalantly; they are unsuccessful; they remain calm; they bring out larger cutters; they get a little bothered; finally they bring out huge bolt cutters several feet long. They are now sweating but unable to break the lock. What the women know, and most of the audience for this tape will also know, is that this kind of lock can't be cut. The guards at this military installation, however, are unfamiliar with this particular invention for bicycle security. But they learn. Unable to break the lock, they finally break down the gate

FUSE

— something we assume that they are supposed to prevent the women from doing — and the final shot of this sequence shows the broken gate with the lock still intact.

Here, the 'camera' is so present that the full experience of this event is felt from beginning (which is somewhat mysterious) to end (which is humorous). The action, however, is not 'politically fulfilling'; that is, nothing happens as a result. But this is the nature of Greenham. It is an exercise in faith and education for all those women who are involved. And this tape is the same. Just some women getting together and trying to change history.

POSTSCRIPT. As a eulogy to the right to express opinions such as those detailed above, I would like to quote from Jeremy Welsh's catalogue introduction to this exhibition. He speaks about 1984, both as an actual date and in the Orwellian sense, saying, "When the video/tv medium could so easily be regarded (or used) as a tool of social control and repression it is important to make public demonstrations of the positive uses to which it is being put by artists, independent producers, community organisations and amateurs, who are determined not to be forced into the role of passive consumer when the medium itself offers enormous scope for intervention."

Welsh, of course, had no way of knowing when he wrote this that his selection of tapes would be subject of an unprecedented raid by the Ontario Censor Board during the screening at *A Space* which resulted in the confiscation of several videotapes by British artists. Because video equipment was also seized, this raid forced the cancellation of the video installation by Tina Keane, *Greenham Common: In Our Hands* which had been in the gallery; a sculptural video work which wove a web of meaning from the Greenham experience, different from the tape described above, but no less effective. *A Space* chose to continue its screening of the British tapes in spite of this government action. But this shocking display of power by the state is a pointed reminder that censorship is most often levied against minority voices.

— Lisa Steele

11

DEBUNK DEBERT

Tripping up "Operation Bold Step"

CATHY BUSBY

NOVA SCOTIA IS HOME TO A great deal of overt military activity. One of the major concentrations of military personnel in the country is based here. American and other warships and submarines are welcomed in our harbour. The citadel in the centre of Halifax and the cannon that booms from it each day at noon are constant reminders of the city's military history. Tattoo, Natal Day Celebrations and the Air Show all serve to promote and glorify the military heritage of Halifax and the province.

Women's uncompromising rejection of war as a means of conflict resolution and their opposition specifically to the nuclear arms race is also firmly rooted in Nova Scotia. For 26 years the *Voice of Women* in Halifax has been actively opposing this traditional endorsement of military oppression and educating the public as to its dangers. A variety of recently formed branches of the women's and peace communities are at work in the province.

This long military history and the more recent (and growing) antimilitary movement are the context out of which the action known as "Debunk Debert" came. A bunker — a bomb shelter — was built at Camp Debert* in 1964. The bunker is designed to accommodate over three hundred government, military and media personnel in the event of a nuclear war. Its last trial use had been in 1966, until a recent overhaul was followed by the mock exercise of February 29, 1984.

"Operation Boldstep" was part of NATO's Integrated Exercises — a dress rehearsal for WW III. Debert was one of eight official bunkers across Canada to be involved. The exercises were carried out over two weeks culminating on February 29, when the computer

simulated a nuclear attack and the emergency measures programmes were put to the test.

Federal authorities call this the *Continuity of Government Programme*. The plan is simple: In the event of a nuclear war, the government, military and some 'essential' media representatives must survive. There are three hundred twenty-nine reserved spots in the Debert bunker for such people (currently 11 of these are women). Invitations are not extended to family members of those chosen. Government could continue, and as soon as possible these survivors would leave the bunker to return to...?

At a conference in early January entitled "Women and Militarism" it was decided that there would be a women's action at Debert on the day of the military exercise. At the sequel conference the following weekend, including both women and men, the suggestion that men participate through providing support services was agreed to.

All participants in the day of peace and resistance at Debert were invited to join one of several smaller groups which would collaborate on the action for that day. There were six of these groups, each made up of five to fifteen members who chose to work together over a period of time because of a shared specific interest, issue or philosophy relating to social change (thus dubbed 'affinity groups'). The groups served as a source of support and solidarity for their members and were the decision making bodies of the action. Some, of course, had initiated actions previous to this and continue to address aspects of militarism and to do related work for social change.

The day at Debert was well organized and neither began nor ended at the military encampment itself. One of the groups, "Women at Work for Peace", made up of women from rural North Shore Nova Scotia and Halifax, decid-

ed to carry out their peace action on Highway 104, Exit 13 to Debert. They installed a series of large road signs marking off the decreasing number of



David Miller

At Camp Debert

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kilometres to the bunker, thereby drawing public attention to its location and presence within the rural community. This participation as well as their statements pointed out that it is misleading and self-deceiving to prepare a bunker and to present these preparations for war as a 'protection' for the people of Nova Scotia: "We won't let ourselves be silenced and we won't ever believe that these deadly weapons are tools for protection."

Groups met in Debert village at the firehall at 9 a.m. From there the women walked in a procession two kilometres to the Department of National Defence base. At the gate they were met by an assortment of television, radio and newspaper reporters. Media coverage was an aspect of the action that had been well attended to.

The day was divided into periods of mourning, raging, defying and reclaiming — as conceived by the "United Spinsters". The "United Spinsters" of Halifax stated: "We are women who are taking back responsibility for our own lives. We will not allow our earth to be raped and used for war games which will result in the annihilation of life itself." The potential loss of the earth was mourned. Rage was expressed at the unfairness of a system that puts the profits of the arms race before the health of people and the survival of the planet. The women defied anyone to tell them that they should keep quiet about their fears and reclaimed the power to work together towards a vision of a world that does not include a military. Each of these stages was marked by statements from women, as they tied ribbons of coloured cloth to a tree branch in the centre of the circle, and interrupted for continued singing, sign bearing and smaller actions. The statements were prepared by the various affinity groups.

The *Voice of Women* of Halifax urged government and military officials to refuse, as an act of conscience, to cooperate with an Emergency Measures Exercise. "Not only is this plan totally unrealistic in a world with 50,000 nuclear weapons," said *Voice of Women* co-ordinator Anne Muecke, "but play-acting this survivalist fantasy will make the idea of nuclear war seem much more acceptable to all

those who participate." The fact that the plan assumes that the officials with places in the bunker will automatically abandon their families is itself an illustration of the insane system of values that "Operation Boldstep" represents.

But the day was more than statements to co-demonstrators or press. The "Never Again Affinity Group" (NAGS), which has worked together since '83 (mainly on street theatre pieces) contributed what they described as "the reality principle" to the NATO exercise at Camp Debert. Representing the burned survivors, they stood at the gate to the base holding life-size facsimiles of the victims of a nuclear war.

"The exercise is meant to prove that nuclear war is survivable, at least for the few government and military officials who will take shelter in the bunker", said Liz Archibald-Calder for the group. But if our own and the other species on this planet are going to survive, it won't be through civil defense but through devoting our efforts to achieving peace.

Some of NAGS' previous works have also actively set out to "debunk Debert", pointing out the folly of planning to survive a nuclear attack. Their most publicized work, aired across the country and at least as far south as California, immediately preceded the Debert action and also took issue with the *Continuity of Government Programme*. Under the guise of "D.D. Research Associates", the women presented the *Continuity of People programme* (their written report was headlined, "The Future is Our Business"). Dr. Mutandis of D.D. Research advised in this radio performance that:

- 1) the official list of "bunker survivors" be replaced by a list of healthy women of childbearing age.
- 2) Each official bunker contain an official Sperm Bank Repository.
- 3) Each bunker be reconstituted and equipped with an obstetrics wing, including a Conception Unit, where the women will be artificially inseminated with the sperm of their choice.
- 4) Each bunker also be equipped with facilities for the care of infants and children.

The "proposal" was presented as a

viable option which many radio listeners took seriously.

The participation of "Women of P.E.I. for Peace" reinforced the position that the Debert bunker is a product of the Canadian government's preparation for nuclear war. Identifying justice as a paramount concern, they were angered that millions of dollars are spent to protect government officials rather than making greater efforts to preserve life as we know it.

The various groups which participated gained a sense of empowerment in confronting face to face that which they were opposing. The two guards who were attending the entrance gate and allowing those who had passes in, of course refused the women's requests to enter. Although this interaction was a gesture and further provocation was avoided, the women felt in this and other actions their association/bond with the women at Greenham Common, and other military bases in nuclear readiness.

As well as alerting public and commercial media, the women provided their own video, sound and photographic documentation. Camera-women were able to question many of those who were to be admitted to the bunker just prior to their submission of the ID cards which allowed them access. Some of this footage is being incorporated into a video about the Debert action currently being assembled by Liz McDougall.

In completing the protest there was a graphic "reweaving of the web of life". Many colours of wool were passed across and around a circle as the women sang in solidarity. The women, in organizing themselves and voicing their resistance, had informed a wide audience of the human impact and consequences of the military mentality and its condoning of nuclear weapons. Through their mourning, defying, raging and reclaiming, they had drawn attention to and confronted our government's futile survivalist policies.

Cathy Busby is a member of *The Voice of Women of Halifax* and a student at N.S.C.A.D.

* a Canadian Forces base borrowing its name from the neighbouring village, about an hour's drive from Halifax.

METAMORPHOSIS OF MICHAEL JACKSON

A Phenomenon and What It Means

MARLENE PHILIP

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO I taught a workshop in poetry for Grade 7 and 8 students at a public school in Toronto. When asked to write about their dreams and desires, with very few exceptions all students in one class chose Michael Jackson as the focus of their dreams and desires. This preoccupation and at times obsession with Jackson crossed lines of gender, race and class in that classroom. I began to read everything I could on this young man, demanded the record *Thriller* for my birthday and determined to get to the root of this popularity.

Michael Jackson, I concluded, had managed to diffuse those incendiary issues, gender, race and sexual orientation — the holy trinity of controversy — that are today part of life in the West. The reasons for this are quite disturbing, and the adulation and worship are symptoms, not of a less racist, more open society, but of the success of the packaging industry.

A sampling of the ecomiums reveal phrases such as: "America's first black superstar in an industry that doesn't like black stars". "He appeals to all races and classes, and in a time of marked disunity in America, Michael Jackson may be the only thing holding the country together". "He found the formula for providing stainless steel commerciality without losing the street feel". "He is the Donny Osmond of Rhythm and Blues, the first major black artist to appeal to a very young white teen aged audience". The writer of the last statement, Norman Snider of the *Globe and Mail*, suggests that the reason for the success of Michael Jackson lies in the "unprecedented acceptance of black music and culture in American life."

Norman Otis Richmond of the Black newspaper *Contrast*, took a White journalist to task for daring to imply



Before...

that Michael Jackson was not really Black. Here, Richmond argued, was another example of Whites attempting to steal something of value from Blacks. Michael was Black, he insisted. However, despite the unprecedented popularity of Michael Jackson, a Black musician, it is important for us to consider how much or how little his Blackness is tied up with his success.

All of which brings me back to my opening comment about the holy trinity of controversy. Why has a Black, androgynous, male musician suddenly made it so big in America? Is it that he is truly a better musician than all his Black musical predecessors and peers? I doubt it. Talented he is — in fact extremely talented — and his album *Thriller* contains some very fine and exciting pieces of music. However after extended listening and dancing (for his music is, if nothing else, wonderful dancing music), I found nothing that could explain why this music is able to neutralize his being Black and male in American society, and so propel him

to the rarified atmosphere of superstar.

Black males in American society are often seen as potential rapists, thugs, muggers and drug addicts; as a threat to all that is sacred — especially white womanhood and private property — in that pathological society. The percentage of the prison inmate population in the United States that comprises Black men (and women) far exceeds their percentage of the overall population. Black men have raped, killed, mugged and stolen. Black men have also struggled, loved, cared for their families, worked extremely hard at dead end jobs, and survived with dignity in a society that still relegates them to the penultimate rung of the socio-economic ladder (Black women being found on the last rung).

However, the prevailing image of the Black male in American society is of someone sexually and personally threatening. By sexually threatening, I mean not only in the sense of being a potential rapist or mugger but also in the sense of exuding a certain sexual vitality, that at best is perceived as exotic, at worst as animalistic, loose and without morals. A similar image is held about the so called exotic, supersexed Black woman.

As a male, and reflecting the antithesis of the macho image, Michael Jackson threatens no one. His sexuality, if we can call it that, manifests itself in certain pelvic thrusts, which I know are supposed to be sexy, but which are in fact a parody of those musicians and performers such as Mick Jagger and Jimmy Hendrix, whose sexuality erupted with every swagger and thrust of their bodies. As a Black male he is even less threatening and more so since he has had his discernibly Black features altered. His nose is now slim and straight, chiselled to Caucasian perfection. In addition, his sexual

orientation is up for grabs, with his parents insisting to the *Time* reporter that Michael was not gay because it was against the Bible. They also urged the reporter to set the record straight and report that Michael had only had one operation on his face — to fix his nose. He had not, contrary to public opinion, changed his cheek bones or his eyes.

Jackson projects neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality, virile or otherwise. Either one of those would have been preferable to the projection of this plastic, vapid image that masquerades as sexuality. If anything, he can be said to be androgynous, but even there Jackson avoids the commitment to androgyny that is so refreshing in Boy George who parades his own brand of transvestism with a certain panache.

Those very elements that would set Michael Jackson apart in American culture — his Blackness, or rather his male Blackness — elements that are in fact at the source of his music (Black vitality and sensuality); those elements have been not destroyed, but warped, manipulated and packaged for easy consumption by the White market.

With the popularity of Michael Jackson in mainstream American society, the crowning of a Black woman as Miss America in 1983, and the winning of the Pulitzer Prize by Alice Walker, it is very tempting to conclude that we have come a long way in American society — that we have made it. However the ghettos still exist, and in March 1984 those residents of the Overtown ghetto rioted (as they had the previous year) when a white cop was acquitted of murdering one of their youth. Their anger, their sense of oppression is alive and festering in 1984, while Jackson's records break records. Contrary to reports, Jackson's success is not an indication of acceptance of Black music and culture by American society. Jackson's success in White America is an aberration, and a confirmation of the success of skilful packaging. Michael Jackson can be accepted and idolised because he is separate and separated from being a Black male and all that that implies in American society. He has been emasculated and de-Blackened to make him and his music acceptable to the White youth culture of America. In the

FALL 1984



...and After

cult of the individual, Jackson is heralded as a musical phenomenon. It ought to be remembered that he is where he is because of musicians such as Smokey Robinson, Stevie Wonder and Bob Marley who have all helped to make Black musicians more acceptable.

His videotape *Thriller* in which he changes from human form into a werewolf is, in my opinion, a metaphor for what has happened to Jackson within the American context. A metamorphosis has occurred in which he has changed or been changed from that which he is — a Black male — to something other. Watching him perform with his brothers, who all appear so vital, so alive, so identifiably Black and male, emphasizes his metamorphosis and exacerbates Jackson's difference.

This is not to detract from his music nor his demonstrable and demonstrated talents, but here is my problem: that a Black musician is getting the recognition so many many more of them deserve is welcome and long overdue. Black musicians have long since paid their dues, and Black music which is the underpinning of Rock, and which has spawned the only authentic and indigenous art form in America — jazz — deserves the

FUSE

recognition given to one of its products. But at what cost? What of the hundreds and thousands of Black youngsters who now have before them the unequivocal message that to make it, to become acceptable in mainstream America, removal of tell tale signs of Blackness is necessary. And what of the image of this Peter Pan faery figure, cut off from his roots, cut off from the reality of the majority of Black Americans? Is this a fair question to ask on behalf of Black youth? I think it is. But maybe Jackson is like a high, a hit of fantasy that provides some real or unreal relief from the realities of the Overtowns of the U.S.A. This is a perfectly valid function, but one that should not prevent us from analysing dangers of such pain killers.

In a society in which the image, the package is often all that matters, Michael Jackson is the ultimate in packaging. He is all things to all people. He is both Black and White but neither Black nor White. He is both male and female, but neither male nor female. In the words referring to that other American fantasy, Superman, "Is it a man? Is it a woman? No, it is Michael Jackson! Is it black? Is it white? No, it's Michael Jackson!"

