

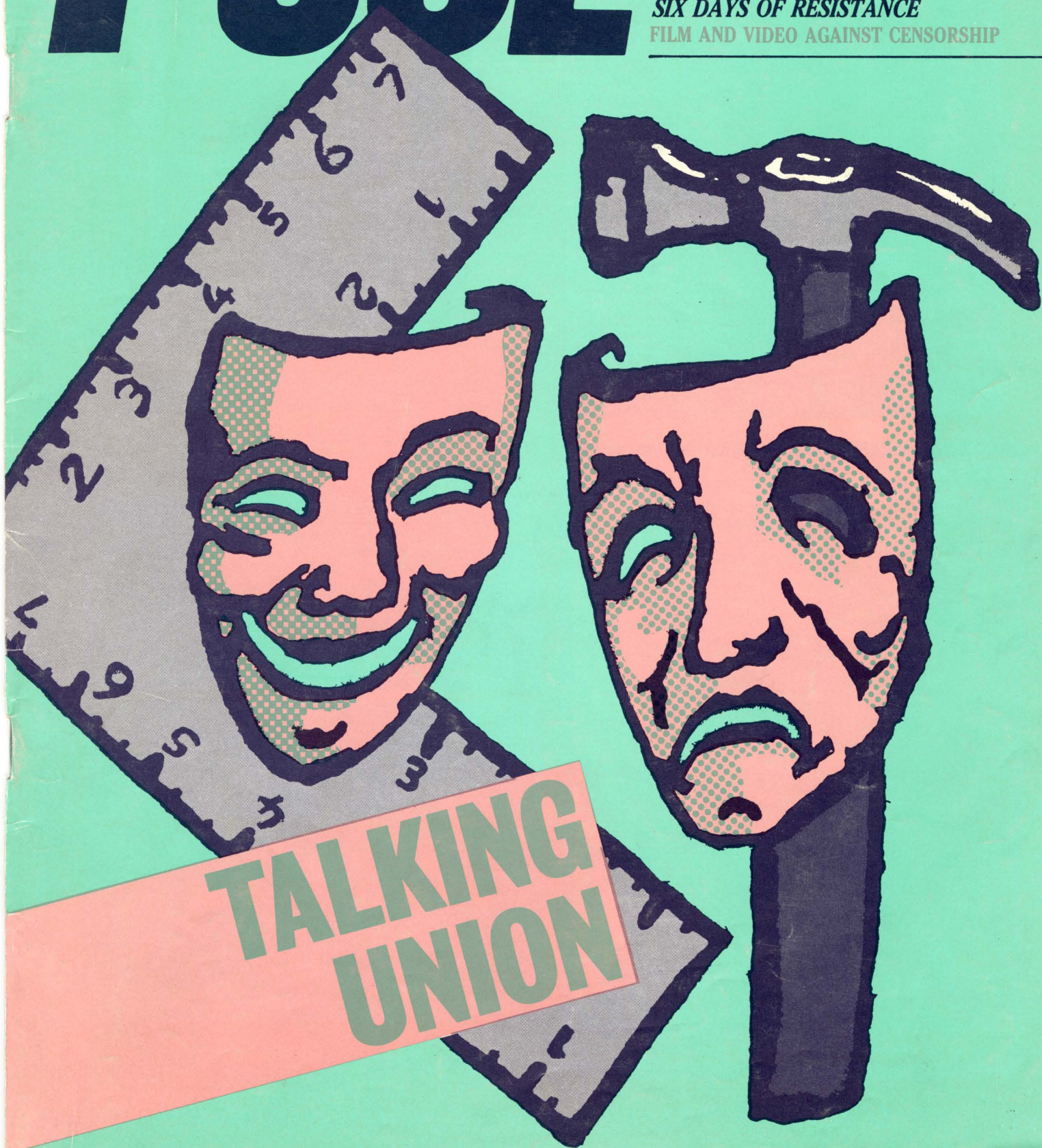
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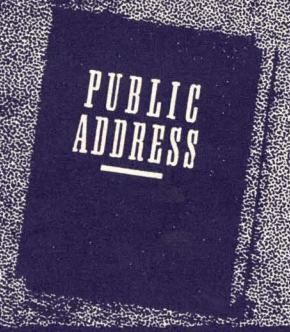
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ARTEXTE

Cover: Artwork, Concept & Design by Richard Peachey
& Chris Reed; filmwork by Montecolour.

Annoying Speculations

AS ONE OF THE ORGANIZERS OF The Canadian Women's Music Festival, "Our Time Is Now," I am responding to Didi Herman's article in the Feb/March issue of *Fuse*.

I was annoyed that Ms. Herman speculated on the reasons behind the decisions and incidents when she could have talked to the organizers and reported what really had happened. Also I think her repeated use of 'one', instead of 'I', to present her "criticisms and cynicisms" (as she called them) lends a false generality to her opinions.

Ms. Herman stressed three problems: the presence of men in the audience, "lesbian invisibility", and, the festival "to a large extent, did not reflect the diversity of individual women's culture and experience that we are still missing."

1) the presence of men in the audience:

Ms. Herman conjectured that the festival organizers may have been influenced by dependence on government sponsorship. She wrote that it was "difficult to draw any clear conclusions"; a difficulty she could have avoided by getting the background information. She assumed, incorrectly, that we did not consider that many women would welcome access to women-only space.

The facts are that to finance the festival with ticket sales alone, we would have had to more than quadruple the ticket price, and, that we would not have received the funding we did unless the festival was open to the public. Further, the "presence of men" is not a "problem" related to "putting together a festival like this for the first time." It is one of the many controversial policy decisions that organizers have to make, in which dissatisfaction of some proportion of the audience is inherent.

2) "lesbian invisibility":

Ms. Herman stated: "Throughout this weekend one had the sense that there was a 'please keep it in the closet' feeling in the air..." Although she believes that the decision of a lesbian performer not to come out publicly should be respected, she nevertheless found it disquieting that only one lesbian performer chose to do so.

Ms. Herman went on to make two points in her argument about "lesbian invisibility" and concluded that "one began to think it was deliberate". The first point was that a group of lesbians who set up a 'lesbian circle', received "little encouragement from some festival organizers". To my knowledge, I was the only organizer contacted by a representative of these women, and that wasn't until the night before the festival. When she phoned and asked if I would attend the circle, I told her it would be impossible for me to attend something that was to take place during the festival.

Ms. Herman's second point, to back up her contention of deliberate lesbian invisibility was that "unidentified persons" tore down posters publicising the lesbian circle. These "persons" were the park police, a fact Ms. Herman could easily have found out.

She continued her speculation: "The situation (of lesbian invisibility) may have been due to either a need to maintain an aura of 'respectability' around the festival and/or to some organizers' homophobia." I question that lesbians were "invisible" and "obvious excluded"; if so, why did the park office receive verbal and written complaints from people who were upset by the open display of affection between women; why were some people made angry enough, by lesbian *visibility*, to write letters to the editors of Winnipeg's daily newspapers; why did many lesbians express to us how great it had been for them to be able to be open as lesbians, specifically at a public event?

As for Ms. Herman's suggestion of "some organizers' homophobia": I'm a 'known' lesbian who worked on the festival with other women, heterosexual and lesbian, and her facile and unfounded comment made my blood boil.

3) the festival "to a large extent, did not reflect the diversity of individual women's culture and experiences that we are still missing":

When I got out a festival programme book, I was again struck by the diversity of women who performed there — in cultural backgrounds, regions of Canada they represented, and musical styles — they were immigrants and Native Canadians, poets, songwriters, story tellers, dancers, political ac-

tivists, outraged and outrageous, women with roots, transient women, old, young, newcomers, and seasoned performers.

It is not clear to me what Ms. Herman meant when she wrote that "women from many different cultural backgrounds were not represented at all". Many? At all? Also, while it is true that "a large majority of the performers were white", I don't think that this, in itself, is a fair criticism of the line up of women who performed at 'Our Time Is Now'. Take the evening of concerts for example: of the 13 acts, 4 were women of colour — Lillian Allen, Four the Moment, Beverly Glenn-Copeland, Innuit Throat Singers; 2 were francophone — Marie-Claire Seguin, Marie-Lynn Hammond; and the remaining 7 acts included Rita MacNeil from Cape Breton Island, Ilena Zarumba from Winnipeg, Nancy White from Toronto, Ezzell, a dancer from Victoria, Connie Kaldor from Vancouver, Heather Bishop from Woodmore, Manitoba, and The Pillow Sisters (from The Parachute Club) from Toronto.

Ms. Herman stated that "there were very few francophone women invited". Again, she was speculating; she never inquired about how many francophone performers were invited. For various reasons, several francophone women were unable to come to the festival. This is true also of other performers we tried to book.

Yes, "many serious issues, including racism, while being an integral part of some of the performers own work, were not organized into workshop formats". So what? One of the reasons for selecting these performers was that "serious issues" are an integral part of their work, and the innocuous (as Ms. Herman called them) workshop titles did not, in intent or fact, preclude performers singing political songs.

Ms. Herman said: "there certainly is a great deal for the organizers, festival workers, and performers to be proud of." Her article did not leave me feeling proud, it left me feeling discouraged and maligned. I think articles like this, not festivals like 'Our Time Is Now', are, as she puts it, "a serious blow to feminist cultural events."

—Joan Miller
Woodmore, Manitoba
SUMMER 1985

The Unsung Trend: DUMPIES

Downwardly (Urban) Mobile People In Eighties Society

JOYCE MASON

THE EDITORIAL FORMAT IS A difficult one. Its requirements and history in *FUSE* usually lead to tonal expectations along the lines of outrage, anger or disdain. (There is, after all, lots to be angry about.) But what about all the things for which such a tone just doesn't make it and the times when we don't have the kind of energy necessary for an angry outburst? What about the mundane and the ironic? No matter what the subject or the style, when framed by the editorial format such subtleties always seem, to me, to disappear into the expectation of griping. But it is sometimes the less global gripe which allows us to roll our eyeballs and laugh.

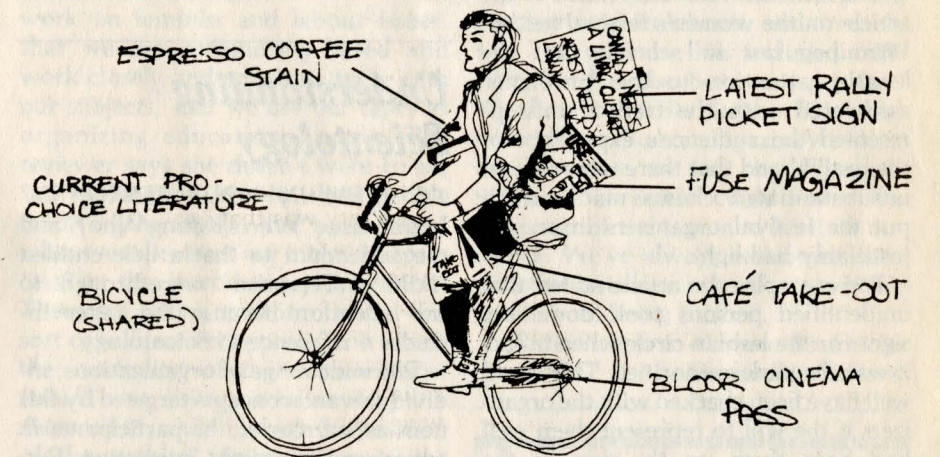
For example, a lot of the people that I know have been complaining lately about the preponderance of articles about "YUPPIES" in the daily presses, on television, etc. Lifestyle and political columns (which are often largely indistinguishable) tell us more than we ever wanted to know about these "Young Urban Professionals".

"YUPPIES" is a media-friendly term that has been used in the revamping of an earlier media-political force, the YIPPIES. The implication is that this is what has become of sixties radicalism. The term 'completes' news stories of the sixties and early seventies by absorbing them into the mythology of "youthful radicalism = mature conservatism" with the attendant assumptions/presumptions that oppositional movements are mere trends.

But little has been written yet about another and, undoubtedly larger, North American phenomenon — the DUMPIES. And so, in the interests of full representation, I will offer here a brief profile.

DUMPIES are not necessarily X-Yuppies, (although, to be honest, YUPPIES aren't either). DUMPIES may or may not, in fact, be politically active. Their primary characteristics are those which are easily identifiable from the most cursory interpretation of the acronym.

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N. HUBERT

- They live in cities (and are therefore URBAN).

- Their average yearly income is unlikely to have appreciated by very much over the years — thus accounting for their 'DOWNWARD MOBILITY'.

- They are PEOPLE; animals are not included in the category. These people can be 'professionals'; but this is not a necessary criteria. They may be artists, typists, legal aid lawyers, poets, bank tellers, teachers, waitresses, gas station attendants, day care workers, or civil servants. They may be unemployed.

- They live IN the EIGHTIES, but they can imagine better times.

- They can also imagine better SOCIETIES.

But any profile of a phenomenon worth its journalistic salt truly requires some lifestyle generalisations, and my preliminary survey unearthed the following:

Possessions: most rent their accommodation and own a bicycle. If they drive a car, it's usually over five years old. If they have a job they spend a considerable portion of their income in restaurants, claiming to be overworked and having little energy for shopping and cooking.

FUSE

Social Activities: anti-nuke, or US Out of Central America demonstrations Pro-Choice rallies, benefit dances and house parties. They like good food and coffee. Many spend a lot of their disposable time and income on alcohol and politics.

Skills/Ideas: They are, mostly, literate. They think that the Americans should leave Nicaragua alone. That the South African government should be dismantled. That women deserve to be paid on a par with men. That people who drive Mercedes are probably corrupt.

Aspirations: a better world. No racism, no sexism, no imperialism. They wouldn't mind keeping pace (financially speaking) with inflation but they don't want it to come out of the hides of those with even less money than they have. They don't want cuts in foreign aid spending or in unemployment, welfare or pension benefits.

Entertainment: Watching German films, complaining about *The Journal* and Ben Gordon on late night CBC.

Seen any lately? Watch for them, they're coming soon to a community near you.

Joyce Mason

Misrepresented Experience

I FEEL BADLY THAT IT IS ONLY when I have a criticism that I get around to writing! I really appreciate that you are around to keep me in touch with the cultural scene now that I live in Regina. Your magazine is excellent and your attention to women's contribution to culture is laudable.

The criticism I have is related to the article on the women's festival held in Winnipeg last fall. I felt that the lengthy attention to the 'problems' associated with the festival misrepresented the audience's experience of the festival and that there were several unsubstantiated claims made which put the festival organizers in an unjustifiably bad light.

For example, the article stated that unidentified persons took down the signs for the lesbian circle when in fact it was the park authorities. This could well have been checked with the organizers if the will to represent them well had been there on the part of the author.

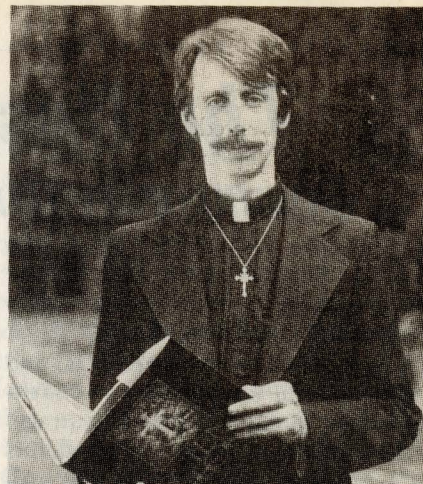
As for the issue of lesbian invisibility, as a lesbian who worked for the festival (as the sound mixer), I felt that rather than invisible, we were integrated in a positive sense. As such I felt the festival more closely approximated the goal of including the diversity and creativity of all women (as noted in Susan Sturman's article of that same issue), than have any of the American festivals I have worked at.

—Nancy Poole
Regina, Saskatchewan

Understanding Scientology

AN ITEM IN YOUR FEBRUARY/March issue "Who's Killing Who?" and the addendum to that article entitled "ABC of Terrorism" were brought to my attention because the latter includes a reference to Scientology.

The wide range of organizations, individuals and concepts targeted by this item as sources of, or participants in terrorism is certainly interesting. Perhaps the writer has Scientology confus-



from the Archives: A Scientologist

ed with some other religion or practice?

The Aims of Scientology are "A civilization without insanity, without criminals and without war, where the able can prosper and honest beings can have rights, and where Man is free to rise to greater heights...". If this (and our ability to achieve these aims!) strikes terror in the hearts of your writers — or readers — I would suggest that there is a misunderstanding of considerable magnitude and I trust that you will print this letter in your next issue to

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rebut the offhand inclusion of our organization in such an article.

The Church of Scientology has over the years documented and exposed instances of open air biological warfare testing in major cities in the United States, of CIA and FBI crimes against the citizens of their country and others. While these crimes may be frightening, pretending they do not exist or knowing they exist and doing nothing to stop them would invite much more fearful consequences for humanity.

Your writers state that International Terrorism is not "the CIA, the FBI, ...Interpol" or the Ku Klux Klan. It would seem that they have redefined the words to mean something else in an effort to gain some measure of public agreement for their opinion.

Scientology is a study of knowledge, aimed at application which can and does improve the conditions in the world. Our goals are global sanity and freedom. To paint us otherwise is misrepresentation.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond. Any questions your readers may have on the subject of Scientology can be directed to my office. Thank you.

Shauna Pratt
Public Relations Director
Church of Scientology
Vancouver, B.C.

Feeling Trashed

WE ARE WRITING IN RESPONSE to the review of our videotape, *Stronger Than Before* by Elizabeth Schroeder (*Fuse*, Spring '85), because we feel compelled to correct the manner in which it misrepresents our work.

We are feminists working in social documentary, for whom there exist few opportunities for a progressive review. In Canada, only two publications, *VideoGuide* and *Fuse* regularly print such reviews, which are usually characterized by their attention to context, to the conditions within which the work was made, as well as to the work itself. As such, they differ from mainstream critical writing and are influenced by feminism and the left in their use of constructive criticism which maintains solidarity with the politics of the work and which tries to break down the traditional authority

of the critic by giving voice to the producer. Such writing helps video producers, who work under severe economic and energy constraints, both to promote their own work, and to build a language of discourse. Therefore we are astonished and disappointed at Schroeder's review, both for its lack of solidarity, and its many inaccuracies.

The lack of context given our tape makes for a rather one-dimensional critique. It is never mentioned what Emma Productions does: that we do work on feminist and labour issues, that we are community-based and work closely and collaboratively with our subjects, that we use our tapes as organizing/educational tools. The reviewer says she doesn't want to see "an explanation of why these people made it [the tape]", and so "cringes" when we talk about our intent and process in the introductory narration. There is a strong tradition behind this sort of (subjective) approach, in which the 'neutrality' of the documentarist (which was always a lie anyways) is disposed of, and in which the position of the author, the presence of the cameraperson, are felt from the beginning. Third world filmmakers have been doing it for years; feminist cultural work, in its linking of personal with political, was built on the subjective approach.

It's unfortunate — and somewhat of an oversight, given that we are colleagues — that Schroeder never talked to us about the tape. Had she done so, the review might not have contained the following inaccuracies:

1) "No working class women were interviewed [in the tape]". On the contrary, our interviewees came from a variety of backgrounds, including working class. All but two live below the poverty line. One spent 15 years as a sole support mother on mothers' assistance.

2) "There is little in the tape which deals with global struggle". A major portion of the tape is devoted to linking local and third world issues. Militarism and imperialism in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras (in which Litton Systems maintains a military base), and the Philippines, are discussed. One of the interviewee's is Filipino, another is Spanish; another lived in Africa for several years — all talk about how this influences their activism. We made this tape specifically to make these connections, not to

depict activism in Toronto. While we realize now that our emphasis could have been clearer, it is very odd that Schroeder missed these connections entirely.

3) "*Stronger Than Before* ends, as it began, with historical stills..." There are no historical stills at the end. A minor point, perhaps, but at this point we're wondering if the reviewer really looked at the tape.

Since its premiere, *Stronger Than Before* has been shown to women's and peace groups, in schools, and on cable t.v. The response has included criticism, but has also been very positive. We hate to write letters like this, especially to *Fuse*, a magazine we like a lot. However we feel that Elizabeth Schroeder's review could harm the reception of the tape and limit its audience. We've always welcomed constructive criticism, but we've never felt good about being trashed.

Ruth Bishop & Marusia Bociurkiw
Emma Productions

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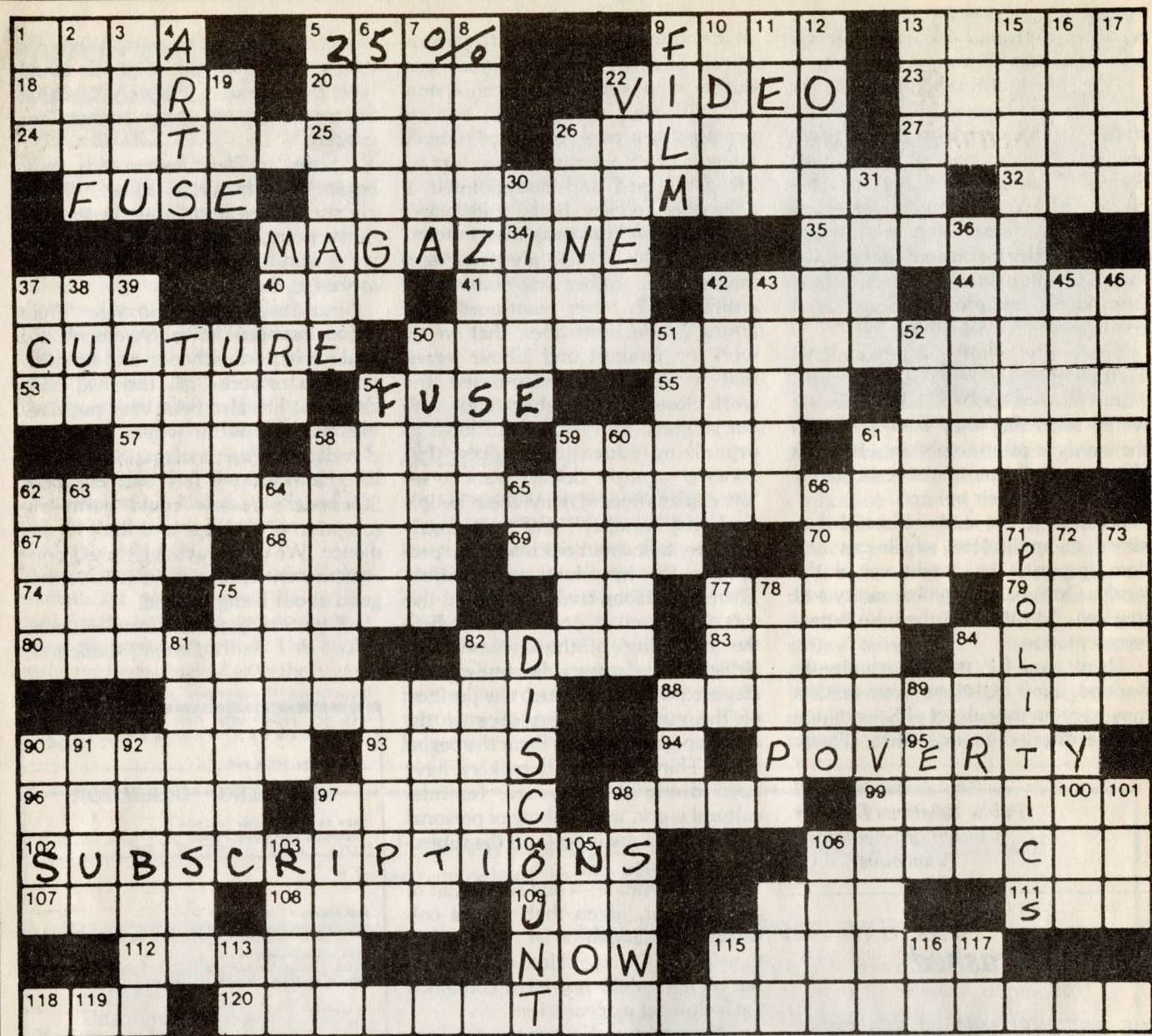
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REPORTS

Selective Exclusion Removing Publications from the Schools

IN MID-MARCH, MAUREEN Hemphill, Manitoba Minister of Education, ordered the removal of copies of Winnipeg-based arts publication, *Midcontinental* from school libraries in the province. The directive was issued as a direct response to charges in the House by the Opposition, on March 15 and again on March 18, 1985, that the NDP was using taxpayers' money to publish "pornography" and distribute it in the schools. The charges were made by Clayton Manness (PC—Morris) and were echoed by Russell Doern (Independent—Elmwood). While the attack was undoubtedly politically motivated, the controversy that ensued also made evident the lack of coordination between Manitoba Education and Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation. A letter sent out by the Department of Culture, Heritage and Recreation on January 4, 1985 suggested that all periodicals eligible under the government subsidized school and public library subscription programme had been approved by Manitoba Education. This was not the case.