Marlene Philip

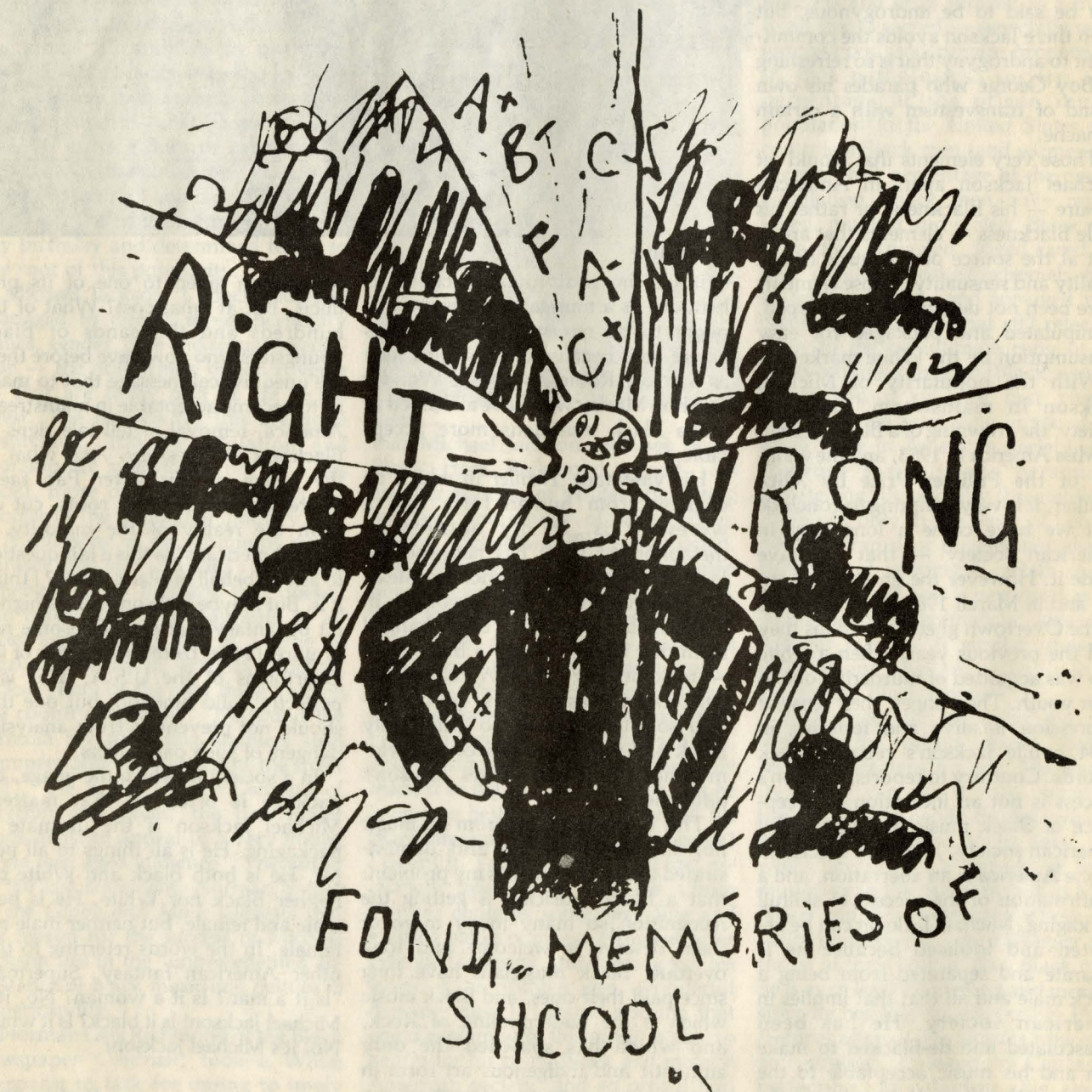
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BACK TO SCHOOL

Attempts to demystify the creative process often include the renaming of art production as 'cultural work'. In these articles, Howard Davidson and Anne Mandlsohn outline, and inquire into, the antecedents of such work — the process of learning to perform it.

The particular types of work investigated are writing and videotape production; the system of cultural formation: public education.

Chris Reed



LEARNING TO SAY LESS

HOWARD S. DAVIDSON

The usual explanation offered for how artists are made, focus on such things as 'talent', 'drive', 'good family background' and so on. These popularized explanations contribute to the ongoing mystification of the creative process. This article inquires into the organization of social practices in schools, rather than the realm of individual attributes and fortuitous events.

MOST OF US BEGAN THE TASK OF learning to read and write in the classroom, and it was also there that most of us first learned that playing with paper, crayons and junk was really something called art. And so, a useful place to begin this inquiry would be the social practice called public education.¹ Before being students, children generally do not engage in the production of texts or "art". Face-to-face oral communication is primarily our means of social interaction.² With schooling, however, we learned how to produce and distribute various forms of text. The form of cultural work I will focus on here is writing. Learning to write in school means learning to make a certain kind of text which meets the particular needs of a particular social organization. Thus, the first formal step in becoming a cultural worker is learning to write what and as you are told to write.

There are obvious differences between talking about an event and writing about one. Talking is work that we all do. Writing, however, is cultural work that only some of us do, even fewer do it as a labour for which they

get paid. In addition, talking is most frequently, though not entirely, an informal face-to-face practice embedded in a moment. The speaker, who often becomes the listener, shares an account of an experience. This oral cultural work depends upon on a connection being established with the other. It enables each participant to offer us some form of response, leaving ideas vulnerable to change.

Written accounts, on the other hand, are formal practices organized by well-established conventions. A written text articulates an elaborate system of social relations. Not only is the relationship between the writer and the reader fixed, the writer cannot add to her/his understanding from each reader's response. For the writer, for me, the burden to be exact becomes arduous. Drafts are rewritten and dictionaries are consulted: every aspect of the process is far more rigid.

To grasp the distinction between speaking and writing we must return to the site where writing was learned: the classroom. When students learn to write in the classroom they are learning to produce a commodity to exchange for a grade. This 'exchange value' is not, however, unique to schools. Written texts function predominantly in enabling the exchange of commodities. In an advanced capitalist society, writing greatly facilitates the movement of

goods as well as many services (including entertainment, education and social action work). Writing for grades is the first stage in learning to write for money.³

The popular emphasis on motivation, ability and skills in the teaching and evaluation of learning to write glosses over the purpose to which most written work is put, and thus ignores the social organization of the society in which students learn to make texts.⁴ One result of this gloss is that we were never told when we learned a way of writing, that we were becoming familiar with only one style of expression. This style is taken as natural, but it is not so. It is a particular manner of producing an account of the individual's consciousness, an account which implies independence of individual subjectivity. To elaborate further on this last point, and in the process to make it more clear how the form of writing which I refer to is produced, I will explore a small moment in the production of a single phrase. In doing so we can see the antecedents of a particular kind of cultural work.

³ Sohn-Rethel, A. *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*. London: The Macmillan Press, 1978.

⁴ Much of the analysis in this article is based on the work of Dorothy E. Smith. See Smith, D.E., "The social construction of documentary reality", *Sociological Inquiry*, 1974.

¹ Apple, M.W. *Ideology and Curriculum*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

² I am setting aside the role of television for no other reason than to keep the discussion manageable. Of course this is a distortion but I am comforted by the awareness that it is only one of many.

A a B b C c D d E e F f

The single phrase which will be the focus of our concern is this: "that is the way he was taught".

The phrase was written in a book report by eleven year old Sarah when she was reporting on *Words by Heart* by Ouida Sebestyen.⁵ In focusing on such a small fragment of text one must attempt to preserve as much as is possible of the context in which the phrase would be read and in which it was written (given limitations of space). Therefore, I will briefly flesh out some of the background in order to bridge the gap between the reader's familiarity with the subject, and my own.

Words by Heart, according to Sarah's book report,

takes place in Texas during the 1930s. It's about a girl named Lena and her father. Lena has a stepmother, one younger sister and two younger brothers. Lena is a black girl living in a town of white people. This is the story about the way she was treated. [In the climax, Lena] goes looking for [her father]. When she finds him he is dying and a boy from the town is lying on the ground next to him. She goes to her dad. He explains that the boy had tried to kill him, but that the boy will live if she takes him to his parents. She doesn't want to. She wants to take her dad home and leave the boy there. Her father tells her that if she loves him she will do it. So she takes the boy and her father dies.

Sarah continues:

Her father tries to teach her to forgive and not to take vengeance [sic] against people who hurt her. He does this because that is the way he was taught and he thought that that was the right way.

Sarah lives with her 14 year old brother, Joshua, and her father, me. Because Sarah is Japanese and Jewish she has had to deal with racism, though not in as intense a way as Lena does in the book.

Making the Texts

Sarah wrote the book report following a guide prepared by her teacher, called "a Book Review form". According to Sarah, the book report was produced

to accomplish a school requirement — to do 'what Ian (the teacher) wants'. This particular text was her third attempt because Sarah was not satisfied with two earlier drafts, so before writing the final copy she and I began to talk about the book. The framework of this talk which I shall call, after Dorothy E. Smith's work, the *primary narrative form*, is well described by Smith as "a process of practical interchange between an inexhaustible messy and different and indefinite real world".⁶

The talk about the book was mixed in with cooking supper, answering the phone, and digressions and incomplete references to our shared histories. Our discussion primarily centred on the climax of the story: the father is stabbed by the white boy. Lena is faced with her mortally wounded father and the seriously injured assailant. Her dying father tells Lena to save the boy's life. Sarah tells me that Lena follows her father's request, although "she mostly wants revenge". We talked about why Lena wants revenge, and why the women in the book wanted to fight for

I enjoyed this book very much. I think this book is well written and flows through very well. It makes me feel sorry for black people and I wish there was no such things as racism. It had a good plot and you felt as though you were Lena.

Sarah Davidson

their rights while the father always preached 'turning the other cheek'. I began to take the position that the father was too full of his Southern Baptist upbringing, but Sarah saw it as a more complex problem.

Sarah: He had a reason, right? He lived in a town where they'd come in for nothing and call out someone's name, right? The guy would come out and they'd kill him or something. If he didn't come out they might kill the whole family or burn down the whole

town where he lived. So he knew that, right?

Howard: So you think that stuff like that made him want to avoid fighting?

Sarah: Well maybe, I mean that's a tough thing. Lena and her stepmother didn't have to live with it or maybe they did. Well anyway it didn't affect them the same way. Lena was too little.

Sarah transferred her analysis, produced in the primary narrative form above, into her book report without the rich language that was full of conflict, social content and human suffering. In the book report it appears as follows:

Her father tries to teach her to forgive and not to take vengeance [sic] against people who hurt her. He does this because that is the way he was taught and he learned that that was the right way. Lena refuses to learn.

Here we are looking at the contrast between Sarah's oral description and the written description, to explicate the process by which she enters, through

the practice of learning to write, into a particular organization of social and political arrangements and thus to do a particular kind of cultural work. In looking at this contrast we can begin to uncover how the primary narrative form gets subsumed by the written form, first in the school room and later in her work and personal life. Comparing the two versions we can see that the result of writing for grades is the partial obliteration of Sarah's also learned, but more idiosyncratic, verbal expression, of her willingness to recognize conflict and contradictions, and of the fluid style of her speech, a style which can express emotions only partially understood.

⁶ Smith, D.E. "The statistics on mental illness: What they will not tell us about women and why", in D.E. Smith and S. Davids eds., *Women Look at Psychiatry*. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1975, p. 97.

A a B b C c D d E e F

Learning to Produce a Medium of Exchange

In the private social relationship of two people talking we hear:

The guy would come out and they'd kill him ... if he didn't they'd burn down the whole town where he lived.

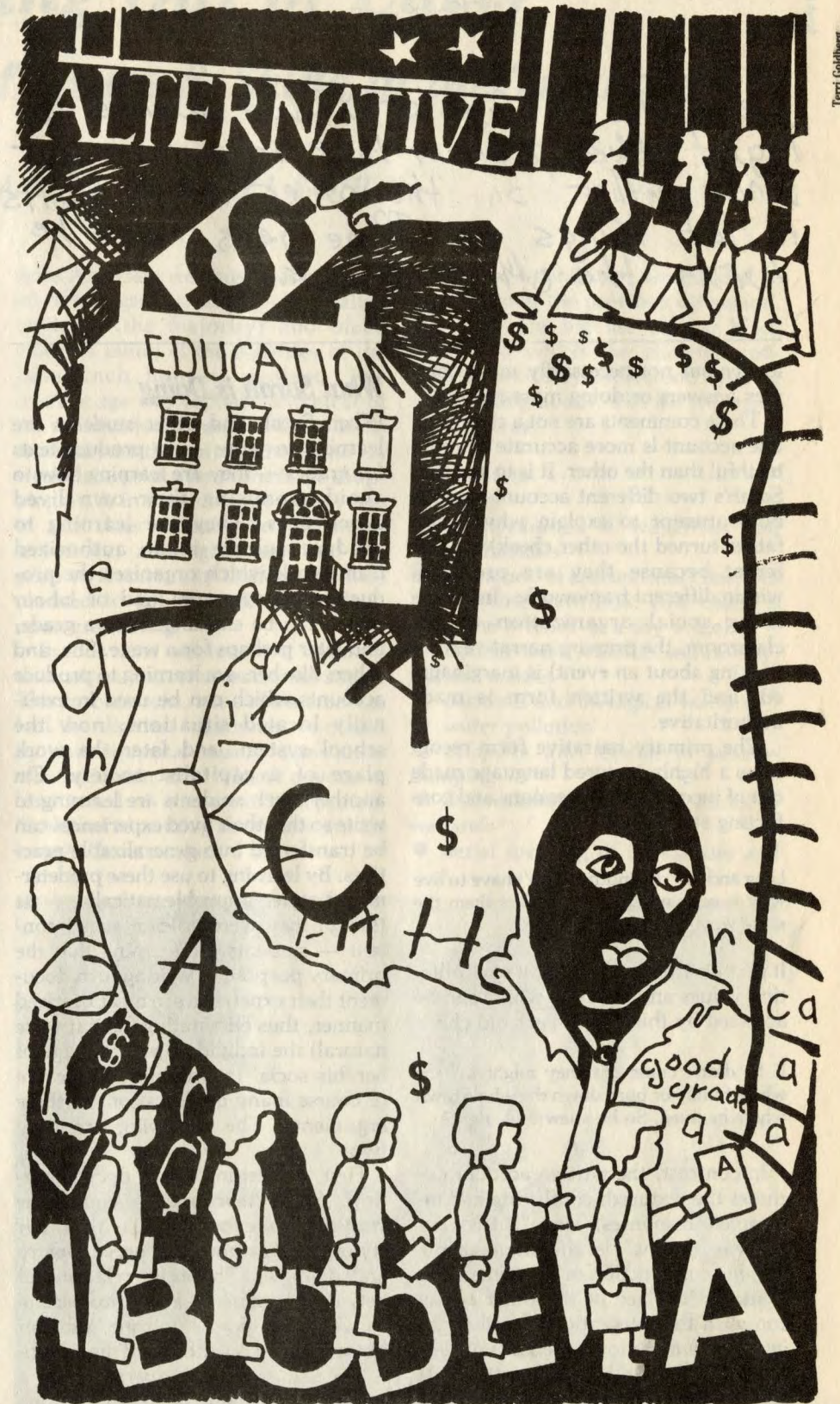
In the public social relationship in which the student is producing a text called a book report to satisfy a requirement we get:

...because that is the way he was taught ...

This change from production for personal relationship to production for a public social relationship is a change in what is intended to be accomplished, and thus what is produced.

The primary narrative discourse knows the historical-personal relationship and allows it to be recognized, but the public discourse, in which the text acts as a medium of exchange between Sarah and the professional school apparatus, does not acknowledge this historical-personal relationship. Through its list of suggested questions and topics, the Book Review Form produced by the teacher to guide Sarah's writing established what is appropriate; it calls for only certain kinds of facts and opinions. This public form is the *official form*; it determines the grade.

If a parent were to report to the teacher s/he had a very interesting talk with the child about the book while cooking supper, the teacher may be interested in the conversation but this talk would not (could not) be graded. The kitchen talk is not an authoritative account for grading because it does not take place within the authorized framework in which knowledge is organized for the exchange process called grading. Further to this, Sarah, faced with 'other things to do', will not produce in exchange for a grade what is not needed, not because she is lazy but because she is doing what is being called for. She has already learned how to be efficient. Even when extra work is produced for extra credit it is usually done as an elaboration on the same forms of organization: 'extra' means answering more questions, writing



H h I i J j K k L l

Minor

Lena is a fighter ^{and} she wants to fight the racism that is put on her. Lena's father on the other hand wants to let things go. If he gets hurt he turns the other cheek.

longer but not necessarily more complex answers or doing more reports.

These comments are not a claim that one account is more accurate or more truthful than the other. It is to say that Sarah's two different accounts (which both attempt to explain why Lena's father turned the other cheek) are different because they are produced within different frameworks. In the existing social organization of the classroom, the primary narrative form (talking about an event) is marginalized, and the written form is made authoritative.

The primary narrative form recognizes a highly textured language made out of incomplete expressions and conflicting statements:

Lena and her stepmother didn't have to live with it or maybe it didn't affect them the same way. Lena was too little.

It permits the representation of conflicting values and interests which can be accessed by this eleven year old child:

If he didn't come out they might kill the whole family or burn down the whole town where he lived. So he knew that, right?

In contrast, the written account excludes the textured, conflicting and incomplete responses. That "is the way he was taught" is the manageable *graphic* construction of the same idea: it stands in place of the other to accomplish the integration of a thought into a document to be used in a professional authorized social setting. It serves practices which are external to Sarah's own interests and beyond her control.

What Sarah is Doing

When Sarah and other students are learning to write — to produce texts for grades — they are learning how to avoid expressing their own lived experiences. They are learning to produce culture in an authorized framework which organizes the production of a certain kind of labour which can be exchanged for a grade, and later perhaps for a wage. She, and others like her, are learning to produce accounts which can be used in externally located situations; now the school system, and later the workplace of a capitalist society. On another level, students are learning to write so that their lived experiences can be transferred into generalizable practices. By learning to use these predetermined styles unproblematically — as though they were void of social content — students are learning that the primary purpose of writing is to document their experiences in an authorized manner, thus eliminating (as if it were natural) the individual's knowledge of her/his social interactions. There are of course many qualifications to these arguments. The following are only two.

First, all writing is not documentation. Some teachers do encourage students to experiment with other styles, such as nonsense prose, poetry and dialogue. The exact relationship between learning to adhere to certain conventional forms in one kind of writing (i.e. exposition) and the capacity to use personal experience as a resource for doing "creative" writing (i.e. poetry) remains for me an open question. Second, there are problems

that arise when using a particular event to make general statements about social relations; that is, my analysis may be extrapolating too much from the single instance which it uses as its foundation and example.

The Book Review Form brings Sarah into an order of submissiveness that she alludes to with the words 'doing what Ian wants'. Why he wants this particular form goes unquestioned. It is never presented to the students that these forms are developed out of an entire series of political/cultural struggles. Nothing is said to explain that Book Report Forms clearly divide the labour of learning into categories organized by traditions and policy makers which are dominated by particular gender and class relations. Questions such as, who is responsible for the Book Review Form or who thinks this is the correct set of procedures to follow are neither raised nor answered. In this manner, the ruling apparatus ideologically secures Sarah's consent, and reproduces a cultural worker capable of making corporate capitalist culture.

The view that all practices in schools inevitably reproduce capitalist society (by separating lived experience from authoritative practices) is a distortion. The process of producing written accounts is a separate event from the experience it records. However, the possibilities exist for learning to do other kinds of cultural work (whether writing, art or play) which can lead to critical social awareness or action. But, in order for these "other kinds" of cultural activity to be anything more than aberrant moments in the steady stream of dominant cultural practice, there must be fundamental changes in the way in which cultural work is learned and organized. And, this requires that we shift the focus of analysis away from simple behaviourist notions of "motivation", "ability" and individual achievement. In this way, we can begin to ask how to make changes that matter in the social relations which foster educational practices and which in turn produce ideological practices.

Howard S. Davidson has worked on rehabilitation programmes within the prison system and is currently studying at O.I.S.E.

Getting Out of Class

Fractioning of Issues & Skills in the Triangle

ANNE MANDLSOHN

LAST FALL, ENVIRONMENTAL film-maker Chris Winter and I applied for a grant under the Creative Artists in Schools program in order to conduct video workshops over a period of two months at C.W. Jeffreys Secondary School. Both Chris and I had been trained in the creative arts (my work being in the visual arts and Chris' in film) and we had recently completed our Masters degrees in Environmental Studies. We were committed to a project designed to heighten student awareness in video and social action. The Ontario Arts Council and the North York Board of Education approved our project as submitted for a grade twelve Communications Arts class, and Rogers Cable provided the technical equipment.

Our stated objectives were as follows:

- to provide the students with the opportunity to meet and work with two practising artists committed to the creative expression of issues of social concern;
- to encourage the students to develop creative ideas through the video medium;
- to provide the students with direct, hands-on experience in researching, directing, scripting and production skills;
- to encourage the students to develop both creative and analytical skills and to encourage their interest in community issues.

My previous "Creative Artists in Schools" grants had involved working both in remote areas of the province and in downtown Toronto. I was particularly interested in expanding my teaching experience to include a suburban area of the city with a cross-section of race and class. The Communica-

tions Arts class we chose was composed of two groups: middle-class Italian students (the majority) and black students living in the highrises of the Jane-Finch housing project. The average age was eighteen and most of the students (with very few exceptions) worked part-time after school and on weekends, primarily in the large shopping malls in their own area. Very few in our class intended to go on to University, although many had applied to Community College. Others planned to go to work immediately upon graduating.

In our first session, we began a discussion about environmental issues. The problem was, none of the students had the slightest idea what we meant by 'environmental issue'. No one knew what acid rain was. "Hasn't anyone at least heard of acid rain?" I repeated. "Isn't that something the Americans do to us?" Renato asked.

On our second day, we decided to expand upon the previous discussion. We started a big list on the black board, to which the students contributed once they understood what we were talking about. The list we ended up with was:

- acid rain
- smog
- disappearance of wilderness and animal habitats
- extinction of species (that contribution coming from Lisa, who called is 'Save the Whales' in a shy voice)
- nuclear waste, nuclear technology, nuclear missiles
- chemical and biological warfare
- water pollution
- oilspills and chemical waste-dumping
- deforestation and disappearance of wetlands
- aerial spraying of insecticides and



Chris Winter

DDT in mothers' milk

- greenhouse effect and the destruction of the ozone layer

"Why do you think all this is happening?" we asked. Dead silence. "Because mankind doesn't give a shit?" ventured Sergio. I looked at Chris and he looked back at me. After two years of studying environmental philosophy at the graduate level, we recognized that Sergio's answer wasn't that far off.

Having discussed the global environmental context, we decided to devote our next few sessions to the medium. We gave a basic introduction to video techniques. "Any questions?" I asked. "When do we get to go out on location?" asked Sandra. The magic words. Sergio stopped combing his hair. Steve and Liliana stopped making out at the back. This was for real. We would actually be taking them out of the school building. They began to pay attention.

The next day, we outlined the various tasks involved in making a documentary video — research, writing, camerawork, sound, interviews and editing. We explained all of these positions in detail. The class was large, and we wanted to make sure that the students would choose the tasks right for them. Because of the undercurrents of sexism ("Oh Lora" the boys sneered, "She can't do anything."), we conducted a secret ballot. We asked them to write down their first and se-

cond choices, with reasons for each choice, collected the slips of paper and spent several hours pondering their various comments:

"I would like to be an interviewer because I never lose an argument."

"I would like to do sound because that is all I want to do except maybe camera."

"I would like to be an editor because I like pushing buttons and checking levels and other technical stuff. You should choose me because other people have told me I'm good at it."

From the list of comments, Chris and I put together several production crews with female members in each crew; we also chose interviewers evenly divided by sex. Thankfully, everybody was satisfied with their tasks — what remained was the choice of a specific topic.

All of the adults and resource people connected with the project had their own priorities. Chris and I felt that we would be a better resource to the students, in terms of research, if they were to choose an environmental theme. Ed Nasello, the executive producer at *Rogers Cable*, wanted a topic relating to his downtown community jurisdiction. We spent two sessions covering various options, Chris and I presenting some, and the students suggesting others:

- The Pope's visit
- Student employment and unemployment
- Pornography in the corner store
- Homosexuality
- Toronto's polluted beaches
- Toronto's drinking water
- The Junction Triangle

Chris and I then presented what we considered to be the viability of each topic in terms of making a video. We also explained that those with authority over the project had specific priorities. Ed Nasello vetoed "Student employment" as too diffuse; he also felt that "polluted beaches" would be inappropriate programming for the late winter. The principal and the teacher both had 'problems' with "Homosexuality" and "Pornography". The class itself thought that "Drinking water" was too boring. In the end, The Junction Triangle won out because industrial chemical spills had occurred there — and the area was quite close to the students' own district in the west end of the city. Kai Millyard of Pollution Probe sweetened the deal by promising to give the research team a special lecture on the topic. Since our research time was limited to a period of two weeks before Christmas, the decision was made to take advantage of Pollution Probe's research files.

At Pollution Probe, Kai Millyard reviewed the problems in the Triangle: "You're up against big industry here" he warned, "And you're going to learn a lot." He pointed out that as student researchers, they had an advantage — they could gain access to information others couldn't get. "Call it a class project," he recommended. He also covered the history of the district:

Terrible air pollution was being endured by the residents whose homes edge up against the factories along the railroad tracks forming the 'Triangle'. Two schools has been temporarily evacuated due to toxic chemical spills, industrial gases and fumes in the area. One health study had indicated that mothers west of Bathurst Street were three times as likely to give birth to children with major nervous system disorders and brain defects than in the rest of the city.¹ Residents had been complaining of dizziness, running eyes, headaches, respiratory problems

and allergic reactions to chemicals in the air for many years.² Another study was being conducted while we were producing our program. When it was released in the late spring of 1984 it verified the citizens' complaints, noting also that children within the boundaries of the Triangle have a six-times greater chance of suffering these illnesses than children in other areas of the city.³ Since children spend both days and nights in the area (while most adults leave to work elsewhere), they suffer and complain more.

Chris and I also invited Barney Singh, an Industrial Abatement Officer from the Ontario Ministry of the Environment to come to C.W. Jefferys to present the students with an overview of the situation in the Triangle from the government's perspective. Mr. Singh had been closely involved with monitoring the industrial pollution in the district. The students learned about the illegality of chemical waste-dumping.

We explained to the students that we had a large collective responsibility in producing the tape because at least 3,000 cabled viewers would see our program, many from the Triangle itself. With this recognition, the next step was to decide who we would interview for the program. Chris worked with the student interviewers to prepare them for interview situations, discussing what they could expect from each interviewee. The students practised how to counter vague or evasive answers with additional questions and comments. In the final sessions before the Christmas holidays, a schedule of interviews was arranged with the following people:

Barney Singh, Ministry of the Environment
Jim Flaherty, Toronto Board of Health
Beate Bowron, Neighbourhood Municipal Planner
John Shepherd, Narcan Industries
Frances Labell, Junction Triangle Anti-Pollution Group

1. The *Toronto Globe and Mail*, "Birth Defects High in West Toronto", February 9, 1984.

2. The *Toronto Star*, "Test the children", May 12, 1984.

3. The *Toronto Globe and Mail*, "Examine children in Junction: MID", May 11, 1984.



Simone Taylor and children, Triangle residents
Dave Cook, Triangle Resident

After the Christmas break, we undertook the actual shooting of the interviews over a period of two weeks. Once in the Triangle, the foul smell was so bad that one student began to complain of a headache. "How do you live here?" he asked Frances Labell. "Winter is better than summer", she answered, "You're lucky — this is a good day." At the Ministry of the Environment, Chris and I were pleased that interviewer Diana made Barney Singh squirm on camera, "If the citizens had not complained, would anything have been done?" (Diana's teacher had warned us that Diana would be a poor choice as interviewer — "Too shy".) While being interviewed, John Shepherd, a representative of Nacan Industries (a company fined for one of the toxic spills) simultaneously tape-recorded the interview with his own machine. The situation prompted one of the students to remark that we could have cut the air with a knife.

With the footage collected, we began to edit. Rogers provided us with evening editing time downtown, which meant that the students could come down by subway after school. As suburban kids, their ignorance of the city was unnerving. Some had never been on the subway before; they were



afraid of getting lost. I was pleased that Lora, who had previously been accused of not being able to do anything, became an excellent editing apprentice, as did Liliana. One of the learning experiences of this project was the respect the male students finally gained for their female peers, whose patience and technical competence was impressive in action. On the whole, the students were disciplined, controlled and committed. They soaked up everything, and two asked about training in video full-time.

An interesting sidelight to their media education occurred late at night at Rogers, when I took Lora and Liliana for a walk during an editing break. We watched as small monitors fed pornography into the cabled hotels. "Not so good for women" muttered Lora. "Yeah, but at least we know what it looks like," answered Liliana. The programmer told them that angry customers telephoned him all night complaining that they were not getting their money's worth for \$5.75; they were used to harder-core material and were constantly demanding refunds.

When the program was finished, *The Junction Triangle* was broadcast on both Rogers Cable downtown and on Graham Cable in the west end. In our wrap-up session, the students commented on the excitement of doing creative work in video for cablecast.



They had also learned about the existence of citizens' action groups and how they organize themselves in response to community issues. We reviewed the major points presented in the completed video: citizen action is slow and difficult work, industry cannot always be relied upon to keep the environment safe, and government does not take enough preventative measures to avoid chemical spills. The students had discovered the complexity of the environmental planning process which involves all levels of government.

In personally assessing the project, Chris and I found that taking students out into the community had a positive effect on their attitudes and behaviour. In the classroom, whether we were teaching video skills or discussing social issues, the students viewed us as teachers' within the school structure

and rarely paid attention. But while shooting in various locations, we were a group engaged in a collective project. In this atmosphere, the students asked questions, assumed responsibility for their own education and solved most of their own problems. Unfortunately, projects of this nature are available only to a small minority of high school students. Though they consume many hours of television, few get the chance to engage in the process of producing such work themselves.

The completed 'balanced-style' documentary (reminiscent of City-Pulse News) was not the kind of videotape that I would have made. I would have preferred to have gone beyond the mimicry of conventional television forms. Although this kind of program allows key stakeholders to have their 'say', it gives the illusion that all are equal participants in a free

marketplace of ideas, where the most reasonable point of view prevails. This approach fails to draw attention to the weighted distributions of power between these participants.

It is difficult to measure the ultimate educational worth of such a video project. Although for this class almost every aspect was a novelty, the quantity of new material telescoped into such a short period of time makes it difficult to judge how any of it might be synthesized. It had not been possible for the students to participate in the entire production process. The crew that visited the Board of Health missed out on the visit to Nacan Industries, just as those interviewing citizens in the Triangle did not conduct the interview at the Ministry of the Environment. The production teams all forfeited the experience of editing, while several researchers missed out on both the location shooting and the studio work. The size of the class and shortage of time allocated to the project resulted in a fractured production/learning experience — reproducing the organisation of industrial/commercial production. The same factors forced Chris and I to take on more responsibility for the content and continuity of the project than we had anticipated.

From my conversations with the students, I would conclude that it was video as a medium that interested them more than the social importance of what we were doing. Yet, I believe that an important element of the process was the raising of questions about our industrial society — a society where occupational health and the longterm safety of the environment are routinely traded off in favour of short-term profit and industrial growth. Such issues were obviously new to the students. After interviewing Frances Labell (spokesperson for the Junction Triangle Anti-Pollution Group) one of the students remarked "That anti-pollution lady sure is strong. I could never fight like that — I would just move." This student did not yet know that this option was probably not economically feasible, or that environmental pollution is so widespread that it would be difficult to avoid the problem elsewhere.

Anne Mandlsohn is a community-based video artist living in Toronto.

TECHNOPHILES, TECHNOPHOBES AND TECHNOCRATS

BRUCE BARBER

WHILE THE MAJORITY OF THE Halifax community was revelling in the hype and anticipated nostalgia occasioned by the excessive media attention to the Parade of Sail, the Association of National Non-Profit Artist Run Centres (ANNPAC) quietly held their annual business meeting within the cloistered halls of the University of Kings College. The first two days of the four day meeting (June 6th - 9th), a hastily convened conference, focused on the relationships between the arts and the new technologies. The organizers, led by National Chairperson Elizabeth Chitty, intended this event, a first for ANNPAC, to allow extensive discussion to occur around the use (by artists and member organisations) of technological apparatuses engendered through the micro-electronic 'revolution'.

Dubbed A.T.&T. (Artists Talk about Technology), the conference was well attended, with over a hundred participants including delegates from fifty-six member centres and affiliates, and sixteen potential members, all of which were voted into the organisation at the conclusion of the meeting. And for an event of this kind, it was relatively well funded — \$45,000 in total, with \$20,000 apiece from the Department of Communications and the Media Section of the Canada Council and a \$5,000 grant from the Nova Scotia Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness.

In spite of the short (two month) preparation time for the conference, the organisation was thorough and revealed a perspicuous understanding of the technological imperatives of timing. The conference ran (proverbially) like digitwork, possibly in deference to

the representatives from the funding bodies in attendance. Conspicuous, as well, was the attention to the auxiliary function and facilitating actions of the media in enlivening and consummating the object of the exercise — talk. What, after all, would be an event about technology without the spectacle of technology itself? A translation service, a film crew (C.B.C. News?), roving photographers with flash units and interchangeable lenses, peripatetic audio recorders, Sony WalkMen, an abundance of microphones lined into a master control and recorder and media representatives of various denominations. The only element missing, it seemed, was the presence of Satellite technology and Telidon. But, no, these too were present. Telidon as used in a provocative video piece, stationed near the entrance of the venue, by Quebec artist Nell Tenhaaf, and satellite technology demonstrated by Hank Bull, who with due ceremony, lured his neophyte audience outside to witness the invisible noon-time passage of a satellite (masquerading as a fly?) across the cloudless Halifax sky. This too was documented.

The other technologies, of recent and not so recent interest to artists: holography (David Hylinsky), video 'digitalis' (Liz Van der Zaag), Computer Graphics (Lise Silverman), Computer robotics — almost — (Douglas Back), computer conceptualism (Hu Hohn) and Slow Scan Video (Hank Bull and others), were also represented in two exhibitions arranged in conjunction with the conference at the two host centres, Eyelevel Gallery and the Centre for Art Tapes.