Hemphill stated in the House and in the media that *Midcontinental* had not been approved by Manitoba Education and should never have been offered to school libraries under the programme sponsored by Manitoba Culture, Heritage, and Recreation, and that she therefore was quite within her rights as Minister of Education in directing that *Midcontinental* be removed from school libraries. But the conflicting accounts given in the House by the respective Ministers served to further increase the confusion and to fuel the controversy. It is a moot point whether copies of *Midcontinental* ever reached the schools. A random survey suggested that they probably had not.

In a twelve-page letter to the Minister of Education, Mrs. Linda McIntosh, chairperson of the St. James-Assiniboia School Board and current President of the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, called for the removal of the feminist magazine, *Herizons* from the list of approved titles for schools. Copies of Mrs. McIntosh's letter were

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sent to all school boards in Manitoba. On April 2, 1985 seven members of the St. James-Assiniboia School Board voted unanimously to have *Herizons* removed from the school division's libraries. It is worth noting here that the decision was made by seven women (the two men on the Board were absent and hence did not vote) about a publication that deals with women's issues.

In this case, Hemphill refused to withdraw *Herizons* from the schools, leaving the decision to retain or cancel the title to school trustees and school librarians. She contended that selections of periodicals for school libraries rested properly with the local school boards and the school librarians since Manitoba Education has not approved periodicals for schools since 1979. Both the President of the Manitoba Association of School Trustees and the President of the Manitoba Library Association, adopted a similar position in their letters to the Minister of Education.



The devolution of decision making to local school boards and school librarians is, at best, a tactical move designed to take the heat off Manitoba Education and the provincial government and to preclude any attempt by the Conservative Opposition or others to move towards centralized selection or pre-approved lists for all materials intended for school libraries in Manitoba. This tactic does not really solve the problem, but rather shifts it to the local boards, where other factors come into play.

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The behaviour of the St. James-Assiniboia school trustees suggests that school trustees cannot always be relied upon to ensure that opposing views are presented in school libraries, and it may be disputed whether the school trustees accurately reflect community standards. The problem is compounded by the fact that the staffing of school libraries varies considerably in Manitoba. School libraries include not only teacher librarians who are professionally qualified both as teachers and as librarians, but also library technicians and others of varying qualifications and backgrounds who manage school libraries. The majority of teacher librarians are concentrated in Winnipeg and Brandon. They are members of the Manitoba Teachers Society, which affords them some protection in situations of this kind. Library technicians are not eligible to belong to the Manitoba Teachers Society and hence are not afforded the same protection.

These recent events should serve to alert the people of Manitoba and especially various arts groups in Winnipeg to the very real danger of censorship. The controversy has brought into the light some of those elements of the population that are only too willing and ready to censor or ban. The Minister's decision regarding *Midcontinental* was clearly within her rights as Minister of Education in the Province of Manitoba. It is reassuring that she stopped at *Midcontinental* and did not proceed to withdraw *Herizons* as well.



novation and change in every aspect of Black life, giving rise to Black english, rapping, jiving, the blues, jazz. But are these developments, or as I prefer to term them, New World revelations of more traditional practices, so fused to the matrix that birthed them in this part of the world, that we can only recognize or acknowledge them in such an environment — the ghetto of *Good Times*, the junk yard of *Sanford and Son* — or is it that we as yet have no pattern, no image of what Blackness in another environment is all about? Is that discernible quality or qualities of Blackness so fragile that it cannot be transported into another environment?

Here's what Robert Farris Thompson, author of *Flash of the Spirit*, writes about the transportation of 'coolness' from Yoruba land to the New World:

Coolness, then, is a part of character...To the degree that we live generously and discreetly, exhibiting grace under pressure, our appearance and our acts gradually assume virtual royal power...The Yoruba remain the Yoruba precisely because their culture provides them with ample philosophic means for comprehending and ultimately transcending, the powers that periodically threaten to dissolve them. That their religion and their art withstood the horrors of the Middle Passage and firmly established themselves in the Americas (New York City, Miami, Havana, Matanzas, Recife, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro) as the slave trade effected a Yoruba diaspora — reflect the triumph of an inexorable will.

After the Middle Passage, jumping class and maintaining one's cool should be a cinch. After all, a Jew does not necessarily become less Jewish by virtue of the fact that s/he is wealthy, nor does the Chinese or Japanese person, so why should it become an issue for the Black person?

But having said this, back to the Huxtables and *The Cosby Show* which is, at times, exquisitely funny. The incidents, events, happenings around which the show revolve are those which any family (read middle class or upper class) could identify with — fights between siblings; clashes between parents and children; children not living up to parental expectations, as when the third daughter, Vanessa, wants to quit the clarinet after her parents have just bought her an expensive instrument; or Clair Huxtable

wanting to have a sixth child. Working class parents and children may find some things to identify with, but there is much more here for the middle or upper class family. More than these however certain things are never mentioned.

The best kept secret on *The Cosby Show* is race. Of the many shows I watched, there was one that contained a reference to Spellman College which I happen to know is a Black College. Cliff Huxtable wants his second daughter to attend Spellman; like her sister, she wants to attend an Ivy League university. Cliff Huxtable urges her to choose Spellman, because attendance there has been a family tradition. At no time is it mentioned that Spellman is a Black college, and that the tradition of which he speaks has validity and force for this very reason.

In another episode, Cliff Huxtable is about to receive an award from his hospital; the chief of staff mentions in his speech that his hospital has always had a policy of hiring minorities as a result of which Dr. Huxtable was hired.

During his many speeches to his children urging them to do better and be more responsible, Cliff Huxtable never refers to the issue of race; never alludes to his or his wife's achievement against what must have been many odds to get to their present positions, or that despite their wealth they still need to work harder to 'make it'. Around issues of race all is silent on *The Cosby Show*.

It could possibly be argued that Cosby has succeeded in transcending the narrow issue of race, to arrive at certain 'universals', but at what price — silence, in exchange for acceptance. Cliff and Clair Huxtable and their family have been made as middle-American as possible, and after all, a middle-American would not have problems with race. Caryn Sneider, one of the show's producers, put it this way:

Indeed Mr. Cosby's goal is to transcend questions of race, to concentrate on family life per se. It's not race at times part of family life? He doesn't ignore the family's blackness, but he doesn't make a statement about it either. Rather the black experience surfaces in subtle ways — references to the author Richard Wright and Howard University, and paintings by Varnette Honey-

wood, a black artist, on the wall of the Huxtable living room.

The New York Times
November 1984

Why does "family life" mean the exclusion of race or racial issues, and why does the mention of Richard Wright or possession of paintings by a black artist qualify as the black experience? Might not a white person mention Richard Wright, or possess Varnette Honeywood paintings? Are we to believe (as I am sure we are) that in Reagan's America of the Eighties, a family such as the Huxtables does not come across, confront or become involved in any issue related to race — even positively? Money is a cushion; but I suggest that it does have its limits, even for the Huxtables, and the luxury of being able to ignore race completely, as is done on *The Cosby Show*, is a luxury that only affluent Whites can afford. I say affluent because poorer Whites often (and mistakenly) see themselves in competition with Blacks for scarce resources such as jobs or housing, and for them race is an issue — Archie Bunker being an extreme cultural example of this attitude. I do not suggest that affluent Whites are not racist, or that they are less racist than working class Whites — quite the contrary — what I suggest that their money allows them to be more insulated from such issues.

It is in this sense and this sense only that the Huxtables do present as Whites in black face: the premise of the show is that if one has enough money, issues of race and racism cease to matter, and in a Black family like the Huxtables this incongruity is disturbing. For the subtle 'surfacing' of the Black experience (referred to by Caryn Sneider in the quote above), I suggest we read 'white out' or 'black out', whichever is more appropriate.

Despite this studied subtlety however, there are a few clues to the Blackness of this family: their talk — the rhythms, pacing and diction reflect the Black idiom — somewhat; the body language of Cosby/Cliff and his son Theo are undeniably Black (The women and girls are all, in their appearance, very much Black versions of white America with straightened hair and pencil thin bodies. The youngest girl, five year old Rudy, is allowed to have natural hair.) and,

courtesy CFTO-TV



Would you buy a used dream from this man?

there is the odd episode such as when the children, parents and two guests of their parents roll back the carpet and spontaneously dance — the younger generation exhibiting their breakdancing skills, the older people showing off their Thirties routines. It is difficult to imagine a scene such as this working as well for an all White cast.

But were a Martian or other alien to land on earth in 1985, and were s/he to happen to see *The Cosby Show* and the amazing Huxtables, could s/he or it be convinced that in Reagan's America at present the unemployment rate for Blacks is twice what it is for Whites, and for Black men over twenty, three times the rate of White males; that affirmative action programs have been dismantled; that the poor, the aged and minorities are under attack by the present U.S. administration?

Bearing this in mind, is it coincidence that at this time a show such as *The Cosby Show* has finally managed

to make it to prime time television? *The Cosby Show* is funny and at times extremely entertaining; presentation of Black images that present some alternative to the stereotypical ghetto environment has long been overdue; Cliff, Clair, and all the little (and not so little) Huxtables do present somewhat healthier role models for Black youth, but surely part of being a role model must include some reference to and acknowledgement of the fact that the Black reality often means facing greater odds in almost every endeavour.

This show must not and cannot be viewed as many would have us view it — an advertisement for the fact that 'Blacks can do it too'; and for me enjoyment of the show was marred by the fact that it is an advertisement for the American dream — in black face. *The Cosby Show* must be placed in its context — in a country which has voted to re-elect Ronald Reagan, whose policies have, with the assent of large segments

of its populace, moved to the right, and where race still matters a great deal.

One danger that must be addressed is that of placing a greater moral responsibility, in this instance, on Blacks, but in general on all oppressed groups. The idea usually expressed in statements like "Blacks have so much to teach us", results in our higher expectations of them, and our being therefore much harsher in our criticisms when they fail to correspond to those expectations. But oppression of a people is no guarantee that they will act differently from their oppressors when they achieve power. Often the contrary is the case, and without conscious analysis or re-education, we can only hope that experience will have sensitized them sufficiently to act differently.

Unlike Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy, both of whom use race and racial issues in their humour, Cosby has never done so, although there has never been any doubt that he was a Black comedian. His humour has always steered clear of race and, to be fair to him, his show remains faithful to that approach. I do think, however, that a comedian of his skill could very easily incorporate references to racial issues without offending his middle-American audiences.

And what about the Huxtables? Well, the Huxtables have made the American dream a living reality — especially for Blacks — See, anyone can do it — even Black folk — if they just try hard enough and forget about race. (Mind you, there is never any indication that the Huxtable parents ever had to work hard to achieve their successes.)

I have always been leery of being critical of American Blacks for wanting the American dream — after all if everyone is entitled to two cars in the garage, a coloured T.V. set, a VCR (the list keeps getting longer), why not Blacks? Let us not, however, forget the cost of that dream to the rest of the world, not to mention the poor, the black and brown of America. As much as they are entitled to that dream — the Huxtables, the White and Black Huxtables of America, we are entitled to struggle to replace it with a more equitable one.

The American dream is dead! Long live the American dream!

Marlene Philip

The great industrial and fine art exhibitions of the mid 19th century exalted the products of individual genius and reminded the masses of the fecundity of western civilization. After W.W. I, "blockbuster" culture shows received some refinements which allowed the jingoistic conflation of cultural products with the 'progressive' ideologies of a nation state. Disguised as 'cultural exchange', 'international relations' or 'diplomacy', International Expositions, Great Travelling Exhibitions and World's Fairs encouraged those nations participating, or rather competing, to take every opportunity to present their expertise and cultural vitality and, above all, to display their 'independence' and *power* as sovereign states.