It was apparent after the events of the first day that the audience was

composed of technophobes, technophiles and technocrats, not all aware of the ministrations of their order. If there was an 'information gap' (as was suggested by Red Burns, panelist for the second day's panel: "Issues of Practise: Alternatives to Technocracy"), it was not one of complete ignorance or naivete on the part of the participants. The aggressivity of the marketeers of the new technologies, the abundance of literature for technophiles of various persuasions, make it virtually impossible for an individual to maintain immunity unless one lives in a virtual mass media blackout. Not that the mass media provides information which would inform one of the intricacies of the products, services or benefits of the 'new age', but the ambience, everywhere it seems, is one of excitement over the potential, and reverence for, the capabilities of the new technologies. Just listen to the testimonies of those who own or have access to: an Apple II, an IBM, an Epson, a Tandy, a Brother or a beauty from Texas Instruments, or any of the other products from the host of companies competing in the burgeoning market for personal and business computers, word processors, printers, copiers and combinations thereof. And, of course, the ever important software that assures you, the owner, that your life, your business, leisure and the lives of others in your orbit will "be changed now and forever". Buy one of these products and "you and your business can become part of the movement of enhanced information exchange, better and more efficient filing, reduction in labour, greater profitability..." etc. etc. As IBM touts it: "Once every few centuries something so remarkably dif-

ferent appears that it changes our lives and mankind forever". The question is: for better or...?

If there was a (newspeak) "gap" at this conference, it was not one of information. Most of the participants, apart from being showered in the past four years with debris from the media blitz on the new technologies, were also raised during the sixties, a period of unprecedented industrial, scientific and technological expansion in accord with the flexing of capital muscle. Many were also aware of the liaisons between artists, electronics engineers and scientists which, in the mid to late sixties, promised much and delivered little: the artists retreating to their old technologies and the engineers to their laboratories, production houses, classrooms and board seats. But these liaisons did produce important debates concerning the role of technology in

society and the relationships between science, technology and culture. It is no accident that the sixties also witnessed increased criticism of the status quo, of big government, monopoly capital, militarism, imperialism, racism, chauvinism, classism, ageism, etc. and the formation of protest movements, special interest groups and lobbies. Theodore Roszak's 'counter culture' died an ignominious death but many of its issues, and debates are in urgent need of revivification.

One of the delegates said it, if, unfortunately, as an ironic aside. "Since I started speaking", said Hank Bull, "two thousand people died of starvation". But should this be on the agenda, or should any of THE issues: the arms race, acid rain, chemical pollution, poverty, racism, sexism, etc.) be on the agenda of a conference entitled "Artists Talk about Technology"? Cer-

tainly, if we are to take at face value a statement reiterated in a hundred different ways during the conference — that technology is *not neutral*, that it never can nor ever will become independent, autonomous and neutral — such issues should not be hidden. Perhaps Martin Heidegger said it best when he wrote:

Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm it or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology.

No, if there was a "gap" at this conference, it was not lack of information; it was an historical and a critical *denial*. How can we speak of technology in the absence of a discussion of technology's role in the growing

economic disparity between the 'hot' first world countries and the 'cool' third world countries; when the micro-chip revolution is putting hundreds of thousands of North Americans out of work; when micro-chip production workers in the micro-tech sweatshops of Japan, California and the Philippines are damaging their eyes: when technology is used to service the arms race in space; when technology continues to pollute the environment, on land, in the sea and air. When will the *social* cost accountants receive the same genuine mandate as the cost accountants? Perhaps what is needed is one, probably several, epidemiological studies to examine the effects of progress. And if there is a phobia to which few would openly subscribe, it is the fear of "progress".

With few exceptions, thankfully those of keynote speakers, Chris Creighton-Kelly and Sara Diamond, and two panelists, Gary Kibbins and Nell Tenhaaf, the general level of discussion was marked by a dearth of critical thinking. Even skepticism, usually a clear indicator of incipient criticism, was in short supply. The general tenor of the panel discussions, the artists' presentations and group discussions was uncritical.

Chris Creighton-Kelly's long introductory address, "Artists and Cultural Production: How is Social Meaning Made?" contained an elegant critique of the ideology of technocracy. In his final statements he warned of an over enthusiastic response to the new technologies in the absence of a wider understanding of the political, economic determinations on the form of technocracy. There is no simple formulaic equation here. Dominant ideology is not an omnipotent and ubiquitous force, producing *all* those social and cultural constructions which work against the just and truly 'democratic' society. The formation of 'consciousness' is not brought about in a strictly deterministic or instrumental way by the autonomous or semi-autonomous structures which we label patriarchy, technocracy, militarism, capitalism, bureaucracy, but rather through a more fluid system of inter-relationships.

Creighton-Kelly's "reformulation of the problem", the shaping of technology into technocracy, was based on a

concept which he termed "Three Spheres of Influence, the economic, the political and the cultural". The presentation would have gained in substance if more attention had been paid to the historical and material conditions which have given rise to the development of specific technologies and which in their turn have hastened the hegemonic tendencies of capital; and if acknowledgement had been given that capital in and of itself has not always provided the fertile ground for technological developments although it has assisted their aggrandisement and potential for control.

Sara Diamond's paper "Technology and Gender" persuasively argued the case that technology is produced by and is an indispensable component of the patriarchy; that technology and technological apparatus have identifiable male values and that these values, in the context of a patriarchal dominance of social organisation and culture, foster and maintain "deep class divisions" within our society. Diamond's paper was wide ranging and theoretically ambitious. She presented a series of descriptions of the conditions and effects of "Taylorism in the office" and the "electronic sweat shop", the new age's variation on the methods of the early 20th century scientific managers of the workplace.

The assertion that technology has a gender and that this gender is male has some political expediency but like all generalisations it deserves greater elaboration. A technological nemesis will not be gained through this alone. However as some of the most important critiques of militarism have been developed through feminist analysis, perhaps there can be no better foundation for the critique of the bureaucratization of technology — technocracy.

Apart from the papers mentioned above, few speakers emphasized the need to ascertain the function of new technologies, especially small computers, within an organisation such as ANNPAC. The spectre of the "Living Museums' Network" — a late seventies ANNPAC proposal for an interactive computer-based organisation (see *Fuse*, Vol.4, No.4) — was once again raised and then quickly tucked away in the history file. However the intimation that ANNPAC should become

more responsive as a network, a system of inter-related parts, is never very far behind discussions about the overall viability of the ANNPAC 'system' and its relationships to other institutions, public galleries both here and abroad, the Canada Council, Art Bank and the provincial arts councils.

During the last two years and most recently at this conference, the discussions taking place around the structure and organisation of ANNPAC give evidence to the fact that ANNPAC is beginning to rid itself of the notion that it is a loose organisation of like-formed and like-minded centres whose chosen mandates are to further the general development and exhibition of the arts in their various communities. Centres and affiliates such as *A Space*, *Art-Text(e)*, *Art Metropole*, *Unit Pitt*, *Centre for Art Tapes*, *The Western Front*, *Lavage Plus*, to name but a small number of the centres, all appear to be specialising, changing their mandates and accordingly their organisation to suit the specific interests and involvements of their boards and their constituencies. It is apparent that what distinguishes the centres from one another is more important than their complementarity. With increased specialisation and role differentiation taking place within and between centres across the country, changes in the division of labour and distribution of work on both a provincial and inter-provincial basis is occurring. Each centre appears to be focusing on one or two, and in the larger centres (the *Western Front*) several distinct activities. In these instances the potential for an expanded use of technology may be applied. It is obvious that a centre or agency whose primary function may be collection and distribution — *V/tapes*, *Video Inn*, *Art Metropole* (different though their individual mandates may be) — can make use of a computerized filing system for ease of access and distribution. This has become a proven success in libraries throughout Canada and of course the ultimate models exist in the banking, postal and taxation systems.

However, any proposed widespread use of computers within the general ANNPAC membership must take into account some practical considerations regarding alterations in the division of labour which will arise with the in-

Some of the over one hundred technophobes, technophiles and technocrats in attendance at ANNPAC's 1984 AGM





Chris Creighton-Kelly gives a technologized talk on technology

roduction of high tech apparatus. The points to be considered, some of which were raised during discussion sessions at the conference, are reason for some concern and could become the basis for a social impact assessment in the event of extensive deployment of high technology within the ANNPAC organisation.

Studies of this kind have yet to be undertaken with any degree of commitment by institutions within the public and private sectors. It is generally known that the increased use of technology in the automotive industry, the postal system, the banks etc. etc., has changed the status of work and decreased the workforce significantly in these areas. It will probably be some time before we know the full extent of the effects of the introduction of new technologies to these and other work places.

The present production of artists in this country and of the organisations with which many of them are affiliated is *labour intensive* and this labour is underpaid or unpaid. We need no reminder that a substantial proportion of

production and editing equipment. Many centres have inadequate spaces for their needs. Major administrative costs beyond rents often include printing and mailing. Such costs are not negotiable and the only options available to administrators to ensure budgetary flexibility are in salary, artist fees and equipment purchase. Budget cuts occur in order to service the non-negotiable expenses. This may lead to the deferral of exhibitions and/or of equipment purchase. Obviously it is difficult to generalise about the extent to which budgets are manipulated to service projected or expressed needs such as purchase of equipment, but as with small businesses, non-negotiable expenses often control the growth of the centre, its ability to service existing programmes in accord with its mandate as well as its projection of new programmes according to the exigencies of external or internal forces, such as the fluctuating aims and interests of the Canada Council or of the centre's own membership.

The introduction of computers to assist in the administration and work undertaken at artist run centres will have similar results to those obtained in other institutions. On the positive side, increased efficiency and organisation of files, accounts and exhibitions (perhaps). An eventual reduction in hours of labour and with it costs for the same or similar products. This, so the argument goes, would allow more 'leisure/work' or freed time for artists to produce their work in a more efficient and thus productive manner — productive in economic terms usually equated with profitable.

But this kind of thinking, the equating of productive with profitable, which underlines much of the persuasive rhetoric used to substantiate the net benefits of the introduction of high technology to the work place should be carefully evaluated when the work places in question have the degree of complexity of those located within the ANNPAC organisation. The *corporate* model of *cost efficiency*, *greater productivity* equals *profitability* is not appropriate, if we examine the manner in which the introduction of new technologies reduces labour time and jobs which presently carry a high premium inside the arts community and at large throughout

the country.

Much of the work undertaken at artist run centres and by artists throughout Canada is unprofitable, as the tax collector well knows, and will probably remain unprofitable for the foreseeable future. At present the artist run centres of ANNPAC provide a modicum of paid employment for a substantial number of artists, both on a regular and irregular basis through federal and provincial grants, at considerably more expense than it would be to provide small computers to each of the centres to undertake the work now being done manually. However the cost of those presently employed within the ANNPAC organisation is probably *much less*, ultimately, to the tax payer, than it would be if these artists were all receiving U.I.C. benefits.

How then can the introduction of computers alter the situation for the better? Should the net result of the introduction of new technologies become more artists on the unemployment lists? Is this scenario, similar as it is to those problems faced by industry, in the best interests of the artists and ANNPAC? Would not a more effective strategy be to increase the membership of each centre, gain access to more funds through both the traditional funding sources and the private sector in an attempt to increase the number of employment opportunities?

In the absence of an effective union or unions which could enter into a collective bargaining process with their employers — the centres themselves and by extension the state; in fact in the absence of the consciousness on the part of artists that we are workers who 'sell' our labour, it makes sense, particularly with the potential for even tighter reins on the federal and provincial purse strings, to strengthen the organisation from the base up and not streamline it with computer assistance from the top down.

Much of the thinking and discussion taking place around the nature of the new technologies and their application to the work place, must take into consideration some of the negative effects on social organisation, on the distribution of labour power within society. Without this consciousness of the socio-economic implications of the 'urge to technologise', cultural producers may continue to remain alien-

ated from the principal material productive forces of our society; those forces which directly and indirectly provide the fertile ground for the development of culture itself.

In order to further the inquiry into the benefits and possible negative effects of the introduction of new technologies, it may be necessary that a comprehensive economic study be undertaken on the funding, the allocation of resources and division of labour within ANNPAC. The data for an economic study is probably already available through the funding agencies and individual centre reports and with adequate analysis and interpretation the organisation may be able to ascertain the needs of the various centres, how they are being met by the resources of the centres themselves or provincially and federally, by the funding agencies.

Of course, such a study could begin to undermine the relative autonomy which each centre enjoys, but with increasing competition for what appears to be a diminishing capital resource, it could provide legitimate and useful information from which individual member centres, their constituents and the ANNPAC organisation as a whole could benefit. The question of extending memberships to new centres will continue to be raised at each meeting in the future. It may not present as many problems in the minds of the executive of ANNPAC if they and the boards of each centre understand the practical issues which arise from competition between the centres.

Many of the issues of a practical and economic nature appeared to be split from the main conference and took place during the business meeting at its conclusion. It would perhaps have been worthwhile to air some of these issues during some of the discussion periods at the conference. In the context of a more theoretical and somewhat abstract discussion, some grounding of day to day problems may have given more relevance to the purpose of the meeting which tended during the two day period to veer away from attempting "to provide a context for discussion of issues concerning and surrounding creative use of technology by artists" (opening address by Elizabeth Chitty), to concentrate on the relationship of technology to AN-

NPAC.

The discussions at the conference ranged across the technical, philosophical, social, ideological and ethical aspects of the new technologies. Given this range it was hardly surprising that little insightful discussion occurred or that any consensus emerged. However, the fact that some of the more 'knotty' issues were presented in this context is important and the form of conference should provide the model for further discussion on issues relevant to artists and artist associations.

The ancient Greeks made connections between *Techne*, signifying those ways in which things became manifest, the means by which they are brought into being, and *poesis*, the making, usually associated with the creative cognition of 'superior' individuals called fine artists and poets. But, in the west, by the 20th century, such connections have long since disappeared. The *techne* of *poesis* has a very different meaning than the *techne* of *technology* which the contemporary *techne* has become.

The antipathy between science/technology and art has a long history. There have been those who have attempted to work with, rather than in the service of technology and there is no denying that science and technology have irrevocably altered the means and manner in which visual artists, actors, musicians, writers, etc. act in the world. However, because the locus of attention for art, science and technology is culture and society, we are all responsible for their effects, whether we are their producers or consumers.

The convening of a conference like "Artists Talk about Technology" may not contribute to or extend the debates on issues pertaining to the technological revolution, but it has enhanced the potential for many to further educate themselves regarding the uses, misuses and abuses of technology in relation to their respective communities. It has laid ground for artists to work together, planning their individual and collective responses to something which may, as IBM prophesies, in fact become something "so remarkably different...that it changes or lives and humankind forever!"

Bruce Barber

STILL SANE

SARA DIAMOND

SARA DIAMOND: What does your project, *Still Sane*, consist of?

PERSIMMON BLACKRIDGE: It will be twenty-seven lifesize body casts or fragments from body casts done in clay, with writing on the bodies or on sheets of paper, metal or wood, coming out from behind the bodies. It deals with the three years that Sheila Gilhooly spent in and out of mental hospitals for being a lesbian. Generally, Sheila did the writing and I did the sculpture, but we overlapped, working together and sharing ideas. It's a documentary; it goes in chronological order, but doesn't have a continuous flow; it jumps through different episodes.

It starts with when she first came out as a lesbian and was committed by a hysterical shrink a week later. The pieces talk about the things that happened in the hospital; about side-effects of drugs that she was given; about the ways that inmates are turned against each other and alliances between patients are broken and good-intentioned staff people end up compromising their ideals or getting fired. There's pieces about the endless, tedious boredom of hanging around this institution waiting for something to happen; about shock treatment, and about the way mental patients are treated when they get out.

There's all these grim, painful pieces, but there are also ones that show her resistance and her fighting back. One piece says on it, "Known throughout the nuthouse for breaking windows and escaping across roofs" and another, "Nineteen shock treatments and I still don't want to be cured of being a lesbian."

SARA: So, rather than seeing the pieces and becoming depressed and feeling that this woman is being destroyed, you see the work and become angry and profoundly touched by her capacity to keep her inner core

Persimmon Blackridge is a Vancouver artist working primarily in clay. For the past two and a half years she and Sheila Gilhooly have collaborated on a sculptural and written record of the years which Sheila spent in a psychiatric hospital. Some of these works have been exhibited in the "Woman to Woman" show (Women in Focus Gallery), Little Sisters Bookstore, the World Conference of Churches conference, the "Sexuality and Seeing Show" (Unit Pitt Gallery) and as part of A.K.A. Gallery in Saskatoon, as part of the Women, Art and Politics conference. The entire, twenty-seven piece series will be shown at Women in Focus in Vancouver, opening September 28 and running to the twentieth of October.

intact, despite all of the humiliations and pressures.

PERSIMMON: We feel that the series is a really positive statement. Although it has all this horrifying stuff in it, it talks about the fact that we can have the strength to resist. Sheila had the strength to resist, even though she was isolated and controlled by these institutions, she kept her own spirit inside of her.

Everybody in this culture censors themselves; we really censor the way that we can be in the world; we censor our life and spontaneity as well as our resistance to oppression because there's this threat of: they'll call you crazy and they'll lock you up, or you'll get thrown in prison: something awful is going to happen to you if you don't act normal.

There's one study done of married women who were locked up for being schizophrenic and their rate of hospitalization after being released. The one thing that all the women who ended up re-hospitalized had in common was that they didn't do their housework. All the others had many of the same symptoms: they didn't brush their hair, and they cried a lot, but that didn't get them re-hospitalized. The one thing was not doing housework!