Since W.W. II, the U.S. has played a leading role in projecting its economic and military power around the world and culture has played its part in legitimating, in 'humanistic' terms, the exploitative and expansionary tendencies of large corporations. In the early fifties U.S. culture was marketed with the same kind of entrepreneurial aggressiveness usually associated with automobiles and other industrial products. The corporate model is now the preferred one for those seeking to exercise the authority of one nation's culture in another nation's institutions and chauvinism is a pre-requisite to the formation of cultural hegemony.

The European Iceberg: Creativity in Germany and Italy Today which was installed at the Art Gallery of Ontario from February 8th through April 7th of this year is part of this tradition of the blockbuster show. Curated by Germano Celant, the show cost, at last estimate, over \$600,000. It included the work of 40 visual artists, 8 architects and 16 designers and filled 70% of the gallery space.

There was considerable publicity and press coverage (in both the dailies and the art presses of the country) and yet many members of Toronto's cultural community steered clear of the Iceberg — demonstrating that European attempts to counter the cultural dominance of the U.S. cannot gain endorsement, much less succeed, if they exhibit the same tendencies as the dominion they attempt to usurp. Nationalism was not the only chauvinism exhibited in the Iceberg. Of all those artists whose work was included, only three were women.

In this article Bruce Barber looks at a few aspects of the exhibit that raise issues of some general concern or interest concerning the phenomenon of blockbuster culture.

The Imaginary Iceberg

Bruce Barber

THE EXHIBITION: Auteurship and 'Cultural Dialogue'

THE AUTEUR OR 'CORPORATE' executive' status of the curator, an expected feature of most exhibitions of this magnitude in the eighties, was confirmed in many ways in the *Iceberg* — by the choice of artists ("blue chip to the core", as John Bentley-Mays wrote in an early *Globe and Mail* review), the title of the exhibition, its overall design, publicity and catalogue — in a word — its *packaging*. The exhibition itself becomes a *commodity*, reflecting less the concatenation of its various constituent features (cultural artifacts, visiting artists, critical essays, etc.) than its encapsulation of a concept — a product to be marketed.

In the case of the *Iceberg* the concept marketed, is the putative resurgence of European Culture (read high art) as the dominant international force; a usurping of the cultural hegemony displayed by postwar U.S. Of course, this is a pipe dream. One has only to think of the dominance of Hollywood cinema, Coca Cola and the ubiquitousness of the U.S. media in all its forms on the 'world stage', to recognise the continued ideological dominance of United States culture. Nevertheless, European cultural entrepreneurs are attempting to counter this dominance.

The complex layout of the A.G.O. must have presented very real problems for the curatorial team. Three of the spaces survived the difficult problems of installation: the excellent architecture exhibit, except for the ridiculous plastic water surrounding Aldo Rossi's impressive model for his *Worlds Theatre* (Venice, 1979); the installation of the major works by Fabro and Kounellis in the Signy Eaton Gallery and the rooms of Beuys and Merz, senior artists whose large scale sculptural installations demanded enclosed spaces to operate effectively. A few art works; the paintings of A.R. Penck, Jorg Immendorf, the sculpture of Rebecca Horn and Michelangelo Pistoletto also survived, probably more for their power as strong and articulate works, than their placement in the galleries. But the overall effect was one of department store density. The design section in Gallery E was like a bargain basement, the extensive scale differences between many of the objects, their haphazard arrangement, and particularly the low plinth settings for some of the smaller exhibits, confirmed for the viewers that this level of culture was to be considered of lesser importance to the fine art section upstairs. The video/film screening area was a comfortable hole in the wall; this, too, revealing the subordinate role of theatre, film and video to the show-casing of contemporary German

and Italian fine art (painting and sculpture).

Celant's objective of initiating a dialogue among the various arts, high and popular (mass) culture and their social context, was defeated, the artifacts merely enacted a dialogue of the deaf. The various disciplines only came together in the catalogue, and here, in neat, compartmented sections.

THE CATALOGUE: The National/ International Debate

THE MOST OBVIOUS QUESTION which strikes one about this exhibition and its catalogue is, Why this use of *Iceberg* as a title? Beyond the allusions to the arrival of the exhibition in Canada, in the dead of winter, the sole justification for its use seems to be its metaphorical codification of relative size, and complexity — *viz.* we are seeing but the proverbial 'tip of the iceberg' of European culture and the culture's of two of Europe's constituent states, Italy and Germany. As Germano Celant, guest curator and principal architect of the exhibition writes in the catalogue's excessively hyperbolic introductory essay,

The image of the "European Iceberg" has several functions. It serves to indicate the enormous complexity of European culture, which cannot be shown in its totality. And

the metaphor also emphasizes that the visible part here, Italy and Germany — leaves all the other countries hidden under water. Furthermore, the portion surfacing in Canada is the one now emerging in the territory of the arts and it could not exist without the portion that is still concealed. We must always bear this in mind because of its profound influence on the visible situation.

"The European Concert and the Festival of the Arts"

While Celant emphasizes the heterogeneity of European culture, he nevertheless distinguishes the national cultures represented by his pantheon of chosen artists as being emergent, in short, above the rest, which remain submerged and invisible. Even given his attachment to the dialectic contained within the iceberg image — of the whole sustaining the part — it is the part which remains *above* and *separated* from the rest, and it is this peak or pinnacle which 'beams' out its message of dominance to Canada and the rest of the world.

In fact, the twists and turns in meaning that Celant subjects his readers to, in order to conceal his chauvinism, are a marvel to behold. At times he seems on the verge of revealing the true nature of his iceberg's expedition as cultural *putsch*, only to destroy it with oblique references to internationalism and cosmopolitanism:

An event like the "European Iceberg, Creativity in Germany and Italy Today", representing national cultures and a continental culture appears to be located between the extremes of chauvinism and cosmopolitanism. It exalts the creative products of ethnic and anthropological individualities, yet tries to place them beyond any differences and peculiarities in order to *demonstrate their internationality*.... Such confusion between chauvinism and cosmopolitanism is not new — indeed it is age old. Recently from 1945 through the seventies, cosmopolitan culture was identified with the United States, whose cultural sway involved an extreme chauvinism toward other cultures.... Now it seems to be Europe's turn to *proclaim itself the bearer of values*; yet such an act would likewise have a chauvinistic overtone. How can we smash this perverse mechanism?

[emphasis added]

As if to deny the critical intent of his own 'analysis' of this "age old" problem, Celant follows this understanding of the dynamics of reverse chauvinism with the most gross and misleading stereotyping. Of North American culture he writes: "North

America has followed a straight line and fallen in love with the cube"; European culture, through a perverse contrast, is "attracted by crazy vectors that go in unprogrammed directions and take chaotic courses, upsetting any expectations and assumptions about confines". German culture is "characterised by excess and transcendence", Italian culture by "temperance and internal reformism".

Of what? To what? How? When? and Why? ...we may well ask. He struggles with the values subsumed under the terms 'nationalism', 'internationalism', 'cosmopolitanism', 'chauvinism', without for a moment identifying these as *ideological* constructions worthy of some definition. The most difficult term, 'culture', suffers a

and quasi-social (epiphenomenal) distinctions which treat a continent and two of its constituent states, in *all* their complexity, as if they were isolated villages. Ironically, it's almost as if Celant has absorbed *American stereotypes* of European cultures and used these to validate his understanding of cultural difference.

How do the artists — the culture producers — fare in this mass of generalisations? Not very well. The artists and their work appear as rhetorical figures to the imputed 'normative' values of German and Italian culture — abstract cyphers used as evidence to legitimate and in some cases valorise, the stereotyped conceptions of this or that aspect of their nations' identities.

Celant lumps together the very dif-



CLARK SCHEID PV 60, designed by FRANK HESS (ICEBERG CATALOGUE)

Transforming road-paving into an aesthetic experience

similar fate at his hands. The extreme heterogeneity of European culture is emphasized, only to be denied in a whirl of hyperbole and innuendo. He describes, or rather interprets, Europe as "a mental and physical factory"; "a stockpile of age-old repertoires"; its culture emanating from "spoiled flesh and a deteriorated spirit". In true surrealist fashion, European culture is further likened to, "an enormous house of dreams in which day and night are confused."

In Celant's text, real bases upon which cultural difference may be ascribed (geo-political, historical, religious, class, language, economic) are erased in favor of psychological

ferent work of two filmmakers, Pasolini and Fassbinder, with that of two visual artists, Kounellis and Kiefer, and describes their production as "therapeutic...a metaphor of thought and action, describing from the past until today, a wicked and repugnant contamination that has to be exorcised", and further, "Drawing energy from the black and murky humours of a feverish society tormented by centuries of nightmare, war and pestilence, these artists seek revivication." We are given listings of artists who Celant says (incredibly), "have been inspired by philosophy and the experience of creativity as developed within the German and Italian contexts

from 1966 until today" — to which we may ask — what German or Italian artist has *not* been inspired by their own context? And what of the nature and extent of trans-cultural communication between other European states and other countries of the world?

The observations that Celant makes about the anxieties of the contemporary artist living and working in an increasingly administered world and of the plight of the artist seeking an affirmative relationship to history and tradition are interesting, and could have withstood further elaboration and/or analysis. He also comments on the return to the values of the market place, repudiated in the sixties and seventies by many of the artists in the exhibition, under the banner of Arte Povera. He alludes to the re-valorisation of the artist-as-hero, destined for "self-immolation on the altar of solitude and the market". Given the context of the exhibition and its various models, (the 1982 *Documenta 7* (Kassel) and *Zeitgeist* (Berlin) 1982), these should have led to a more rigorous examination of the determinations of capital on both artistic production and the formation of this exhibition — if not, why allude to the fact in such extravagant language? Instead, we are subjected to a glut of symptoms, not entirely helpful for a summary diagnosis of the state of cultural health of two of Europe's nation states.

Thankfully the more prosaic style of many of the other essays contained in the extensive catalogue counterbalance some of the excesses of the Celant text. With the exception, perhaps, of Bruno Cora's text, "Iceberg Europe — The Crystal Facets of the Italian Face", which revels in the possibilities provided by the iceberg metaphor, many of the essays provide useful commentary on the material exhibited and the contexts wherein it was produced. A few of these are excellent, particularly the essays on architecture (Tilman Buddensieg and Francesco Dal Co), those of theatre (Giuseppe Bartolucci and Peter Iden), and film (Vitoria Boarini and Wolfram Shutte). In contrast to the Celant text, these essays provide a more honest account of the post-war cultural developments in Germany and Italy. Thomas Shutte's discussion of the importance of German attorney and writer Alexander Kluge as an "invaluable strategist,

theoretician and practitioner of the New German Cinema" and of the formation of the state-supported F.F.A., Organisation for the Advancement of Film (Filforderungsanstalt) as a necessary economic support base for the development of the Federal Republic of Germany's film industry, is particularly good in this respect.

CORPORATE AESTHETICS: The Case of the Antique Electric Razor

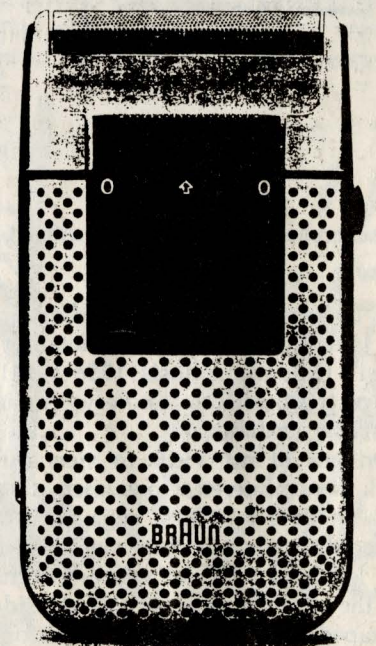
THE DOCUMENTATION AND REPRESENTATION of the relationships between culture and society and among the various spheres of cultural production, should be undertaken with extreme care. Many of the recent exhibitions of culture *per se*, of which *Iceberg* is an example, treat the complexities of social and cultural organisation, in purely formal terms. Works of design, photography, architecture, theatre, film, are taken from their original or usual contexts, stripped of values peculiar to these contexts and re-invested with others — cultural objects are artifacts of significance, worthy of consideration and appreciation as discrete *objets d'art*.