SARA: What techniques do you use

to extend your analysis of psychiatric institutions beyond Sheila's immediate experience?

PERSIMMON: Sprinkled here and there between the pieces we're going to have clay slabs that will have different situations written on them like, twice as many women as men receive shock treatment, and stuff like that. Also, quotes from studies: there are a lot of studies that show that poor people, old people, people of colour, women and gay people are hospitalized more often, are sent to worse places, are diagnosed more seriously and are kept in for longer. It really runs along lines of class, race, age, sex and sexual preference. It's not removed from how people are treated by society in general. Psychiatry is not an objective science. People going through this show and reading this very personal story will also read these statistics which places it within the whole context.

The other thing about the political and the personal has to do with how I came to do it. I was going through all this struggle about art and politics. I had worked for two years on a sculpture series called *Circus*. It was really bright and had clay women riding lions and eating fire and jumping through flaming hoops. It was really, really fun

and gave people this wonderful, laughing sense of the strength and power of women, but at the same time it wasn't Heavy, Political work. So I thought, "Okay, now I've had fun for two years, I'm going to do some heavy political art work. For the next months I made a whole lot of crappy sculptures. I kept thinking, "What is this? Why can't I do anything that's real?" The only work that I was doing that was good was about being frustrated as an artist, but the pieces I did about heavy political issues were rotten. I started getting all this stuff in my head like, "Is it true that political art always ends up as bad art and it's propaganda...", you know that line. I was struggling with that stuff and at the same time knowing that there was a lot of political artwork in the world that was really good and moving, and that in fact I had done work that I felt good about.

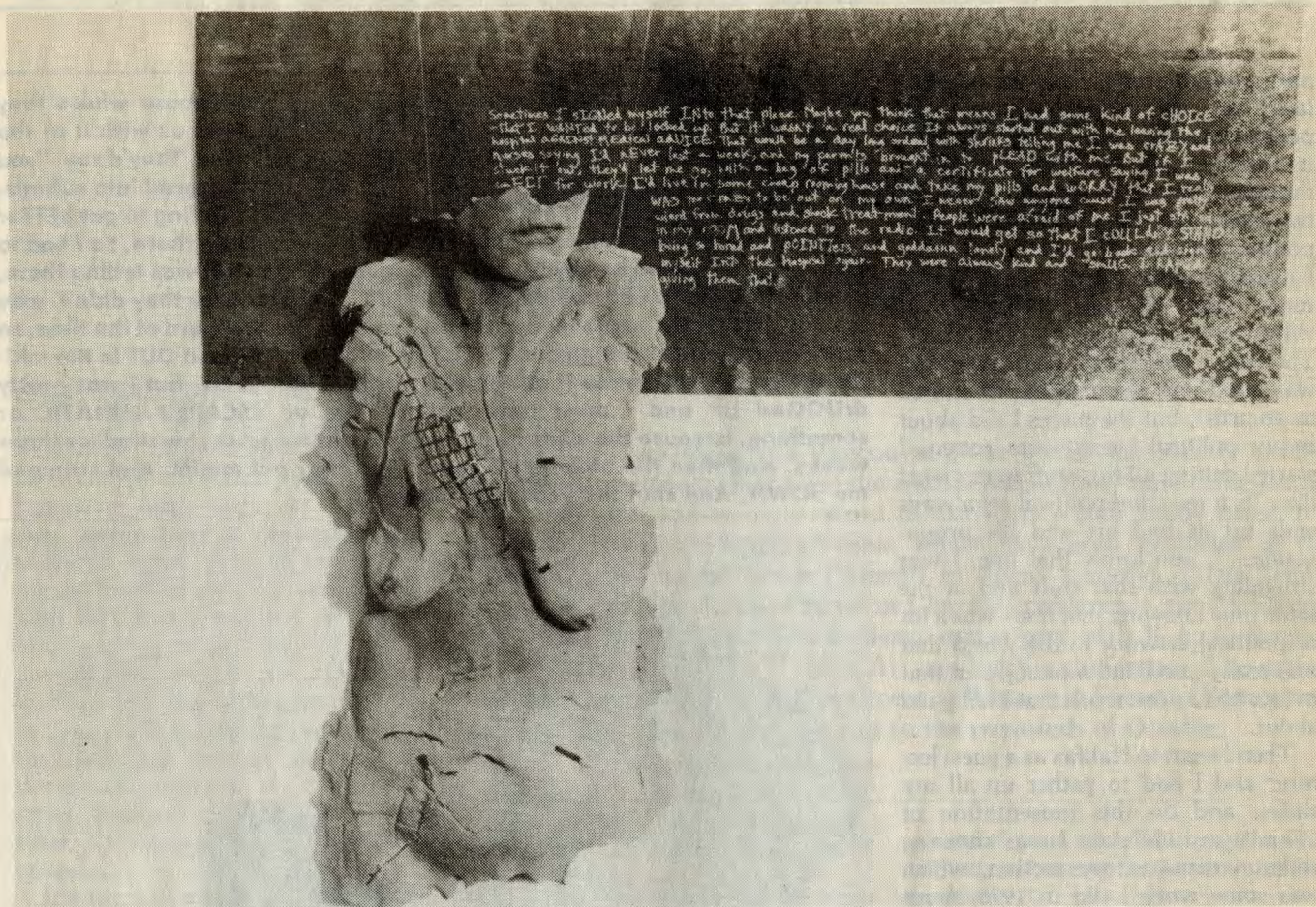
Then I went to Halifax as a guest lecturer and I had to gather up all my slides, and do this presentation of "This is my life". As I was showing slides, I came to one section, which was some work I did in 1978 about women in mental hospitals. They were little sculptures that had a lot of little things happening that were generalized women in generalized hospitals. As part of that whole series I did two wall plaques that are about these two friends of mine who are still locked up. On each of them was a drawing of my friends and then some words about what their situation was. When I showed those slides and read the words I was practically in tears, in the middle of this art lecture.

Those two pieces weren't really better than the other ones, but they still had this emotional impact for me. On the way back home on the airplane I was considering all these things. I thought, "Well, a lot of the problems with what I was doing was that it was coming only from my head, from this idea that I *should* be doing this political art work." It wasn't out of a great emotional upsurge, and it wasn't out of a more tactile, flash of an image, it was just all out of my head. I think that art, in order to work, has to be working on all levels at once. It has to be coming from some sort of visual excitement and emotional commitment and some intellectual understanding at the same

StrAckville was this big institution kind of like a WAREhouse where they stored people they'd gIVen up on. They used to thrEAten us with it at the Royal Hospital, especially when anyone DID get sent there. They'd say, "you don't want to end up like HER do you?" and we'd all be scared into submission for a few days after. So one day they said I wasn't TRYing to get bETTER and that when a bed came frEE in StrACKville, I was going there. So I had to WAIT. People would hardly TALK to me, cause all the staff was telling them, "You don't want to end up like HER, do you?" And of course they didn't, who would? I WAITED and planned escapes. I was in a locked ward at the time, so there wasn't much coming and going, but one time I slipped OUT in the middle of a crisis and made it all the way to the BUS DEPOT, but I was pretty drUGGED UP and I must have looked like an ESCAPED LUNATIC or something, because the cOPs came and brought me bAck. I waited for three weeks. And then the ambulance came. And they put me IN. And strapped me DOWN. And shut the door. And drove off.



Paula Levine



signing myself in

Sometimes I signed myself INTO that place. Maybe you think that means I had some kind of CHOICE-that I WANTED to be locked up. But it wasn't a real choice. It always started out with me leaving the hospital aGAINST MEDical adVICE. That would be a day long ordeal, with shrinks telling me I was crAZY, and nurses saying I'd nEver last a week, and my parents brought in to pLEAD with me. But if I stuck it out, they'd let me go, with a bag of pills and a certificate for welare saying I was unFIT for work. I'd live in some cheap rooming house and take my pills and wORRY that I really WAS too crazy to be out on my own. I never saw anyone cause I was pretty weird from drugs and shock treatment. People were afraid of me. I just stAYed in my room and listened to the radio. It would get so that I couLdn't STAND being so bored and poiNTless and goddamn lonely and I'd go back and sign myself into the hospital again. They were always kind and smUG. I hAted giving them that.

time, or it's very shallow. That happens in political art and it happens in other art work, you get stuff that's just brittle. So I had to figure out how to make political art that was alive in my heart, my guts and my hands, as well as my head.

I decided on the airplane that I would try sticking to personal experience, something that was close to my life. In that way I would have the immediacy, the sense that this did happen to a real person, which you often lose if you go for a generalization; I figured if I did it right, the audience would make the generalizations. When I came back I asked Sheila if she would do some work on mental hospitals with me. She thought about it for a few

days, then she said, "Sure!" We didn't know what we were getting into!

SARA: Did you research before or during the piece to develop your analysis of psychiatry and to place lesbian experience within that analysis?

PERSIMMON: For a long time it was me and Sheila talking about our lives and stuff that we knew about. It's been something that's important for me in my life. I have never been locked up, but my father was, my uncle was and my grandmother was. My uncle's still on lithium, his brain is burned out from insulin shock treatment. I saw my first shrink when I was twelve because I hated school. Then I went to this school shrink who hated me, thought I was a Bad Girl; he never did manage to

normalize me though. I had a nervous breakdown, or whatever you call it, when I was twenty. It was really awful; everyone kept telling me I was really crazy. I went to this mental hospital as an outpatient and graduated to this shrink from the child guidance centre. She was nice, but the next year I saw a shrink who thought I was rotten, who really encouraged me to be miserable because he didn't like it when I was strong and smug and powerful; he liked me better when I was miserable.

Sheila and I talked through all this stuff together; we were exploring stuff that was painful for both of us. Now, with this work, Sheila is the one that is exposed and it makes a difference between us. Instead of being right in there

together like we were the first year, now there's this difference, which is that her story everyone hears, while my story is still private. I know it's hard for her. So I want to say stuff so that she's not out there alone. There's these pieces about her cutting her arms up; well I did that too. It feels terrible to talk in an interview and say that, but I can't let her be all alone.

As far as book-type research, I've read a lot over the years. In the last couple of months, when I've been working on the slabs, I've been reading *Phoenix Rising* and *Madness Network News* and books by different anti-psychiatry writers like Leonard Frank, Peter Breggin and Judi Chamberlain,

and getting the facts and statistics from there.

SARA: You've centred so far on the ways that the institution of psychiatry expresses society's biases towards specific groups of people. Do you have an analysis of mental illness, emotional crises and so on, that goes along with your analysis of psychiatry?

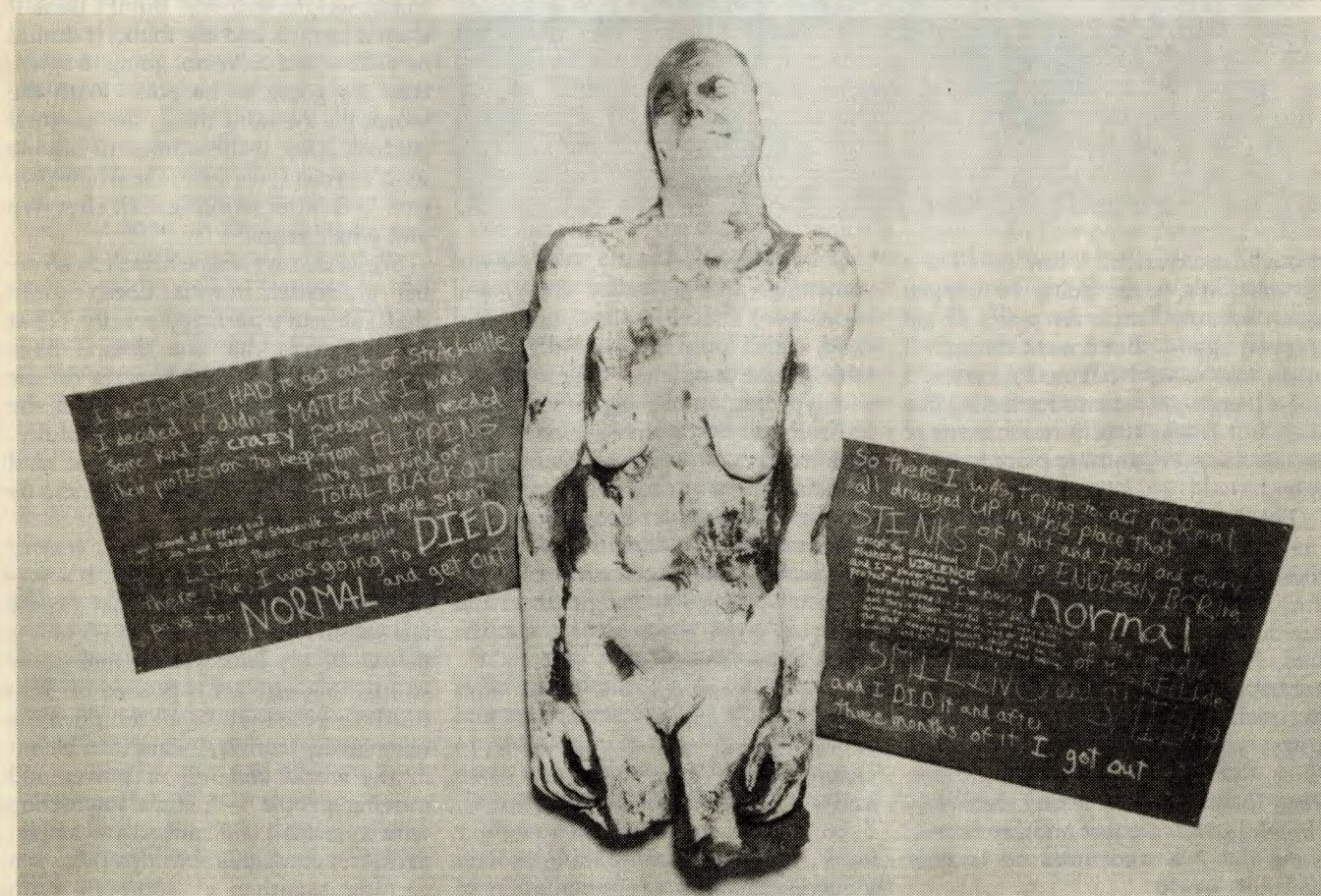
PERSIMMON: Some people do have a hard time and some people do go into really unusual corners of their minds that most people do not have much experience with. You can't separate that out from social factors. What is it that either drives someone so far inside that they hit a place like that or gives someone so much freedom that they

can go to a place like that? What is it that holds some people in check in a rigid normal, what is it that gives some people the ability to stay clear of those really painful places? Those have to do with social factors; they're not just personal or biochemical matters.

I had my second journey into those painful places and it made me change my thinking a bit. I knew that my first nervous whatchamacallit had to do with sexism; it had to do with a whole lot of anger that was being turned against myself; I had no other place to put it. I had no feminist analysis; I didn't see the world from the point of view of women. It seemed like there was something wrong with me. I

getting out of Strackville

I deCided I HAD to get out of StrAckville. I decided it didn't MATTER if I was some kind of crazy person who needed their proTEction to keep from FLIPPING into some kind of TOTAL BLACKOUT. I was scared of flipping out but I was more scared of Strackville. Some people spent their LIVES there. Some people DIED there. Me, I was going to pass for NORMAL and get out. So there I was, trying to act nORMAL, all drugged UP in this place that STINKS of shit and Lysol and every DAY is ENDlessley BORing except for occasional flashes of VIOLENCE and I'm powerless to protect myself and I'm being normal. Normal women don't talk about being a lesbian and they're always cheerful. I was very good, always smiling, never complaining or bothering the staff, keeping my mouth shut and smiling, always obedient and quiet and nice and smiling, in the middle of this HELLhole SMILING and SMILING. And I DID it and after three months of it, I got out.





thought afterwards, "Now that I'm a feminist, it's never going to happen again because I'm never going to get trapped again." But I went through it again last year; I felt really rotten. I guess there were reasons for feeling like that, but it was totally reminiscent of before. I went to another place to some extent.

The thing that was different from the first time was that when I would get these creeping feelings like, "Maybe I am crazy" or "Mental illness runs in my family", I had people around who said, "You are not crazy, real things are happening in your life, you're having really strong feelings, you're not crazy, you're just hurting." I used to think that "correct ideas" would prevent "breakdowns", now I think that "breakdowns" are just another normal thing that we sometimes do to cope with this world.

Some people feel really, really awful sometimes and get called crazy, and some people feel really numb and dead, which looks more socially acceptable. Some people cut their arms up; some people smoke cigarettes. They are both self-destructive acts. Smoking cigarettes is worse for you than a little non-suicidal slashing, but cigarettes are more acceptable. People have different ways of handling things. To get support when having a hard time without being labelled and stigmatized and alienated from the rest of society is really important.