The design objects in this exhibition were relieved of their function in order to be received as objects worthy of transcendental contemplation. The context, and the manner in which they were presented, did not permit us to examine them as objects with a *social* function. Apart from the exhibition of some working drawings, the production process was absent and all but the representation of good (tasteful) design values ignored. These values reflect less the market acceptance of the products than their encapsulation of an *aesthetic*.

With this in mind, the appropriation of the *Iceberg* exhibition by the *Braun Corporation* (international producers of domestic electrical products) for one of its corporate image advertisements, is particularly interesting. The full page ad which appeared in the February 10th issue of the *Toronto Star*, two days after the official opening, was captioned "BRAUN IS HONOURED TO BE ONE OF THE CHOSEN FEW". The ad was tacitly endorsed by the A.G.O., even though *Braun* does not appear in the catalogue as a supporter of the exhibition. The attempted erasure

of difference between high art and commodity design renders this *icon* of popular culture *sacred*. The electric razor is elevated to the status of unique, albeit reproduced, artifact. It has been given an aura and now becomes the fetishised commodity *par excellence*, its meaning carefully administered by the Corporation in collusion with the institutions of cultural legitimation. The result: increased market value? After all, in its new role as 'high culture art object' the razor's status as antique is virtually assured. "*Braun* has always believed Dieter's designs were works of modern art. It's an honour to know the Art Gallery of Ontario agrees" implies that 'when you buy a *Braun* electric razor...you are making an investment for the future'.

The Art Gallery of Ontario
presents
EUROPEAN ICEBERG
Creativity in Germany and Italy Today
February 8 to April 7, 1985. Tuesday through Sunday.
Art Gallery of Ontario, 317 Dundas Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1G4



BRAUN IS HONOURED TO BE ONE OF THE CHOSEN FEW.

Braun is very pleased to announce that the work of our chief designer, Dieter Rams, has been chosen as part of the superb European Iceberg Exhibit, on display at the Art Gallery of Ontario.
The Rams-designed collection of Braun appliances was chosen to represent the pinnacle of German design in the post-Bauhaus period (1950-present).
Dieter Rams' work is a prime example of German creativity at its best with its emphasis on the functional rather than the elaborate.
Braun has always believed Dieter's designs were works of modern art. It's an honour to know the Art Gallery of Ontario agrees.

**METAMORPHOSIS:
One Day in the Life of a
Secure Artwork**

ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE ADMINISTRATION of the art experience is worthy of consideration. It concerns the legitimate economic imperatives of the institution to ensure that damage does not occur to either the works housed by the gallery for the purpose of public exhibition, or to members of the public during their visit to the gallery.

Many of the installation works in the *Iceberg* exhibition were protected by restraining barriers. However, this 'protection' at times created ambiguity in the minds of the viewers. One such

said, "She's right Bob... Look", and she too placed her foot across the barrier. But the second signal summoned a red coated A.G.O. guard into the space. "Hey, you can read! The sign says "Do Not Touch". You're not children".

According to the gallery administration, the Kounellis work sustained damage the day after the exhibition opened because visitors could not refrain from touching the section of the work which was smoke marked and then smearing their fingers on the wall. The tape barrier and warning signs were not enough. Therefore, the gallery security approached Ronald Nasgaard, A.G.O. chief curator, and Germano Celant who agreed that the infra-red warning device should be 'added'. They considered it the lesser of two evils:

logists could have a field day with a work such as this, unveiling it perhaps, as an allegorical representation of one — or perhaps all — of the holy sacraments. But then perhaps this is *not* what the work is about.

In fact the institution has set in motion a true metamorphosis — one not planned by the artist but which the curators sanctioned. It is in this context that Germano Celant's published statement suggesting that he "will sign the whole operation" becomes laden with irony. This is *auteur privilege* at its best.

Would it have made a major difference to the experience of the work, if the warning signs had been discarded? Would the whole wall have been covered in finger marks after the exhibition? Perhaps this kind of transformation is preferable to the one that took place. Why, if the gallery was worried about finger marks, did they not use a fixative spray? Did the artist want the public to understand the smoke marks as temporary and would he have condoned the public examination? Could he have been asked?

POSTSCRIPT

HOW ARE WE TO THINK OF THIS iceberg, now that its constituent facets have melted back into the museums, dealer galleries, private show rooms, and artists' studios of Europe and elsewhere? We can have no doubt that this exhibition has provided Toronto with an understanding of the cultural vitality of two European countries? But did we not know that already?

What have we learned? What have the art denizens of Queen St. West, the students of the Ontario College of Art, of York University, of high school and college programs and the other 60,000 visitors to the gallery during *Iceberg* month, learned from viewing and thinking about this exhibit? Perhaps that Europe is continuing to challenge U.S. domination in the global cultural arena; and that, in Celant's words, Europe has proclaimed itself "the bearer of values". But what values are these? Aesthetic? Political? Religious? Ethical? Moral?

Perhaps it is too early to tell; Germano Celant could be right after all with his unfortunate suggestion that you "bomb them with information and then they will react".

Bruce Barber

CONDITIONS OF PRODUCING

Cy-Thea Sand

The story is something you can leap into, have the bliss of... It's a kind of short-term gratification for the psyche.

—Cynthia Ozick

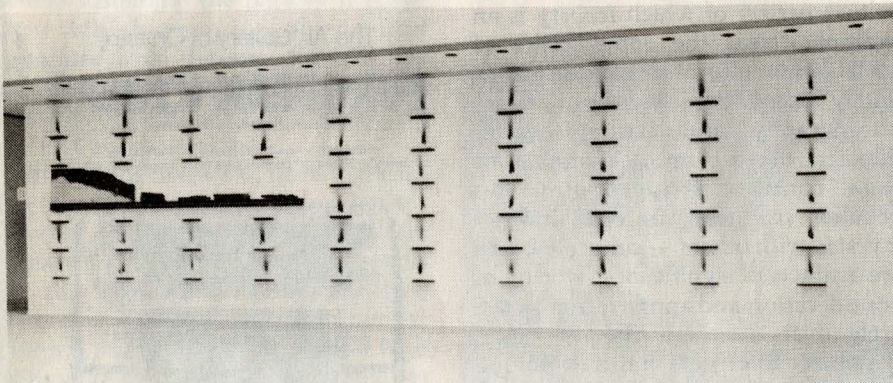
HOW DO THE CONDITIONS behind the production and distribution of women's writing influence its style and content? The short story, for example, huddles between poetry and the novel for attention from readers. Short stories sell almost as poorly as poetry and many of their authors must rely on other means of support. Bobbie Ann Mason and Ann Beattie both complain about the need to satisfy their publishers with novels when they would be much happier writing stories. Bobbie

Ann Mason states that "there is a sort of built in pressure in the way they do the contract. Since short stories don't sell that well, they expect a novel for your second book."

Despite this monetary preference for the novel by big name publishers, the short story is enjoying a renaissance. According to critic D.D. Guttenplan in his article "The Boom in Short Stories" (*New York Times Book Review*, June 10, 1984): "a quick look at the literary landscape discloses short story after

short story, where formerly novels were mainly seen." He writes that "among readers as well as writers, the short story has lost its status as a warm-up exercise for the serious work of novel writing."

This is true also of the feminist/small press scene. Readers look forward as much to the latest stories in magazines, journals and anthologies as to the hottest new novel from the Women's Press, Naiad or Virago. Year after year we are treated to excellent fiction from feminist



Metamorphosis III (1984-85) — without warning device

case concerned the Greek/Italian artist, Janis Kounellis' work, "Metamorphosi" (Metamorphosis 1958-1974), one of the most impressive works in the *Iceberg* exhibition.

On one of my visits to view this work, I encountered two women and a man, in their late 30's, engaged in a heated discussion over the significance and legitimacy of the warning signs and the infra-red detector placed inside the taped perimeter of the installation. Both women insisted that these elements were part of the work. The man insisted that they were a legitimate warning to the public not to 'disturb' the work. After their debate had continued for some time, one of the women decided to test her assumptions and placed her foot between the beam projector and its reflector, allowing the device to emit a high pitched "buzz". "There", she said, "you see? It's part of the work. Nothing happened!" The other women, as if to reinforce this,

possible misinterpretation of the work, or its destruction. At the time of the decision, the artist was not informed of these changes to his work. And so one is left to speculate whether the intentions of the artist have been betrayed by the exigencies of exhibition and/or administration indemnification.

The metaphorical constructions within the altered work — the identification of fire through its residue, smoke; the symbolic significance of candles and the altar-like shelves; the invisible (transformative) infra-red light demanding the presence of an object to 'speak' its warning; the (hierarchical) arrangement of the shelves in rows of six; the charred wood; the black tape barrier with its primary directive "Please Do Not Touch"; and most importantly, the guard who enters on cue to deliver his lines. This is a performance work, a *tableau vivant*, no? Biblical exegeses, structuralists, symbolic interactionists and numero-

SANDRA GREGSON





writers such as Donna E. Smythe, Jan Clausen, Becky Birtha, Barbara Wilson, Cynthia Flood and Beth Brant, to name but a few. My collections of stories by Jane Rule, Mavis Gallant, Anne Hebert and Alice Munro must make shelf room for short fiction from Newfoundland's Helen Porter, Saskatchewan's Lois Simmie, journal anthologies by and about women of colour, collections devoted to lesbian writing, Utopian stories by women, stories from Norwegian, Latina and Canadian Prairie women. Despite harsh economic times, a new literary journal has been born in the Pacific Northwest. *Backbone* is dedicated to quality work, including short fiction, by women who find getting published difficult because of circumstances like geographical isolation and racism. This frenetic interest in the short story is a significant and exciting development for writers, especially for those of us from cultures, classes and lifestyles historically absent from the printed page.

The definitive feature of the short story is time — time to write one and time to read one. Creative hours are limited for writing/reading women inundated with domestic duties, wage labour or a combination of the two. Non-familial women may seem to have more hours to pick up pens or books, but we too are pressured by our shifts at the factory, hospital, bar or classroom. Women can read or write short stories on the bus, in the laundromat, while sitting with the sick or elderly, in the early morning hours before the babies wake up or during meal breaks at work. It is a medium less dependent on privileged circumstance.

The condensation of time in the writer's life can be reflected in the style and language of a short story in part because the short story relies more heavily on intensity and drama than the novel. Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing" (*Tell Me A Riddle*, Dell Publishing Co., New York, 1960), is a good illustration of the short story as a transformer or reverser of limitation. Called by a school counsellor to consult about her nineteen year old daughter, the narrator flashes back through her daughter's uneasy childhood. The story is about a mother's lack of time and it is

riveted to the page by images which underscore this limitation. "And when is there time to remember, to sift, to weigh, to estimate, to total?" asks Olsen. The question refers not only to the counsellor's request for insight into the daughter but also, I think, to the process the writer herself must grapple with for the sake of her art. For those of us committed to writing despite irritating odds, time must be dethroned as the reigning enemy in our lives. The work, however sporadic, must get done. The force which kept Tillie Olsen from writing for twenty years is, in her story, "I Stand Here Ironing", subdued, controlled and cleverly crafted into steady expression and permanent art.

In D.D. Guttenplan's essay, Elizabeth Tallent is quoted as saying that the demands of the short story form insures "that there isn't time for you to misplace anything." This strategy can assume a critical significance if applied to the work of writers speaking from a non-canonized place: lesbians writing out of their experience, women of colour drawing upon their cultural differences and working class writers absorbed in the task of bearing witness to class bondage.

The demands the short story makes for brevity and drama can influence the historically silenced writer (or first generation writer, as Tillie Olsen would say) to pare down non-essentials to get quickly to the core of her narrative. A recent example of this technique is Raymina Y Mays' story "Naomi and Avery" (*Conditions 10*). In a few pages Mays creates a neighborhood spilling over with movement, despair and passion, as the narrator quickly guides us to the final frame: two women comforting each other over the loss of their lovers. Expansive, explosive emotions are contained within Mays' picturesque, crisp language, like poor characters who cannot travel the world but whose lives are filled with restless layers of complexity, coincidence and contradiction.

This getting down to the nitty-gritty is beautifully realized in a Sharon Riis story, "Something I Do" (*Periodics 6*). The surface lives of her white, working class characters appear boring. But the reader soon realizes that these women

are the avengers of male violence as well as being avid Elvis fans and full-time moms. It is a wonderfully understated story that deserves a wide audience. Although some readers may disagree with its homespun justice, its cathartic power is indisputable.

The gay ritual of coming out is often used by lesbian writers not only as a theme but as a time-line shaping their work. The process of 'coming out' is a lifelong project for most of us, but is usually highlighted by telling parents, close friends or bosses. Lindajeane Brown's story *jazz dancin wif mama* (*New Lesbian Writing*, edited by Margaret Cruikshank, San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1984) speaks humourously in Black English about a mother and daughter simultaneously finding out about each other's love for women. In this same volume Elsa Gidlow's autobiographical work, "Casting A Net" is shaped by her coming of age as a lesbian; the details of her life sculpted to emphasize the centrality of her sexual identity to both her sense of self and of community.

Although I may not entirely agree with Wayne Grady, the editor of *The Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories*, (Markham, Ontario 1984) when he asserts that "by interpreting for us the complexities of human life, by helping to bring the unarticulated soul of an entire community into sudden and radiant being, the short story can be said to have assumed a social responsibility left vacant by poetry since the late 1950's", the short story is playing a crucial cultural role in our progressive communities. Short stories can be read alongside political analyses in magazines like *Mother Jones*, *This Magazine* and *Ms.* Progressive publishing is making it easier and easier for the time-harried story lover to enjoy good fiction, and providing writers with opportunities to publish, helping to ensure that this trend continues.

Cy-Thea Sand is a writer, and a co-founder of *The Radical Reviewer*. She lives in Vancouver where she is presently a member of the editorial collective *Kinesis*.

TALKING UNION ACTING ON UNEMPLOYMENT

SARA DIAMOND

TALKING UNION IS A ONE ACT PLAY ABOUT unemployment, written by Chryse Gibson of the Carpenters' Union L.U. 452, with original music by Phil Vernon, of the same local. It has played to over 2,000 people in British Columbia's Lower Mainland, at performances sponsored by both the Carpenters' Union and the C.L.C. The production is directed by Suzie Payne.

Fundraising is now underway to make a videotape of the production and to workshop and tour it through the province. Chryse is currently teaching carpentry at the Carpenters' Union and the Nicaraguan government.

Sara Diamond spoke with Chryse Gibson and Phil Vernon about the creation and production of *Talking Union* and of its music.



Marcel Maillard (left) and Dick Clements perform at C.L.C.'s Winter School in Harrison, B.C.
SUMMER 1985

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRYSE GIBSON

SARA DIAMOND: Could you begin with a description of the play?

CHRYSE GIBSON: *Talking Union* is a thirty minute, one act play, with four scenes. The story is about three unemployed carpenters and the decisions they make when faced with whether or not to work non-union. It's intercut with original music by Phil Vernon. There are four characters in the play, three carpenters and Monique, who is the wife of the main character, Jim.

What happens is that one of the carpenters, Roy, decides that he wants to work non-union, basically, he's got a job at Kerkhoff. In the middle of a basketball game with Stan and Jim, who are the other two carpenters, he tells them, and of course, all chaos breaks loose. Stan is an older man, in his late forties, he's very pro-union. He has been active in the union for years and understands the importance of collective bargaining and also that non-union is used to drive down the benefits and wages of all workers. Jim, on the other hand, who's our main character, and our married carpenter, is not so sure. He's been out of work; he's depressed; he feels somewhat hopeless at this point, and the idea of just being able to go back to work again is very interesting to him. Jim then approaches his wife, Monique, with what he's going to do, as she is coming home from work. They talk about what having been a union carpenter has meant in his life, about the fact that she is forced to work non-union because her particular nursing home is not unionized yet. They talk about the issue of safety, and she forces him to really consider what his action will mean, and he forces her to really listen to his fear, because he's very afraid. He's lost his dignity as a person. He feels useless and like he's not contributing to society in general, that as a family man he's not fulfilling the expectations of a breadwinner.

Then in Scene Three, Stan comes by to talk to him and through their discussion Jim decides that he doesn't have to work non-union, that instead he's going to get active with the union. Now that sounds like a big jump, and it is one. A lot of it is done through tension and body language. In the last scene



Struggling against the depression of unemployment

they all join together again — Stan, Monique and Jim. It comes out that Jim has asked Roy, the non-union kid, to come play ball with them on a picnic. Stan and Jim have a confrontation about this. It turns out that Stan, in fact, himself at one point, in his youth, had worked non-union and had changed his mind. The idea of the play is that people do make mistakes, people can change their minds, that the whole issue is not nearly as cut and dry as the unions would like to have it. In fact it's a complex, personal issue.

In the end, Roy comes to play ball with them and we're never quite sure

whether or not he decides to come back into the union or not. We just know that he's having trouble with the non-union route; the lines of communication are open again.

SARA: Who is Kerkhoff and why is he relevant?

CHRYSE: Kerkhoff is mentioned because of the recent situation in Vancouver and Kamloops. He had been a fairly small, non-union contractor, who has now leapt into the areas that the unions have basically held jurisdiction over — larger commercial jobs. He was recently awarded major, major contracts totalling millions of dollars,

at the Harbour Cove, which is Pennyfarthing Construction, and at EXPO and the Kamloops Courthouse. It was a confrontation situation. The unions opposed him at Pennyfarthing and lost to the courts. Kerkhoff, we feel, has quite a bit of backing now and is being used consciously to bust the union hold on construction work. That's why the specific reference in the play.

SARA: Why did you choose those characters?

CHRYSE: First of all, I should make it clear, I have never written a play before, and never expect to write one again. I wrote it because I wasn't working, and like Jim, the character, I felt useless. I had felt that there was no way to express my fear and my despair; writing the play was one way that I could do it.

The characters are composites of my peers. In fact, for the basketball scene, much of the dialogue was literally lifted from a conversation that three of us, in a drunken stupor, were having at a party to celebrate one of our friends getting his journeypapers. We were talking about how far we would go to keep a job. These are all political activists in the union, but it really got to be quite obvious that we'd go to great lengths to keep a job. We laughed, but in fact, we all want to work. And that's where the characters come from, from people I know.

SARA: The characters in the play are all men, and you're a woman carpenter. Why did you choose to use only male characters for the construction workers?

CHRYSE: There are, I believe, 33 women in the Carpenters' Union out of a membership of 30,000, and my intent was to discuss the issue of the despair that you feel when you are unemployed. I felt that to use a woman would distract from that issue. When we were doing the casting, we discussed trying to find an East Indian or a Chinese person to play the roles, and unfortunately, the characters are so clear, it's like a good guy and a bad guy and an in-between guy. You would end up getting all involved with racism and everything else. It's a real criticism I have of the play and I don't know how to get out of it. And just to throw a woman in on top of it all wouldn't work.

SARA: It might have made the emotional aspects of the political questions seem sex-specific.

CHRYSE: Something that I did do with Monique, is that she's very much a role model, in her strength and conviction and her commitment to certain political ideas. Also, she's working and he isn't. She very much orchestrates the environment so that he is comfortable expressing himself without her mothering him or putting him down. That was where my own personal view on the importance of strong women comes through.

And she's a nurse — that was a specific decision on my part. Because as a tradeswoman we often are romanticized and our life sucks as much as anybody else's. Unfortunately, a nurse, because it's a traditional female role, isn't seen as someone to look towards for strength and I think that's unfortunate.

SARA: Why did you decide to work with theatre as a form? How did you proceed once you had chosen the medium?

CHRYSE: That's actually quite a story. I'm on the action committee for the local, and most of us are unemployed — we had some suicides in the local and a great deal of despair. It became obvious that a social function might be really good as a way to bring people together. Everyone's poor and people aren't able to go and spend the evening out, so we thought, "Gee, let's make a social evening." We got the other local, Carpenters' Local 1251, to help us out and we thought we'd have a cabaret. It's a lot of work to put together a cabaret, so that didn't really look like it was going to happen. Then we decided, "Let's do a short play and have a dance afterwards."

We started looking for plays. And we looked, and looked for plays and didn't like any of them. So I said, "I want to write one." That's how it started. The first play that was written I did with Mickey McKuen from the postal workers' union (CUPW). That play was about two and a half hours long, with fourteen characters in it. It was about the On-to-Ottawa trek, and about the 1980s, flipping back and forth — a historical docudrama with multimedia. But, I realized that it was impossible to produce in the time that we had. A few of us felt that the 1980s was appropriate (which was the part I had written) so that was how the play got started.

I had this belief that there's quite a bit of talent, amongst the rank and file

members. Sure, we're carpenters for a living, but most people have other interests, hobbies, whatever. And I felt that there were people out there who were interested in theatre and sure enough there were. But their being interested and actually getting them onto the stage were two different things, which I soon discovered.

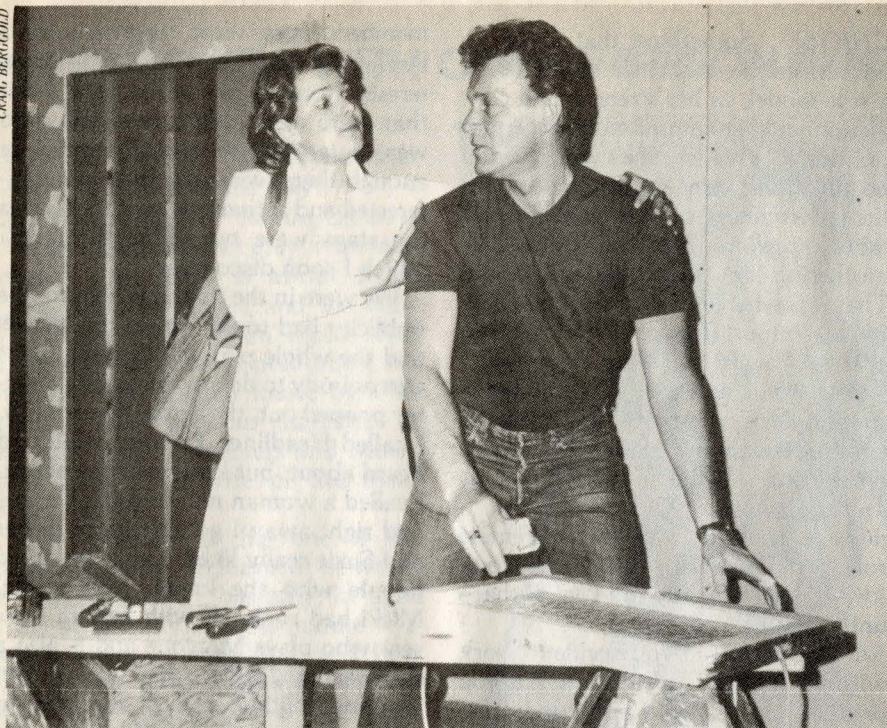
We were in the final hour before the publicity had to go out for the cabaret and the whole play fell through, there was nobody to do anything. The director pooped out, the actors pooped out. I called Headlines Theatre, which I'd heard about, but knew nothing about. I called a woman named Suzie Payne, and right away I got the script to her and Suzie really liked it and she called people who she knew. Meanwhile, Micki had come up with Sandra Gossen, who plays Monique and is also a member of CUPW. She was in fact working fulltime and in the play at night, whereas other people were trying to make their living in the theatre. The exciting part of it was that they did it for free.

You've got to understand that my local, they're a great bunch of guys, but when I told them that we were going to do theatre, they said, "Well, okay, whatever." Believe me, there were no great expectations. You could say that the evening was not pushed as strongly as it could have been, which was just as well, because it was standing room only by the time it got going.

We put the show on and it blew the minds of the union executive and activists. From then on there was a lot of support. It was an exhilarating evening. The audience participation was excellent; most of the audience were carpenters and it was a play about them! It was also exciting for the actors. They're not used to having people booing and cheering and clapping. Later on, somebody said to me that they imagined that at least 80% of that audience had never seen a play, except for maybe one with their kids.

SARA: Did you use any material from the tradition of the workers' theatre of the 1930s in B.C. and other places?