SARA: You spoke earlier of the ways that the work exposes Sheila's life and experience. It seems impossible to escape objectifying your subject as an artist, whether in biographical, documentary or semi-documentary work. Part of the art-making process involves creating a representation of

the living real person, something outside of the person being described, something out of their immediate control and a partial truth at best. That process of objectification occurs even when the artist has a sense of integrity and wants to empower that subject. That objectification is not inherently bad; it can allow the viewer to identify, to see into new experiences, to perceive strength and power, not only vulnerability. In this case I think it works in that direction. What steps did you take in your process of collaboration to strengthen Sheila's role within the piece and working process?

PERSIMMON: We worked physically together, but a lot more with ideas. Before I start sculpting and she starts writing, we've talked endlessly. She came up with some of the most right-on, outrageous imagery that's in the work. She writes a whole lot and then I edit it down and then she edits my edit. We've always had this approach that I have final say on the art works and she has final say on the words. When we have disagreement on something, we argue it out as far as we can and what I think weighs with her and what she thinks weighs with me. But if I think it should be pink and she thinks it should be yellow and we're not going to agree, then it's going to be pink. With the words it's the same thing; she has total control. Also, if she wanted to can the whole project, we'd can the whole project. Even after working on it after two and a half years.

Sheila doesn't define herself as an artist or a writer, but that doesn't mean that she can't participate fully. That doesn't mean that she doesn't have dynamite ideas about how to do the artwork. It doesn't mean that she doesn't write strongly and beautifully. She doesn't have to take on that kind of an identity to be able to participate in a project like this.

There's a lot of shit in this society about who gets to be an artist. It's really encouraged by society that people feel stupid when they look at art unless they're highly educated. It makes me so mad because art is pushed off into this little room where all the power is taken away from it. I want it to be out in the world and full of power and moving people — people interacting with it, instead of all airless and stuffy. SARA: I can agree, but this piece is a coming together of someone with

highly developed technical skills and someone with a profound sense of their own vision and ability to express that with words, but without formal training. I think the piece is so powerful because of that combination: it is technically well-executed, it has embedded in it the history of your work as a sculptress. This contributes to the power of the images.

PERSIMMON: People who have a real commitment to art work and do it all the time are doing a different kind of artwork. Art is a skill, there's a lot to learn and it takes a long time and you're always learning more. I'm not saying that there's no difference; I'm saying that there should be everything. People should not be made to feel that if they're not a "professional", they can't make art and that what they are doing is unimportant: "Oh, she's just a Sunday painter".

SARA: Why did you choose to create a work that moves from one point in time to another, using numerous pieces, rather than summarizing psychiatry and Sheila's experience in one work?

PERSIMMON: There's so many things to talk about! A lot of how we chose what to do was to talk about a piece and say, "I really want people to understand about slashing; I want people to know that we're not crazy, that slashing makes some kind of sense within the context that it happens." Or... "I want people to know when they someone on the bus who's twitching and jittering and looking weird, that it might well be because of their medication, not because they're so-called 'crazy'." Part of it is making a chronology understandable and a lot of it is really wanting people to know how it feels.

SARA: Why did you choose to use a naked figure as your central image?

PERSIMMON: Sheila's writing style is really verbal and you can hear her voice when you read the words. It has this sense of reality and presence, of "Oh my god! This is a real person and this really happened." Having the physical image of that real person gives that feeling more, makes it inescapable. There is a lot more expressiveness in a naked body and it gives more leeway. If you're making someone with clothes on, you can't really do wild things like scribble all over them with graphite.

FALL 1984

SARA: It becomes fashion if they're dressed and you do that.

One of the things that I find powerful about this work is that it undermines the traditional use of nudity and the relationship of audience to the naked female figure. The power of these figures and the beauty and intensity of experience make voyeurism very difficult. Instead nakedness becomes an analogy for truth.

PERSIMMON: The violence in this show is like that. I've seen a lot of artwork where violence is done to the female figure in a way that glorifies that violence. The woman is the victim; the other. The viewer is not meant to identify with her pain. In our show there is also fragmentation and violence to the figures, but it happens in a different way. It's showing what's happening to her, but we feel the pain in our own bodies. We identify with her, not with the violence being done to her.

All through it, in the most down and tormented pieces, she still has a really big sense of power and integrity that comes through.

SARA: I wonder if that's in part because she authored the text. You know that it's Sheila's body and voice and that there's a way that they move through that forces you to confront her experience. It's too easily your own, for one thing. It's totally different from the text in pornography where it is authored by someone else, acting as a constant lie denying the body, which is itself being shaped by someone else to constitute a lie about the experience of the imagined (and real) woman. The use of nakedness, text and the images of violence comment on an institution (dominant psychiatry) whose function is to fragment and contain women's power and sexuality. The forced privatization of Sheila's sexual identity as a lesbian is met directly by her nakedness, it becomes a statement affirming the right to that sexuality...

The basic material in the work is clay. How did you work with the clay; what other materials are involved?

PERSIMMON: We have three plaster casts of Sheila's body. The clay is pressed into the casts and, when it stiffens up, pulled out. Then I work on it, tearing it, fragmenting it, changing it. Then it's fired.

I worked with oil paint on clay. I really like the colour and control that

FUSE

you get with paint that it's hard to get with glaze. I've done a lot of pieces going over the paint with a propane torch, which I originally did when I didn't like the way that a piece was painted. I decided that I would go over it with the torch and take the paint off. It started to burn and get funny and I loved it, it was terrific. I've also painted with autobody enamel with sawdust mixed into it and then burned it with a propane torch. The enamel doesn't burn, it stays the same; the sawdust burns and gets all funny, so there's this glucky texture. A lot of the pieces combine other materials; there's pieces with a lot of metal screen and there's plastic net.

It's incredible using three moulds for twenty-six pieces. I keep thinking that I'm going to run out of ideas. But the limitation makes you explore deeper and deeper. There's a lot of difference between pieces: I changed the expression of their faces, fiddled with the corners of the mouth. Some of them have the head from one mould and the body from another.

SARA: What audience are you aiming for?

PERSIMMON: We want as wide an audience as possible. There's different kinds of audiences. We would like a feminist and lesbian audience; we'd like an ex-mental patient audience; we'd like a shrink audience; we'd like straight people off the street. For some people, it will be support and confirmation and for other people it will be a window into a really different experience and hopefully an understanding of it. We want to publicize it as widely as possible, for example through newspapers and posters: we'd like to put up posters at Riverview [a Vancouver mental institution]. We'd like to put them up in halfway houses, and shrink schools and psychiatric nurses' associations and outpatient clinics and gay and lesbian organizations.

SARA: What are your plans for the work after the *Women in Focus* exhibit in Vancouver?

PERSIMMON: We want to do a book that will have the photos and the text. After putting so much work into it and believing in it politically, we don't want to just show it for three weeks and then leave it. We'd love to travel the show. We want a lot of people to see it.

S.D.

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Motherhood Within and Beyond the Law

Three Films from New Films/New Directors, NYC

BERENICE REYNAUD

The Ballad of Narayama

By Shonei Imamura
Japan (1983)

IT TOOK NO LESS THAN ANOTHER festival — the annual New Directors/New Films Festival co-organized by the Lincoln Center Film Society and the Museum of Modern Art (March 30 - April 12, 1984) — to bring to New York the winner of the Grand Prix of the 1983 Cannes Festival; and the film is still not in distribution. *The Ballad of Narayama*, however, is one of the most accomplished products of Japanese cinema recently presented to a Western audience. Its director, 58 year old Shohei Imamura, has an impressive filmography, but only his last three films, *Vengeance Is Mine* (1979), *Eijanaika* (1981), and *The Ballad of Narayama* (1983) have been shown in New York.

The Ballad starts with a spectacular aerial shot above a deserted snow-covered mountain: nothing in sight, but the blinding, heavy whiteness of the snow. Suddenly, while the panning continues, an isolated house appears on the screen, then two and three, then gradually the village itself. In this remote corner of space, outside history — we are obviously taken into what anthropologists call a "société froide" ("cold society"), i.e., a society without history, where the social structure remains unaffected by the passing of time — the villagers live in semi-poverty, swayed by the circular rhythm of the seasons that regulates their agricultural life, and by traditions, codes, and superstitions that regulate their social exchanges.

The most important Law in the village decides the relationship between parents and children: handed



Tatsuhei carries his mother on his back to her deathplace

down by an ancestral figure of authority, it reflects the psychoanalytic principle that parenthood is only realized in death¹, and that children themselves have to become the agents of this process. When a villager reaches 70, he/she must be carried to the top of the Narayama mountain by the eldest son of the family, and left there to die.

The Ballad, which starts in winter and ends in late autumn is the story of the last year of Orin's life; she is the head of her family, the mother of two sons whom she has, proudly, raised by herself. A tragedy overshadows Orin's otherwise spotless life: her husband, incapable of bringing himself to carry

¹ I am alluding to the ritual murder of the original father by his sons as analysed by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* and expanded in Lacanian Theory: it is only as the Dead Father that the father can assume the function of the Law.

his own mother to Narayama, disappeared years ago. Orin (Sumiko Sakamoto) then had to play the role of a double figure of authority, both mother and father to her sons, and to "wash" the shame that befell her family through her husband's behaviour. Now, at 69, she fears that her older son, Tatsuhei (Ken Ogata), who is extremely attached to her, will fail in his duty as his father did. The apparent justification of the Law is to rid the community of useless old people, but Orin is still strong and hard-working; in a painful scene, she will break her front teeth to spare Tatsuhei the temptation of considering that she is still a useful and capable worker.

In this year, before she is taken to Narayama, she must also regulate the sex life of her family. She will find a new wife for the widowed Tatsuhei, a

way for her second son, "The Stinker", refused by every woman, to get laid, and will rid her grandson of a pregnant girlfriend from a family of thieves.

The last struggle is internal: within Orin herself, between her will to live and her desire to embody the Law; and within Tatsuhei, between his love for his mother, and his final acceptance of the Law. The Law, however, is as much a concern of the dead as of the living, and, to the bewildered mother and son, the missing father will appear one sunny afternoon, at the foot of a tree. This apparition breaks Tatsuhei's silence and he reveals to Orin that he killed and buried his father, shamed by the latter's cowardice, at the foot of the same tree more than twenty years before. In relating this, Tatsuhei has transformed a living and probably ineffectual father into a powerful legend (his father has become a wandering myth, and the villagers keep saying throughout the movie that they have seen him "in the Eastern Mountains"); so must he also subject himself to a classical Oedipal structure: to give up his mother for the sake of a Symbolic Father.

The justly praised final sequence of *The Ballad* shows Tatsuhei's long walk towards Narayama, carrying his mother on a special seat on his back: a striking image based on the visual reversal of pregnancy (Orin carrying her son in her belly). The Law forbids parent and son to talk to one another once the walk has started, and the sequence is shot in an oppressive silence, filled only by the noises of the wilderness: animal calls, branches breaking, crushed leaves, water running, wind blowing through the trees... The journey is a dangerous physical ordeal. Encumbered and burdened by Orin's weight, Tatsuhei must cross a ravine on the trunk of a tree, climb very steep slopes on all fours, etc... It is also a psychological ordeal: he knows that each of his steps, each of his muscular efforts, brings his mother closer to death, the way each of his mother's painful contractions, when she was giving birth to him, was bringing him closer to life. They finally reach the monstrous ossuary, strewn with the bones of generations of villagers left there to die.

Upon arrival, Orin, quite dignified, kneels down to pray in silence, while

ravens start circling around her. Tatsuhei breaks down at the moment of leaving his mother, but she orders him away, and the snow starts falling, signalling the cold that will kill her soon.

I do not think that Imamura's intention in this film is to justify the (probably mythical) set of rules enforced in the village — whereby a wife is asked by her dying husband to "repair" with the gift of her body the deeds of his past life, and the community inflicts an atrocious death to a family of thieves — but rather to refelct upon the importance of the Law in the structuring of human societies and human psyches. But herein lies, I think, a possible misinterpretation of the film. Seduced by the sensuousness of the camera work, the quality of the performance, the location shooting which displays the interaction between natural cycles and the life of the villagers, some critics have felt justified to write about a "pantheist image of the world". True enough, the narrative is constantly interrupted by beautiful, *National Geographic*-like close-ups of "natural phenomena": flowers blooming, animals mating, hunting, or devouring each other, etc... However, these images do not imply that the peasants' sexuality, toil, actions of revenge or punishment resemble a 'natural' state. No matter how "primitive", "close to nature", and "cruel" the lives of the villagers may seem, it is constantly mediated by language, rules, traditions. The Law is not a triumphant, "pantheist" assertion of life. Neither is it, at best, a mere code for survival. It is the authority which says "No" to immediate gratification.²; it embodies the presence of death within human psyche.³ When Tatsuhei comes back from Narayama, still carrying his mother's empty seat, distraught but lighter, he has accepted not only the necessity of Orin's death, but the fact that one day, he too will be carried to the ossuary by his son.

In his previous *Eijanaika*, Imamura

² The pun often found in French psychoanalytic theory: le Nom du Père/le Non du Père (the Name of the Father, the No of the Father): the Father's Law, the acceptance of which solves the Oedipus conflict, is signified by his giving his name to his children; on the other hand, the authority of the Father is perceived as a negative one ("Thou shalt not enjoy thy mother").

³ For Freud, the "death wish" occurs as a necessary limitation to the "pleasure principle"

showed the struggle of a "little man" caught within his own misery and impotence between the rivalries of several parties of samurais, gangsters and rebels, and who, losing his wife to a pimp, found himself leading a popular revolt, and died in the repression. The filmmaker's vision is not one of passive acceptance of the "order of things", but rather an investigation and questioning of this order.

Tatsuhei, small peasant without power or fortune is, in his way, as much a loser as the hero of *Eijanaika* — although the society which maintains this particular state of oppression (the feudal society of samurais and warlords)⁴ is never shown in the movie.

In the context of *The Ballad of Narayama*, Tatsuhei achieves a dignity parallel to that of Socrates accepting to drink the hemlock because the laws of Athens have condemned him, and he has always stood for them. In spite of the killing of his father, and within the limitations of his life, the peasant Tatsuhei, having realized the physical and spiritual journey in which he gives up his mother to go back to his wife and family, has succeeded where King Oedipus failed.

Straight Through the Heart

By Doris Dorrie
Germany (1983)

STRAIGHT THROUGH THE HEART, 1955-born Doris Dörrie's first feature film, takes us in another dark corner of human psyche: the realization and denial of sexual difference, the impossibility of communication between the sexes (or, as Lacan termed it, "the impossibility of sexual intercourse"). But while Imamura's mythical fable is presented as "ahistorical", Dörrie determinedly locates her brilliant "comedy of manners" in contemporary Germany. Her heroine, Anna Braun, is another of those "rebels without a cause" who have increasingly

⁴ There is, however, a representative of the "outside society" in the person of the salt merchant who helps Orin arrange the marriage between Tatsuhei and Otama. The theory of the "sociétés froides", like the theory of underdevelopment, should be completed by a study of the outside economic structure that tries to maintain an unmutable status quo in these societies, to keep their domination over them.

populated the cinema of our industrial societies in the last thirty years: disaffected, bored with herself, her menial job in a supermarket, and with society in general, Anna Braun dyes her hair blue and sends herself love letters in a diary form that she pins on her wall.

Whether she knows it or not, Anna, like a fairy-tale princess, waits for a big man to take care of her. And, lo and behold, the big man appears in her life. Middle-aged, charming, wealthy, he has been following and watching her for days before inviting her to dinner in a fancy restaurant and making his pro-

The fairy tale soon reveals its monstrous aspects. The gentleman's agreement is indeed one-sided: no sex, no emotional involvement, no demands. Anna's prince has just found an easy solution to "living with a woman" without having anything to do with her. He is the boss and she the (asexual) object, revealing his desire to keep things under control, his narcissism, his childish fear of women. Unfortunately, Anna is not strong enough to take advantage of the situation, or deal coolly with it; indeed, in spite of her "warrior-like qualities", she

She dresses herself up, and lies down, motionless as a corpse, in the garden, surrounded by candles. Armin is slightly worried, and allows himself to be brought to where Anna wanted him: in bed with her. "I know how it's going to end — badly", he sighs. "That does not matter," moans Anna. After sex, Armin seems to relax, talks about himself, his emotional life, his first love — then, abruptly withdraws, and pretends that everything he has just said was sheer invention. Anna, furious, leaves Armin and his money.

Yet, as soon as Anna leaves the



Faking suicide — not literally, but cinematographically

posal: he invites her to live at his place, and to receive a generous monthly stipend, without any obligation. "Why?" Anna asks, suspiciously. "Because I'd just like to watch you, to imagine I have become somebody else." "But why? What do you see in me?" "I see in you the strength of a warrior." "This is ridiculous; I have nothing to fight for" replies Anna, who leaves the restaurant.

Once back in her little room, however, she finds that solitude is unbearable, and that the gentleman's offer represents a way to get out of her unsatisfying way of life. The next shot shows her settling into her benefactor's middle class suburban house.

might have been chosen *because she is not strong enough*. With nothing else to do, she spends hours waiting for Armin, her "protector", tries to drag him out for an evening in town while he'd rather play chess at home with a computer, ends up drinking herself sick in a deserted café, attempts to talk to him or attract his attention when he reads the *Wall Street Journal* at breakfast, draws the shape of her body on the living room floor as if it were a corpse. In short, she makes a "nuisance" of herself, thus perfecting the poor opinion her partner has of women.