CHRYSE: Once we decided that we were going to do this I got a job! Here I was writing this play about unemployment and I was working fulltime. It was ludicrous. I didn't have as much time to research as I wished. When I read the plays in *Eight Men Speak* they



Sandra Gossen as Monique "orchestrates the environment...without mothering him or putting him down."

seemed very timely for that period. I said to myself, "I can probably get out something that's this good about today." It gave me the confidence to write. But this play is much less rhetorical, there is a real attempt to expose the concepts through personal interactions and through what people are thinking, rather than what they are putting out in public.

Something that was really important to me in writing this was that men in this society and construction people in particular, are discouraged from expressing themselves on a more internal level. That's part of why there's a lot of family problems right now, in families of construction workers. The man has never been encouraged to say what's on his mind and partners and spouses aren't encouraged to talk it through. There's so many stereotypes about what the breadwinner's expected to do, it's very hard to admit you're not doing it; to figure out why; to figure out why you feel so shitty and to get it out to somebody else.

One of the objectives of the play is to say, "It's okay to be scared, you're not the only one." In fact, one of the lines in the play is, "What makes you think you're so special, we're all scared of death of that first job." We're all scared of losing our skills and our ability to produce and we're all scared of getting fired from a job. Another aspect of the

play is to say to the spouses (in my case it's the husband, but I'm unusual), that there's more to the situation than simply not wanting to work. There's a lot more and it should be talked about.

SARA: Can you comment on the end of the play? You take a guy who's saying, "I might work non-union, I don't know what to do," and moving him to where he is able to talk about his dilemma. The solution you pose though, is to get involved with the union and the unemployed committee. Is this not too simple?

CHRYSE: I wrote the ending twice, actually. I wanted the ending to be more ambiguous, at least with Roy, the guy who decided to go non-union. I'm not a playwright and I didn't know how to do it, I'm sure there are techniques. One of the problems of the play is that there's been no movement over the months that we've been performing it, in terms of improvement.

For me, I got involved with my union and it was a real lifesaver. I had moved out here and didn't know anyone and had transferred my union membership. For me it was a community that I could fit into and could easily become active in, and the committee was a lifesaver for some of my peers. It felt like you were contributing. It also felt like you were taking an active role in changing your situation as opposed to only reacting to

your situation. For my peers, and I'm thinking of people in their late twenties to their late thirties, it was really an important move forward. Unfortunately, the unions are being really brutally battered, specifically the building trades and that has rendered us ineffective as an organized body.

The play does say that the Unemployed Action Centre is just one way; it says to participate, to get involved. A lot of people sit back and make good criticisms but they don't come and make public their criticism. You can criticize the unions for not providing an environment for these concerns, on the other hand, you have to criticize the rank and file for not being willing to stick their necks out. Whatever you're going to do, stand up and say it. Deal with it!

SARA: Where has it been performed so far?

CHRYSE: The first performance was at the Carpenters' Cabaret for two locals and friends in the Lower Mainland. The next time we showed it was at the Provincial Council of Carpenters. The Provincial's been very supportive of the play; we sent out invitations to forty labour, political and cultural leaders in the Lower Mainland to come and join us for wine and cheese, a kind of showcase, hoping to get requests for the play. We did a show for the annual convention of the B.C. and Yukon Building Trades Council convention. Out of it we got four performances at the Canadian Labour Congress' winter school at Harrison Hot Springs. And all of the performances, with the exception of the first one, have been paid for.

SARA: The CLC performances are significant because that's beyond the building trades. Is the play general enough to communicate to this audience?

CHRYSE: People have not had to be a member of the Building Trades to appreciate frank discussion about unemployment. I would like to see the play expanded to a three act piece and that would mean throwing in a couple of more characters. Through those we could include other unions.

Out of the success of the play has developed the feeling that culture is an extremely effective tool in education and propaganda. This play could be termed agit-prop. I want to make it real clear that it is not going to make any inroads into drama, it's never going to push forward the concept of

theatre; it's a very particular genre and it fulfills that function. It encourages people who always thought that culture was an excellent tool for education to go ahead and say it, to use the play as an example and to push the idea.

We would all like to take it on tour because we feel that a critical part of the play is that it's live. We see it as a catalyst. We're sending out kits suggesting how people could use it in their community. You could use it to introduce a social evening, you could use it as part of a workshop and a discussion after, to talk about unemployment or non-union work.

We've been approached by diverse union groups to videotape it. We've been dragging our feet because we feel that it will lose a lot of impact as a video. We have a promo tape that's about ten minutes and it looks good — it's kind of soap opera-ish to be honest — but it will really lose a lot of its impact. We're hoping to be able to workshop it and tour it.

I had a response to the earlier discussion of the 1930s. I feel, and a number of cultural people in the unions feel, that a 1980s recession-culture is emerging out of British Columbia. At our convention a number of people, for example, musicians from Dawson Creek, came up to me and said, "I'm writing

all this music and I can't find a place to play it." So we were thinking that we could encourage communities to use the play for part of an evening and then get their own cultural workers to perform. Then we could record and document that person's work and take it with us. As we went from town to town, we'd become like a bee that was pollinating — developing a network.

SARA: Do you think that new technologies make that possible in a way that didn't exist in the past where you would have to rely on oral culture or the migration of workers?

CHRYSE: We don't see that migratory sense of movement now, what we see is T.V. If we can use that technology it would be really good.

SARA: One of the things that's different about folk or popular culture as opposed to mass culture is that it's specific, rather than general. The limits of it are also that people in another area or industry might not relate to it. But because it is specific, it can educate people who are compatible in some way, about other people's conditions. It will be valuable to see where the play connects, who can relate to it, where people gain the most solidarity and how this varies.

We've talked mostly about union involvement so far, what role have

theatre professionals played in the production?

CHRYSE: They made necessary contacts for us. David Diamond [of Headlines Theatre] put together a tour budget which unfortunately we haven't yet been able to use, but we will!

Getting paid has been an interesting issue. Culture is not recognized as a skill in our society, so it's very interesting to convince my union not to encourage non-union production (which is what this is right now) and to pay union scale. We've gotten to the point where that's happening although we have no formal affiliations with ACTRA or Equity. We're basing our request for money on their scale.

We did the promo tape through the B.C. Institute of Technology studio and because of the nature of the play it automatically encourages people to discuss the issues that are in it. Most people at BCIT have no other exposure to our issues. We all ended up sitting down, and got into this lengthy discussion about union versus non-union, and how the unions are functioning. We've made a lot of people rethink construction workers' reputation in the world. It's been really nice to talk to people as human beings as opposed to the stereotype of sexist pigs whistling at women on the street.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHIL VERNON

SARA DIAMOND: At what point did you become involved with developing the play?

PHIL VERNON: In the spring of last year when Chryse said that she wanted to write a play, to do with the situation in the '30s and the situation now in the '80s with longterm unemployment. She asked if I would get some songs together, both historical songs for the '30s, and also the songs for the '80s. She had in mind a song that is in the play right now called *Murder*, which deals with an accident in downtown Vancouver, a number of years back.

Chryse wrote one scene that was built around *Murder* and then she asked me what I could do about the rest of the play. At that point I was in the midst of writing a song about construction that was the balance (at least in my own mind) of the other song. *Murder* was not something that I felt

good about singing everyday as I worked on a high rise, especially as it got higher and higher. The song *Concrete Fever* is a more positive description of heavy construction work and it was initially the lead-in for the play.

SARA: Had you performed at all for the union?

PHIL: I had, the previous year, taken my guitar along to a convention and sat in a side room and played. I guess they got me to sing *Solidarity Forever* when they found out that I could sing, at the end of the convention.

SARA: You mentioned that *Murder* was based on an accident in Vancouver. Could you describe what took place?

PHIL: About three years ago, on the construction of Bentall Four, they were up thirty-six floors doing alterations on the forms — that often hap-

pens when you get to the final floor at the top — and the form tipped when there were four men on top. The form didn't actually fall, but it threw the men down thirty-six floors and there wasn't a whole lot left of them. It's an important event, not just because of the deaths, because deaths happen all the time. It sparked an investigation into the safety of form work in the province.

It was a time of high employment, the one boom period that we've had in the last little while, so we did have the power at the time to push for a safety investigation. We found that more than 40% of formwork in the province was under-built — that is, not safe. About a week afterwards, there was a similar incident in Alberta. It really focused attention on form work.

Certain regulations were brought

in. Under our present agreement, all formwork and falsework (which is what holds the concrete in place until it is set) has to be engineered; it has to have an engineer's signature on it. The plans have to be available to all the workers on a site; so that, supposedly, anybody could demand to see the plans for such-and-such a form, see if it has a signature on it and ask how it works. Those were definitely steps forward.

Now, when times are tougher and everybody, including Job Standards, are covering their asses, it's harder to enforce that part of the agreement. There's still danger — particularly with members who are not experienced with fly forms.

SARA: You've described the music a bit. What role does it fulfill in the play?

PHIL: The way the play was first presented it started with *Concrete Fever* and then there was a scene and then I did a little short song, which I wrote as a transition piece basically. Then there was *Murder* in the next scene and I just had some instrumental piece. The music was not particularly strong and in fact it dwindled as the play went on.

The song that I wrote specifically for the play is called *What Does It Take*. It's a transition between Scenes One and Two. It describes a person sitting and wondering, "How am I going to get back to work, what am I going to do, what does it take," questioning, "What am I as a man, what does it take to be a man, what does it take to break me and what does it take to understand this situation?" Asking some pretty big questions and then, hopefully, the plan answers them or, at least, it presents more aspects of a situation, so that the audience is asked the questions. The play hopefully does not answer everything but poses some questions.

Now, in the performances that we've done at Harrison (CLC), I do a fifteen minute set on my own, ending with *Concrete Fever*. The songs set the stage, not only in terms of construction, but with songs about unemployment, about solidarity with Nicaragua, about union organizing, about hassling with your fellow workers about racism, setting an overall theme as to what's going on these days in our fights as labour.

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we've done at Harrison (CLC), I do a fifteen minute set on my own, ending up with "Concrete Fever". The songs set the stage, not only in terms of construction, but with songs about unemployment, about solidarity with Nicaragua, about union organizing, about union organizing, about hassling with your fellow workers about racism, setting an overall theme as to what's going on these days in our fights as labour.

Then I go into the *What Does It Take* song, focusing on the personal situation of somebody who's out of work. My sense of the play is that it has a very personal focus within a larger social, economic, political setting. What I've wanted to do with the music is go deeper into that personal, emotional space. In the play, it would be melodramatic to have these outpourings of emotion, angst. It is in some ways more appropriate and more able to be heard coming through music. I'm not putting the words into anybody's mouth, they're not from a particular character. I almost play the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy. I restate things from a slightly different perspective.

I find that the songs that speak the truest come from a particular personal viewpoint for me — when I'm speaking out of my own experience, or an experience that I shared with others. It's better than if I'm trying to describe somebody else's situation or 'let's all get together and smash the state.'

In Part Two of *What Does It Take?*, I get into the nitty-gritty of personal experience. This goes from Scene One (the argument between friends) and Scene Two, where the carpenter is in turmoil and is telling his wife that he wants to work non-union because he's going crazy. So the song sets a depth of anger and self-hatred and frustration before that scene.

Later, at the end of the play, after the oldtimer has persuaded Jim to stay in the union, we needed a transition to the last scene where everything is just wonderful and they get a picnic together and they're "sticking to the union" — except for this one enigmatic character, Roy. That was a tough part for me. I rewrote it a couple of times because I was finding it really difficult to make this leap. It was not necessarily believable that somebody planning to go to work with Kerkhoff would end up working on the unemployed

committee and "rah, rah, we're all a team." I thought that was a little bit 'socialist realist', even though it wasn't Chryse's intent to write that kind of play. She's trying to leave it up in the air whether Roy is going to be with the union. And I was trying to make it less clear that Jim himself was 100% behind what he was doing in the union. Although on the surface everything's great, he's still unemployed, he's still out of work and I know from my experience in the union that you cannot make those changes 100%.

The union is not a perfect organization; there are power struggles and there's the use and abuse of the members. Even though I belong to one of the most progressive unions in the province, it's not a message that I particularly want to put out: that unions are the answer to everything.

This song is the most important transition, of somebody going through being unemployed, and wanting to do something that was right and still feel good about himself, to feel that he can be active: this is central to the problem of unemployment and breaking out of the isolation.