Her depression is finally so overwhelming that she fakes a suicide — not literally, but cinematographically.

house, her depression returns. She tries to get in touch with Armin, anonymously visits his ex-wife (now an alcoholic) and finally pretends to be pregnant in order to be re-admitted to the house. "How much is it going to cost me?" asks Armin. "Nothing. I want to keep it." "You don't know how much this means to me!" Anna, thinking she has tricked her man, has of course but fallen into another trap: Armin has realized that a child would fulfill his will to control much better than a woman. And, after the first few weeks of 'honeymoon', Anna understands that she is nothing but the receptacle of this man's child, that she has lost again. She has to carry on with her

lie, and then escapes to avoid detection during the last months of her "pregnancy." She flees to Frankfurt, and there, kidnaps a Turkish baby girl.

Returning to the house, hell resumes. Armin wants to eliminate Anna from the "joys of motherhood" and be both father and mother to "his child". He bathes her, feeds her, sleeps in the same room. Gradually he discovers the truth about the baby's origin, though he refuses to admit it, and finally since Anna, feeling excluded, has begun to make a "nuisance" of herself again, he orders her out. Only a murder, and an ultimate, comical escape to Turkey, will resolve the situation.

Clearly, the (objectionable) characters depicted with humour by Doris Dörrie are not "realistic" and do not call for identification on the part of the viewer. They belong to the realm of the farce, albeit a sophisticated one. The initial situation — the "contract" between Anna (Beate Jensen) and Armin (Sepp Bierbichler) — in its artificiality, reminded me, in some uncanny way, of the contract that the hero of Sacher Masoch's *Venus in Furs* imposes to an initially reluctant Wanda. Armin is not exactly in a masochistic situation: he may be, however, a man who does not have the courage of his own perversions. Sacher Masoch's novel does parallel the pattern of Armin's masochism:

1) the choice of a woman as an object of worship and/or fantasmatic identification ("You are a warrior" says Armin.)

2) the definition of the terms of the contract by the man alone (like Wanda in the novel, Anna is lured into a situation she has neither chosen nor defined; linguistic power belongs to Armin; and what he orders her to do, literally, is to live with him, i.e. to be beautiful and tantalizing, but to "refuse" him sex);

3) the sense, from the outset of the relationship, that it is "doomed" not to last (Sacher Masoch's Wanda, as the novelist's creation, utters at the beginning of the book the same words as Armin: "It will end badly");

4) anger and frustration on the part of the man when his object of fantasy rebels and starts acting on her own; this is sometimes coupled with a denial of this rebellion (Armin's refusal to ad-

mit that the child brought by Anna has been stolen);

5) a decidedly pessimistic feeling about the relationship between the sexes: "As nature created her, and as man currently treats her, woman is man's enemy, she can be only his slave or his tyrant, but never his companion",⁵ concludes Sacher Masoch (italics from the original text).

Thus, *Straight Through the Heart* plunges into some of the "hidden secrets" pertaining to human sexuality. In particular it can be read as a parabola investigating the unbridgeable gap between male and female sexuality. If recent psychoanalytic theory has shown female sexuality as constructed as the representation of an absence — excluded from the linguistic order, female sexuality appears as a "gap" within male discourse⁶ — it is equally important to mention "faking" as an important constituent of female sexuality.⁷ The possibility open to any woman to fake orgasms (or to pretend, afterwards, that her orgasms were "faked") may explain in part men's resentment against women. Men are constantly in the position of emitting signs (erection/detumescence) which they are far from controlling entirely and which are immediately decipherable — even though their ultimate meaning is clear neither to the emitter nor to the receiver⁸ — while the "mysterious" body of the woman does not offer such signs.

Emotional withdrawal of certain men may be explained as the will to detach themselves from the possible meanings of the signs emitted by their bodies. On the other hand, not only do women have the power to "fake", but, since they are excluded from language and power, lying is often their only possible way of expression. Anna's

⁵ Sacher Masoch tries to give some feminist overtones to his pessimistic conclusion (this situation will remain as long as women are not educated to be made the equals of men), but this theoretical sympathy for women's liberation should not conceal the deep misogyny that is at the core of his "philosophy".

⁶ See Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne: *Feminine Sexuality*, edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, translated by Jacqueline Rose, 1982, W.W. Norton & Co., London and New York (simultaneously published in Canada by George J. McLeod Limited, Toronto).

⁷ About faking and female sexuality, see my upcoming *Briseis's Desire*, in *Interim*, Vol. 1 "On Modernity", Willis, Locker & Owens Publishing, New York.

⁸ See Bérénice Reynaud, op. cit. "The question left to the woman when she interrogates the Other may be formulated as: he has a hard-on, but what does he want?"

situation is typical in this respect: faking a suicide is the only way she can get sex, and faking pregnancy the only way she can secure a few months of common life with Armin.⁹ There is, however, a price to pay, and the fantastic "happy end" of Doris Dörrie's pungent fable does not mitigate the darkness of her vision. In contemporary Germany, blue-haired punkish kids who lie and steal children will be handed over to the police, as witches, in the Middle Ages, were brought to the stake.

The Princess

By Pal Erdoss
Hungary (1983)

*JUTKA, THE HEROINE OF PAL Erdoss's film, also fakes motherhood, not to hook up a man, but as a desperate solution to her loneliness. Her story, ironically titled *The Princess*, is the first feature of the Hungarian documentarist, and it awarded him the Grand Prize at the Locarno Film Festival, and the Camera d'Or at Cannes, in 1983.*

In 1972, Erdoss had made *Something Else*, a documentary on the life of young working women in Budapest, and he had conducted interviews with more than 100 women. Years later, he decided to shoot the story of one of them. Jutka (Erika Ozsda), abandoned as a child by her mother, comes to work in a Budapest factory with two girl friends from the same village. After the death of her foster parents, she tries to establish contact with her real mother and sister, and, failing that, has several boy-friends, all as selfish and disappointing. Her best friend becomes pregnant and has a child, but dares not confess the truth when she goes home to visit her parents. Jutka, good-naturedly, pretends to be the mother of the little girl. Later, when her friend has a fling with a new (and married)

⁹ Fake pregnancies, i.e. hysterical pregnancies have played a significant role in the constitution of psychoanalysis as a science, and in particular the discovery of transference phenomena. It is Anna O's hysterical pregnancy which caused the end of her treatment with Breuer (the latter being "horrified" and unable to handle the situation of transference). As Lacan notices, if desire is always the desire of the Other, Anna O's "fake" pregnancy translated nothing else but Breuer's unconscious desire to have a child by her.

lover, and intends to leave the child in an institution, Jutka, who has just broken up a long-term relationship, opposes her violently, and obtains custody of the child. She leaves her working girls hostel and spends all her money to take a room in the apartment of a childless old couple. She recreates an artificial family: an "aunt", an "uncle", an unwed "mother" and her child. But the happiness is short-lived. Jutka's friend reappears with her man who has had a change of heart and now wants the child as well as the mother, and Jutka, powerless, collapses in tears.

The film, shot in grainy black and white, reconstructs the atmosphere of the "cinéma-vérité" of the seventies. Jutka's story parallels that of a famous anti-heroine of the Eastern European cinema of that time — in one scene Jutka is actually watching Milos Forman's *Loves of a Blonde*. In particular, it is the sequence showing the seduction of the title character by the

young pianist who makes fun of her body and her lack of culture ("You are like a Picasso's guitar") while endeavouring to have sex with her.

Graced with Erika Ozsda's sensitive performance, *The Princess*, in spite of its simple story line, explores finely the different levels and the contradictory aspects of Jutka's *difficulté d'être* in industrialized Hungary. The narrative is woven with tender, humorous, quasi-impressionistic touches. Jutka's existential alienation — as an abandoned child, as an inexperienced girl, as an unskilled worker — is rooted in the narrowness of the actual choices that are offered to her. This is why, like so many exploited women, she expects to find the meaning of her life in the discovery of the Other. Her early experiences, however (the rejection by her real mother, the death of her foster parents), made her discover that the Other is always missing, hence her apparent "coolness" in dealing with men, her mixture of toughness and vulner-

ability, her simultaneous desire and refusal to get "involved". It is in her relationship with the child, with the possibility of a fantasmatic symbiosis that it uncovers¹⁰ that she discovers the ultimate Other, that she discovers a place to exist.

Jutka's (lack of) status within the patriarchy does not allow her to decide that she will, like Orin, embody the Law "better than a man"; neither is she conniving enough to use Anna's strategy to secure for herself a place, albeit a false one, within the male structure of power. The melancholy ending of *The Princess* gives the final touch to its heroine's exclusion from the order of things.

Bérénice Reynaud is a film critic, living in New York City.

¹⁰ See Mary Kelly's remarks on the fetishism of the mother in relation to her child in Mary Kelly's *Post Partum Document*, 1983, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley.

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Electronic Valentine A Story about a Storyteller Telling a Story

SHEENA GOURLAY

The Last Screening Room

A Valentine

Videotape by Vera Frenkel
(Distribution information available from
V/Tape, Toronto)

"THIS IS A STORY ABOUT STORY-
telling, about a journey, about the
ministry of culture and a screening
room there. It is also a story about art,
received ideas, propaganda, memory
and exile."

—The narrator¹

This quote from *The Last Screening Room: A Valentine* is a description of the work. It describes the structure, a few of the narrative elements and some of the meanings running through it. However, there are other levels of reading. Vera Frenkel has used a cultural code, storytelling, to explore the nature of storytelling itself. But storytelling also represents other themes including art, romance, myth and desire. These themes are explored by the narrator through the story that she tells. They are also part of the structure of the work, of the way that the narrative has been constructed from fragments of music, text, narrative and images. This structure engages the viewer/listener in the narrative and in the themes that unfold within it.

The Story

The Last Screening Room: A Valentine was premiered in an installation at *A Space* in June of this year. During the tape a complex series of stories unfold — stories of storytellers, a prison, artists, and of the making of "a video valentine". During this presentation there was, at one side and close to the back of the room, a smaller monitor on which a silent tape played.

¹ All quotes are taken from the narrative in *The Last Screening Room: A Valentine*.



Celebrating the ritual decapitation of Saint Valentine

The silent tape was a re-edited version of a tape made by Frenkel in 1981, *Stories from the Front (and the Back)*, *A True Blue Romance*. The tape had been redubbed, leaving out the introduction and credits, and colour-keyed to produce changing blues, grays and sepia, giving it the look of a very old tape, re-dubbed many times. Through this earlier work had run the narrative of an artist (played by Frenkel), her journey to Vancouver, a casino at the Western Front and the stories that were told there.²

The Last Screening Room: A Valentine — the main tape in the installation — is a story told by a woman who worked as a 'Privacy Guarantor' for the Department of Health. She lives at a time when it is illegal to tell stories. This law was passed "because storytellers, unlike public servants, were people who told lies for a living and that travelling so much made them elusive and therefore dangerous."

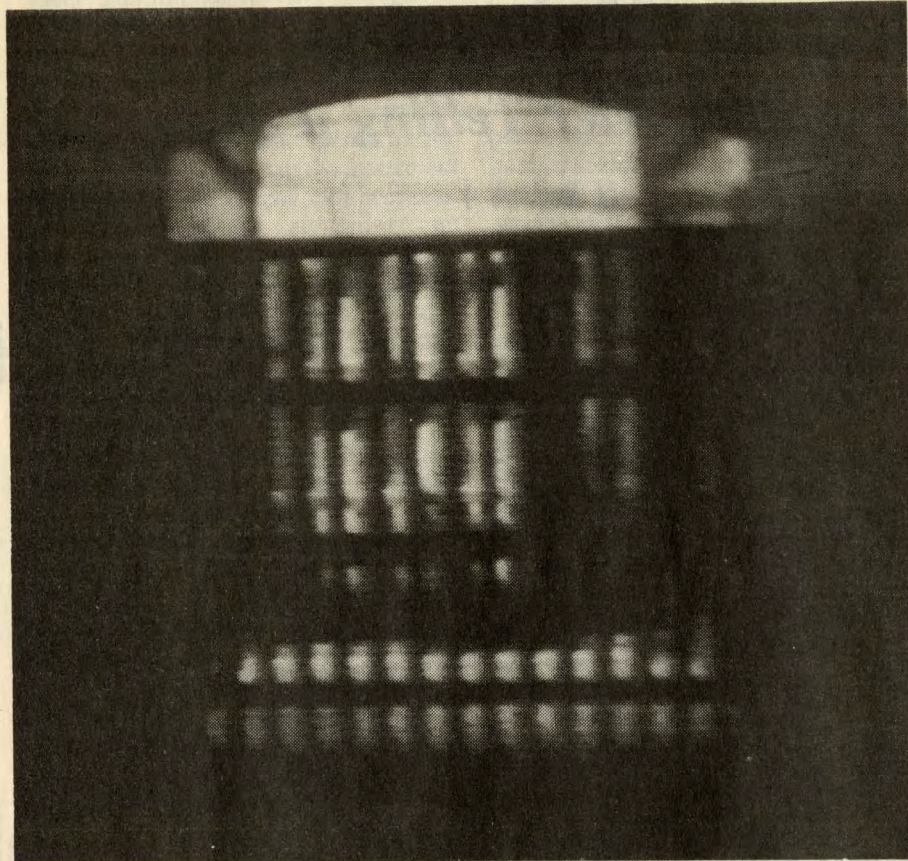
² Adding further to the layering of stories, it is interesting to note that at the end of *Stories from the Front (and the Back)*, *A True Blue Romance*, we are told that what we had just seen was a reconstruction using actors and actresses which had been made in San Francisco after the artist had left Vancouver.

However, as a Privacy Guarantor it was her job to listen to prisoners in the privacy of their cells.

For ten minutes, sometimes twelve, a prisoner could say anything he or she wished knowing it would not be documented. This opportunity for privacy was an official programme of the Ministry of Health, my employer, and was possible because memory was known to be a highly flawed method of capturing data, as unreliable as naked observation really. And so the Privacy Guarantors, there were six in Canada at the time, were never expected to recall what had been said. Nor, in fact, would anyone have believed us if we'd tried.

One day during her regular rounds in the prison she meets a very old woman who had recently been found on the road between Napanee and Bath. The old woman had had no identification but had carried an ancient, inaccurate map. Having a map was a serious offence and she was therefore incarcerated. It was this old woman who persuaded the narrator to break the law, to remember and to recount the story that the old woman tells.

The old woman's story is told over



Sheena Gourlay

Recognizable as an elevator, yet "read" as the prison

several sessions, carefully memorized and later written down. She had at one time worked as a bookkeeper for the Ministry of Culture and, while there, she had surreptitiously acquired access to the screening room and the last twelve videotapes there. One of these, the tape of the last storytellers made before storytelling was outlawed, she had seen over and over again. In order to preserve it she had made a copy, using actors and actresses, on stronger stock. The original, however, had disappeared soon afterwards.

In the middle of the old woman's story is another story, laid out in sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory fragments. It tells of an artist, a journey to Vancouver — to the Western Front — in search of the True Romance. It also tells of how it was long ago when storytelling was not forbidden, and of how this changed when only truth-telling was allowed — when memory and alienation had become crimes.

Many years later the Privacy Guarantor, now working as a promptor for the Canadian Opera Company,

decides that it is time to fulfill her promise and to recount the old woman's story. She decides to tell the story as her first video-valentine. St. Valentine's Day is the only one of the old holidays still left and it exists "to celebrate the ritual decapitation of St. Valentine and the coupling of the birds."

Electronic valentines are uniquely personal documents really. They are not subject to censorship for the first month following production, after which all valentines which have not been erased voluntarily are collected for review. These are either held in a central archive, the same archive as referred to in the prisoner's story, or erased and returned. There is a third alternative. If the annual valentine crosses the boundaries of acceptability, the producer forfeits the right forever to invent romance in this form.

The Structure

The Last Screening Room: A Valentine can be seen either as a single tape or within an installation.³When shown

³This work will be shown as an installation at the Camden Arts Centre, England using the main tape in a reconstructed scene from the tape, in November 1984.

at A Space the screening included the simultaneous presentation of the silent tape (referred to earlier) and was followed by *The Epilogue*. In this context, the silent tape functions as the 'original' tape/story referred to in *The Last Screening Room*. The Screening Room tape is then the story about the many re-recordings of the silent tape. *The Epilogue*, using texts, images and music from the Screening Room tape, is both an evocation of the story and an injunction to remember. When seen as a single tape, *The Last Screening Room: a Valentine* is seen as the Privacy Guarantor's story of the old woman's story about the tape/story of storytellers at the Western Front.

The fact that the Screening Room tape both depicts the storytellers and is about the storytellers on the silent tape is a result of the way that it has been constructed. It is a montage of many different elements — music, images narratives and texts. This is true of nearly all film and video. Within 'realist' film (especially Hollywood film and all those films that stylistically imitate it) film is edited to produce a seemingly seamless whole, hiding the way that it has been constructed. However, *The Last Screening Room* tells us that it is a construction. The narrator says that she reproduced and tried to give a physical form to the old woman's story based on the fragments of it that remain.

The constructedness of the tape is also emphasized by continuous repetitions and overlappings of the images, texts, narratives and music. For example, still photographs alternate or overlap with the drawings traced from them and other images are doubled in the form of split images or as texts overtop of images. The storytellers at the Western Front appear both in the silent tape and in the Screening Room tape (in the form of stills and drawings). This allows the viewer to see the latter as being about as well as containing the tape of the storytellers.

Vera Frenkel has also used other elements which emphasize the fact that the narrative is constructed. She is the narrator throughout the tape, playing the parts of the Privacy Guarantor, the old woman and the artist at the Western Front. These changes in position and modes of address, from first per-

son to third person, alternate and overlap throughout the work.

Quotation is also used. *The Screening Room* contains footage from previous works by Frenkel. There are sections and stills from the silent tape (which was, in turn, a re-editing of an earlier work) and from *The Secret Life of Cornelia Lumsden* (a two part work produced in 1979 and 1980). It also contains music from a variety of traditions — opera, waltz and what sounds like Greek music among others.

Finally, repetitions and overlappings of narratives, music, images and texts produce a doubling of meanings. By means of the juxtaposition of narrative over image, an industrial elevator is perfectly recognizable as an elevator at the same time that it is "read" as the prison. An old, broken statue is both the decapitated figure of St. Valentine and, later, represents the old woman.

A Reading

Romance is a word that means story: True Romance, a term which declares that the story referred to, is a complete and utter invention. True Blue Romance, the best kind of all, was a collective story with many parts, all intertwined, and neither true nor not true, just there for us to consider.

The Last Screening Room: A Valentine is a story about storytelling. It also declares itself to be a true story. The narrator said that she had tried to reproduce the old woman's story faithfully. In turn, the old woman claims that she had re-constructed the tape of the storytellers so that anyone who had not seen the original could not tell the difference. It is this interplay of the ideas of truth and reconstruction that maps out Vera Frenkel's interest in truth and fiction, not as opposites but as two sides of the same coin.

In *The Screening Room* storytelling is also a metaphor for, among other things, romance, art and myth. These themes are inscribed into the story on the level of the narrative itself. Storytellers are referred to as artists and romancers. The stories that they tell operate on the level of myth,

It is in just this way that the most important stories, the greatest romances, stories that

we believe without thinking, are invisible, fluid, shaping us from within, without our knowing.

These stories/myths are understood as the stories that we live by — the way that we represent, and therefore understand, the world and our place within it. This is to say, they are a form of ideology.

Within the tape the theme of desire runs through the narrative as a subtext. At the time that the story is told, storytelling is against the law. Desire, therefore, becomes desire for the forbidden — the desire to remember and recount.

Today, when the issues around sexuality, representation and censorship are hotly debated among various interest groups while, at the same time, the Censor Board of Ontario moves to extend its powers, this story acts as a fable and a warning. But it is a warning couched in a melancholy humour. The narrator tells us that storytelling was outlawed in the same year that they outlawed the rain. Now, she says, they are drafting a law against art.

To see *The Last Screening Room: A Valentine* as a story about storytelling a metaphor and a fable is, in some sense, to see it in relation to the social context in which it exists. Each of these readings points outside the story itself to social meanings and issues (i.e. the function of art, systems of control, etc.) The tape also has a structure that sets up a particular relationship to the viewer. A narrative usually sets up a contradiction which, through a series of events, becomes resolved. There is, however, no final resolution or end point to the Screening Room. Instead, it is a narrative about its own history and making — about the passing on of the story from storyteller to storyteller. We, as viewers, are called upon by the work to take part in the story. It is about a screening room and a videotape seen there. The Privacy Guarantor who is told this story is asked to remember and recount it. As viewers we are also inevitably in a screening room watching a videotape. The texts that appear in the screen and disappear off the bottom edge, the same texts that appear in the epilogue, act as an invocation to remember.

We are called upon by the structure

of the story to take part. Of course, all representations — whether visual or verbal — are necessarily addressed to a viewer/listener who is called upon to 'read' and thus construct meanings from the work presented. In *The Last Screening Room*, the constant juxtapositions, repetitions and overlapping produce, not a single, fixed meaning, but numerous meanings for each fragment and for the work as a whole. The work addresses us as viewer and calls upon us to 'read' the fragments — to make connections between them and to construct meanings — to construct the meaning of the story. We are thus called upon by both the story and the structure of the work to take part in the cycle of the storyteller, listener, storyteller.

The Last Screening Room: A Valentine is a pleasure to watch for the story told, "a story about storytelling, about a journey, about the Ministry of Culture and a screening room there." The narrator tells us this story with a melancholy wit, using the tone of fairy tales and fables. The tape is also finely crafted, holding together the fragments from which it was constructed while acknowledging their separateness. It also constructs pleasure by acknowledging our presence as viewers and by inviting us to take part. It is a story about the listening to, remembering and telling of a story. As viewers/listeners we are therefore part of this process. The tape addresses and invites us to take part by making us conscious of our position as 'reader' and therefore conscious of the process by which meanings are constructed from the fragments presented.

The Last Screening Room: A Valentine is delightful to watch for itself, for the story told. It is also an example of the way that pleasure is structured through a work. Through this construction of pleasure the viewer is engaged in the work and is therefore engaged in the themes and issues contained within the work. These issues are both self-referential, regarding the construction of meaning and pleasure, and refer outside of the work to storytelling, art, desire, state control,...

Sheena Gourlay is a feminist artist and writer currently living in Toronto.

Silenced and Implicated

Colonized Voices in Canadian Kitchens

GRETA HOFMANN NEMIROFF

silenced

By Makeda Silvera
Williams-Wallace Publishers
Toronto, 1983. \$6.95

ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING aspects of feminist research has been the excavation of women's point of view and culture. Over the millennia, women have been well silenced by the Patriarchy in many ways: violence or threats thereof; being systemically and systematically ignored; our words and way of life have not been considered by men to be worthy of conserving and certainly not worth passing on as historical documentation. Now, many feminist scholars are reassessing accounts of society from women's experiences; researchers in the social sciences often solicit first person testimony from specific groups of women under study, with special attention to reproducing their particular voices rather than simply providing accounts of their experiences.

In Canada several important books have relied heavily on such testimony for their material, providing for the readers an accurate sense of how some women see the world. Meg Luxton's *More Than a Labour of Love* (Women's Press) and Pat and Hugh Armstrong's *A Working Majority: What Women must do for Pay* (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women) are both such books, depending on first person testimony to give a true sense of their subjects and also to substantiate the authors' analyses of society and their recommendations for reform.

Makeda Silvera's *silenced* is "a book about the lives and struggles of West Indian women who are employed as

domestic workers on temporary employment visas in Canada." (p. 11) While she certainly recommends specific reformation of their situation, Silvera also sees that providing an opportunity for the women to speak for themselves is a valid project in itself:

These women have never been heard. Usually we know of them through impersonalized cold statistics or through the voices of others who speak for them, or when the media sensationalises their plight and briefly force us to acknowledge, if only temporarily, that they exist...It is not their lack of education and lack of writing skills that have served to silence many of these women. It is rather that their silence is the result of a society which uses power and powerlessness as weapons to exclude non-white and poor people from any real decision-making and participation.

(p. 18-19)

Silvera interviewed ten domestic workers from the West Indies in Toronto, women between the ages of twenty and fifty-four. All but one have children back home, and seven are solely responsible for their children's economic welfare. Only one is married and her husband remains with the children in the Caribbean.

The largest portion of the book is made up of these women's stories, and there are various common themes. Most of the women have come to work in Canada for all or some of the following reasons:

When I first came to this country, I came with three intentions — to help my kids, to

go to school to better myself, and to go to work to save some money. But now that I'm here, I find you can neither save money, go to school, or send for my kids.

(Primrose, p. 100)

The motivation to improve the lot of their children was expressed by many women:

The poverty life was really getting to me, we were getting older and the kids were getting older. I wanted a better life for them. Coming to Canada on vacation [her first look at the country] and seeing how life can be so decent...when I look back home how people living and we can't reach anywhere, I just wanted to leave.

(Angel, p. 47)

I want my children to be able to come up here and get some of the opportunities like other children, especially in the schools...you know, so many children bright and because they don't get the education opportunity, they just don't bother to go to school and they get disinterested in life and end up sad and bitter. I see it happen too many times. I don't want that to happen to my children. I want to be able to be proud of them.

(Savriti, p. 59)

Not only do the women often not reach their objectives for their children by emigrating, they also suffer enormously from having left their children in the hands of others, often not seeing them for their most formative years:

I know a lot of people say that we shouldn't come here and leave our children back

home, but what else can we do? Our children have to eat. You can't talk to some people about things like that because they don't know what it is like to live in one room with seven other people all sleeping in one bed and some on the floor. If I didn't have to, I wouldn't be here. But I couldn't stay home and see my children suffer. At least working here, I can send home money and clothes for them.

(Myrtle, p. 87)

As a college teacher who often has occasion to work with young Caribbean people in Montreal whose mothers have preceded them to this country...often by many years...it has been my observation that these separations are very painful and damaging to the children as well. However, as Myrtle points out, there are very few options.

To compound their misery, often the domestic workers must look after children of white Canadians and are required to give them a quality of care they must withhold from their own children. Evidently this is a care that many affluent white Canadians are unwilling to provide for their children themselves. Often the workers share rooms with babies and must get up to feed them during the night, tasks not significantly different from those *ante bellum* wet nurses in the South, except that in addition to baby-care, they are expected to put in long, back-breaking days of housework. In many cases they suffer on-going sexual harassment (in one case, repeated rape) and daily humiliations imposed by racist "teasing" by the children and their friends; sometimes they find themselves pawns moved around in the complexities of marriage difficulties. Even in the case of considerate employers, it is possible to feel unhappy, alienated and trapped:

Let's face it. They are the white elite and I is Black. So I was treated as know-your-place, you-are-here-to-do-this-and-that's-all-there-is-to-it. But it's hard to tell your self, "I am only here to do this" — domestic work — when really I am living here twenty-four hours a day. I feel as if this is my home...It's not like I come to work for them and then evening I leave to go home. When you are living with them, they make you feel as if you don't belong, and where the devil do you really belong? It's a funny thing to happen to us because it make us feel we don't

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INTERCEDE demonstration demanding 'landed status' for foreign domestics, in front of Immigration offices in Toronto (November 1981)

know if we coming or going.

(Gail, p. 113)

One may ask irately, "Why do they put up with it?" One reason is that there is little work in the Caribbean, and that is poorly paid. Silvera weakens the book by not discussing this. The Caribbean countries, most of which are in the thrall of the World Bank, are among the most wretched victims of capitalist imperialism in the world. The women who come to Canada as domestic workers are doubly jeopardized. They are driven from their homes by the vagaries of capitalist colonialism, and when they arrive in Canada, they are employed *per force* by those people who benefit the most from the system which oppresses them. Indeed, they are often expected to give very positive affective care and companionship to the children and aged of that class. Some of the women met their first employers when the latter were vacationing in the Caribbean; I would have liked to see some attention paid to the effect of tourism as the central industry of the region and

FUSE

the climate of expectation which it creates in both tourist and worker.

When domestic workers come to Canada, they are 'welcomed' only on temporary work visas which can be withdrawn at the discretion of individual Immigration officers. They are permitted to work only as domestics until such time as they achieve landed immigrant status, which is difficult to get. The figure of the Immigration officer looms large in each life story. While there are regulations for the pay and working conditions of domestic workers in this category, very few employers conform to these. If the workers complain about the meagre pay or outrageous working conditions, they might lose their jobs and/or get deported. If they change jobs too often (regardless of the reason), they might be perceived as "trouble-makers" and deported. Like most social victims, these women live in fear of the caprices of individual officers and in the thrall of their often exploitative and dishonest employers, not to speak of the savage nature of the immigration laws themselves:

It's been such a hard struggle with the Immigration. I only hope they don't reject my application. It would be so nice to feel free... Free to go anywhere I want to go. Free to look for any kind of job I want.

(Molly, p. 81)

Isolated in the home, domestic workers are often cut off from information about benefits or rights to which they are entitled. It would seem that their most reliable sources of information and empowerment come from the Black community newspapers and organizations and from their membership in various churches. Most of the women cited church as their only occasion for relief and socialising:

My only relief is when I get a chance to go to church on Sundays where I can cry out loud to the Lord and tell Him my troubles. The church is my only peace, when I go on Sundays I meet other girls who in the same position like me.

(Noreen, p. 27)

On Sunday, I go to church all day. I go at nine o'clock in the morning until twelve, then I go back again at three until ten thirty at night. To tell you the truth I feel happy there. When I am there the Lord makes me forget all my troubles, and the church sisters and brothers are good people, so we pray together and ask the Lord to make my prayer come through.

(Myrtle, p. 88)

Canada has a history of racist immigration laws. There is little altruism in the immigration policies of one of the richest countries in the world. People are admitted if they have something the Canadian establishment deems necessary: investment, specialised skills, or the willingness to do the work Canadians refuse to do:

Canadians have the feeling that we are coming here to rob them, to take away their jobs, yet we are the ones who clean up all their mess, pick up after them. We take the jobs that they wouldn't take and yet they hate us so much.

(Primrose, p. 100)

The portrait of Canada drawn by these ten women is a strong indictment, and one that all who still have hopes for a better society should take firmly to heart.

For those stout-hearted, Makeda Silvera suggests various routes: pressuring the state (federal and provincial) for better laws; unionization of domestic workers; publicization of their plight. She provides a rather incomplete list of advocacy organizations that aid immigrant workers. I especially smart over the exclusion of Québec's excellent Au Bas de l'Échelle (Rank and File).

My one criticism of the book is its somewhat cursory analysis of the situation. Although Silvera gives some interesting background information on immigrant domestic workers in Canada, identifies the main problems assailing domestic workers who want to organize themselves, and touches on the current discussion regarding women's private and public spheres, she does not really deal with the issue of power which she raised in her introduction or with the economy of indentured labour. She does, however, raise an important question: "Is there any reason to think these women will take steps on their own behalf?" I hope that they will, but it is also clear by their own words that they are not out to reform Canada, but to fulfill their hopes for their families within the *status quo*:

When I get my landed...I'm going to rent a little bachelor apartment and really fix it up nice. Then I want to save the rest of my money to pay for my grandchildren's high school education.

(Noreen, p. 30)

I just hope everything work out fine, and I get the landed and my family get to come up. I want to start living like a normal person with my family.

(Molly, p. 81)

This country has been so savage to these women that one can hardly expect them to be concerned about its welfare. On the other hand, after all the struggle, some of them express fear at bringing their children here:

Now the way things is I scared to make plans. Is like there is always disappointments following you...I don't know if I want my children to come up here...it's so many problems.

(Irma, p. 97)

Canada was created by immigrants who have historically been better to it than it deserved, often over-assimilating to their own peril, especially in times of crisis — for example the Jews* and Japanese** during World War II, who ironically found themselves on "opposite sides" of racist government policies.

If this country were to gain these women as citizens, their energy and ability to manage their lives under extreme adversity would in itself be a major contribution of life skills to a sated nation in pursuit of gadgets and "good times".

One finishes *silenced* in wonder at the tenacity and courage of these lonely exploited women. Makeda Silvera has presented them to us with passion and respect. Her articulated hope for the book is that "the lives and struggles of these women will provide other domestic workers with a sense of power and a sense of their own history," and that it "will serve...as a point of identity for all women who have been silenced." I too hope that this book will reach and give courage to domestic workers to organize and struggle for their rights. Since all women have experienced "silencing" in one form or another in our lives, I hope that the female general public, exploiters and exploited, will read this book, engage with it actively, and ask ourselves the courageous questions the book demands: "How am I implicated and what can I do?"

* Attempts of Canadian Jews to provide asylum to the deported and fleeing Jews of Nazi Europe were consistently blocked by anti-semitic Immigration policies. For documentation of this see *None are Too Many* by Abella and Troper (Lester, Orpen and Dennys, Toronto 1982) — reviewed in FUSE, Vol. 5, No. 5, p. 289.

** Thousands of Japanese Canadians were dispossessed and forced into internment camps during World War II, as "enemy aliens"

Greta Hofmann Nemiroff is a feminist writer, speaker, and educator and Director of the New School of Dawson College in Montreal.

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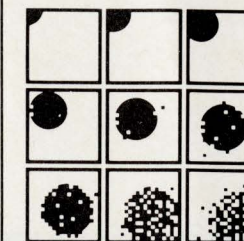
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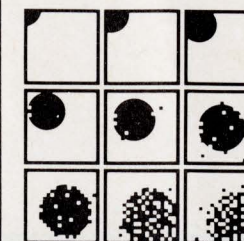
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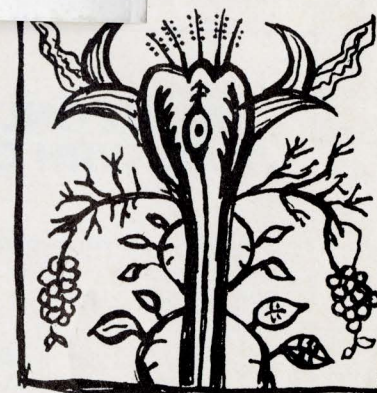
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