The first time I wrote it, it had to do with, "They can't keep me down." But it was just too, "everything is fine", the last scene was even more unreal. So I tried to tone it down and it still wasn't good enough. I worked on it for a week and what I ended up with was something similar in tone to the first transition.

I find sometimes when I'm writing this stuff about "I ain't down yet and I ain't gonna let it get me down and I'm gonna stay with the union" that I have a lot of feelings. I was crying when I put those words together and sang them. But I've realized that the emotion and the tears do not necessarily mean that it's true. It may simply mean that it's something that I really want. There's lots of songs on the market that are really strong tearjerkers and people have really strong feelings about them. It doesn't mean that they speak of our experience; they tap into some of our needs and feelings, but it doesn't mean that they're true.

SARA: What are your plans for developing the play for touring?

PHIL: The idea that's been handed to us from the B.C. Federation of Labour is that the money could be gotten from the Unemployment Action Centres and labour councils to pay for our wages if

we could get money elsewhere for travel. The Unemployment Action Centres got a lot of flack during the B.C. Fed convention for not doing anything. Chryse thinks that the play would be a feather in their cap if they could do it without having to put out very much money. It's not going out and organizing, but for them to recognize the play would still be a victory.

To get the money that we've gotten for this (which is \$3,000 for four per-

formances) is a major victory. Even though it is by theatre standards really cheap, we're not doing it for free, and we're not doing it for next to nothing, which is what the tradition would be. That's a step in the right direction.

The mix of performers is interesting. We've got people from ACTRA, basically theatre community people, legit. We've had people who are wanting to be in ACTRA or Equity. We also have two actors from the post office. They're members of a union. I'm a

member of the Carpenters' Union but I'm not in the Musicians' Union and I'm playing the music. It raises certain questions about the rigidity around things being union, because there were people performing who were in other unions, but they're not the relevant unions. From the other side of it, there are people in the theatre community who are getting a much deeper understanding of unions. There is education going on both ways within the production, quite apart from the audience.

MURDER

Thirty-six floors is one hell of a way
Looking down that winter's day
Cars like toys on the street below
When I felt that fly-form start to go.

That morning not too much was said
Except the voice inside my head:
A glimpse... a shadow, that was all
To let me know that we might fall

Still you know it's hard to say
You can get those feelings just about every day
If you let it, it can make you quit
So you might as well get used to it

When you're working on the edge
You set a column, drive a wedge
You walk the line between your own safety
And the push for productivity

Then suddenly, you lose your breath
You're staring at the face of Death
You see above his hollow eyes
His hardhat bears the dollar sign

Now it's time to call a spade a spade
Cuz when we work there's fortunes made
Lives are lost, and money gained
And money killed us just the same
It was murder

A man's a heart, a man's a mind
A body and spirit all entwined
Goddamn the thing that takes this man
And treats him like a pair of hands

These hands could reach to hold a child
This face could soften in a smile
This heart could let its feelings show
This mind could tell you what it knows:
It was murder
Murder

Phil Vernon
1983

dedicated to Donald Davis, Brian Stevenson, Yrjo Mitrunen, and Gunther Couvreur, who fell to their deaths January 7, 1981.

SUMMER 1985

WHAT DOES IT TAKE

Sitting in this empty room just trying to understand
Waiting for another chance to be working with my hands
What would I do to work again
To know I'm a link in the human chain
To feel the world through my hands
And find a place where I can stand?
What does it take to make a man?
What does it take to make a man?
What does it take to understand?

Every morning when I wake
I feel the twisted knot of hate
Telling me I just don't make the grade.
What good are skills when they aren't used?
What good is trying when you're gonna lose?
Every day it's just the same.
And it keeps on getting harder
Being a husband and a father
While my body and my hands are going soft
And this empty feeling in my gut
Tells me that I'm in a rut
But it's goddamned hard to shake it off.

When I look around me, there's people taking sides,
Some are looking for a fight, some are just trying to hide.
Nobody's got the answers, just pieces that are true.
Now I can't stay here by myself: there's things that I can do.
And I'm looking for a place that's mine
And I could use a helping hand.
But I ain't gonna toe any line
Cuz the way I've been used
Just can't be excused
And now I'm gonna choose my way.

Phil Vernon
1985



RICHARD PICTON

From the *Six Days of Resistance* poster

Ontario Open Screenings, Six Days of Resistance Against the Censor Board, April 21-27, 1985

By Kerri Kwinter

If one could talk about being ready for such a thing, the anti-censorship movement in Ontario was ready for Bill 82. The bill's introduction this spring provided the catalyst needed to organize a fragmented population whose previous stance on censorship varied from outrage to indifference. Given that the Ontario Censor Board* was not going to go away by us waving the Charter of Rights and Freedoms at it, Bill 82 can be seen as a kind of mixed blessing.

At issue in the Six Days of Resistance protest is a law, or a growing cluster of laws, that no matter how you use, analyse or approach them, are dangerous. That Bill 82 is ultimately incompatible with our guaranteed freedom of speech is only a part of the problem. The first assumption of prior-censorship is a presumptuous declaration of territory; the ramifications may, at first, only *seem* benign. In Ontario it was the expansion of that already colonized space that told a growing number of people that something very wrong was up. The issues are not simply free speech and artistic expression. At most, these are aspects of the larger issue; at least, these are liberal terms that have lost meaning. They do not contain the understanding or analysis of sexism, racism and oppression that the anti-censorship movement has developed.

The debate about censorship's relative merits is over. Every word in *Issues of Censorship* (April 1985), in the book *Women Against Censorship*** and in the many other articles published by Ontarians is further evidence of its finale. Pockets of resistance have percolated throughout the province for years. Bill 82 was merely the last in a string of unpopular and

* The Ontario Censor Board was recently renamed the Ontario Film Review Board. Like many writers I will continue to refer to them as the censor board until their power and practice of censoring (cutting and banning) film has been removed.

** *Women Against Censorship*, edited by V. Burstyn (Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver, 1985).

unwise moves on the part of the government — it provided the impetus for the points of resistance to converge into a unified wave of protest. Without Bill 82's mind-boggling assumption of territory we might have gone on for years being referred to as a pocket of film buffs with a scopophilic axe to grind, or an insignificant bunch of special interest groups who were ignoring the greater wisdom of the church, the women's movement and a community of disinterested psychologists and sociologists. The Board's increased power and jurisdiction (predicted by its critics for years) has made clear to more people the intentions of such legislation — encompassing as it does:

- the ability to arbitrarily silence and marginalize any group;
 - the possibility of government interference in the activities of the population;
 - and the finality of decisions not open to public appeal (aside from the expense of court challenges) — decisions made by non-elected, non-professional, randomly selected people.
- This is what the years of protest have been about.

Ontario Open Screenings: Six Days of Resistance Against the Censor Board was an idea one day, a mailing the next and, about six days later, a province-wide action. A group of Torontonians collectively wrote a Statement of Unity (see boxed item). This was mailed out with some background material and ideas for action. Groups and individuals were invited to become coalition members, who would either organize their own event or co-sponsor a screening with another group. Those contacted, who were not able to become members were invited to endorse, and thereby publicly support, the coalition and its activities.

By the time the poster was printed there were approximately 63 coalition member-groups and 40 programmes planned at 30 different locations. By

mid-April over 500 endorsements had been received from groups and individuals. Official endorsement lists and membership continued to grow until the week of resistance was underway. The Coalition received a letter from Joseph Martin, director of the National Gallery of Canada wishing us "and the arts group supporting Six Days of Resistance success in this important challenge to censorship in Ontario." The Canada Council also supported *Six Days* by approving a \$1,900 grant to the coalition to help cover costs. All in all there were over 120 hours of film and tape played in 11 different cities.

None of the three provincial political parties, in the final weeks of an election campaign responded, despite the publicity. (The NDP almost endorsed our Statement of Unity, but declined to do so when we, in turn, did not sign their policy on censorship.)

The coalition's publicist felt that overall, *Six Days* received good press coverage, given the basic problems of the press. She felt that, as always, the best coverage was provided by radio interviews where we were able to represent the coalition's intentions ourselves. Most of the rest of us thought that other than the careful coverage by the alternative press, both print and television coverage varied from good to vulgar. While some reporters displayed notable sensitivity, consideration and sympathy with the coalition's goals, others were only interested in the possible busts and their coverage dried up when no arrests were made.

Six Days was designed to accomplish two primary goals: to educate viewers and to unite resistance. Different groups in different locations in the province have developed critiques and mounted legal challenges to the censor board in the past years. It was time to organize so that the benefits of the critiques and the force of the legal challenges could be maximized.

The sophistication of the anti-censorship movement in Ontario can be attributed in part to the government itself. In the same way that Ontario is a kind of testing ground for conservative policies, so is it one for political critics. For as long as there has been an arbitrary and anachronistic power of prior-censorship in Ontario there has been criticism and opposition to it. The result is, for our side, an extraordinarily credible body of work (written and filmed); a large group of competent organizers and spokespeople; and an increasingly well-informed public.

The work that is being done by the people in the anti-censorship movement (feminists, artists, writers, curators and political groups) has helped to alleviate the "fear of the vacuum". People often think that once the government has found, infiltrated and controlled a space, that their subsequent withdrawal from it will leave some sort of no-man's land, or rather an every-man's land, that will go to pornographic weed. The many intelligent counter-arguments that have been offered seem to have alleviated this fear. Now, when the question, *What will happen when the board no longer has the power to cut, ban and treat film?* arises, more people answer that we will have the freedom to develop voices, critiques and eventually strategies to

understand and deal with the *real* problems of representation.

For the *Ontario Open Screenings*, it was decided that all screenings would consist of films and tapes that had never been submitted to the board or of work that had previously been cut or banned by the board when it was submitted. In the latter case, the uncut version would be screened. Each group curated and arranged their own screenings and did any publicity in addition to the coalition poster.

The coalition obtained legal advice and support from a network of sympathetic lawyers belonging to the *Law Union of Ontario*. As well, the coalition hired a publicist to handle the press conference, help organize radio, T.V. and press interviews and to keep updates going out to the press during the week.

Lawyers were in attendance at as many screenings as possible. It was reassuring to have at least one person present who was absolutely clear about the cans and cannots of Theatre Branch Inspectors and police behaviour.

Only one screening was cancelled. The National Film Theatre (Kingston) advertised a screening of *Pretty Baby* which, for some of the press, was the focus of their coverage of the week. But Jim Bennett, Vice-President of Services at Queen's University (on the property of which the theatre is located) forced the cancellation. The coalition had planned to screen a tape of *Pretty Baby* that they got from a home video distribution outlet. Aside from this, and a few substitutions, all other screenings went as planned and went very well. The biggest problems were technical. Public support and attendance was exceptional; many of the screenings were packed.

At all of the screenings of *Six Days* the following statement was shown to (some) people before entering and read out to the entire audience before screenings took place:

any person who works for, is employed directly or indirectly by, or who is in any way acting as an agent or informer for the Ontario Film Review Board, the Attorney General of Ontario, Canada Customs, any police force or government agency, is not permitted on these premises at this time by order of the organizers of this event and any such person must leave now. If any such person remains he or she shall be considered a trespasser.

Admission was denied to some people who may (or may not) have fallen into one of these categories. It wasn't easy for us to be firm about this with people who claimed that they were there to see art. But at least two police (and up to eight police and inspectors) showed up to each screening. Some of them were quite polite. Some even led us to believe that they were glad to leave — that they were only going through the motions of trying to attend. Others though, as the week progressed, became more hostile and irritated by the form and by our refusal to allow them to enter. They tried new tricks and we devised new replies daily.

On several occasions things went beyond harassment and we heard what some people construed as threats. For example, at V/tape where six afternoon screenings were held, unusually high numbers of law enforcers showed up. After several unsuccessful attempts to gain entrance, one policeman said something like this: "If there are clandestine activities going on here I think I should know about it. I just want you to know that you'll be hearing from us again. Do you understand what I'm talking about? I'll be back."

Before the screening at the Development Education Centre of a documentary film entitled *Crime to Fit the Punishment* (about the making of the film *Salt of the Earth*) two policemen became frustrated (or something) and refused to leave the premises. After they said that they didn't know their own names and their threat to stand outside the door all night received no reaction, they said (and I paraphrase) "We are off duty . . . and you are censoring us. We are going to sue you; we'll see you in court." I can see the headlines now ANTI-CENSORSHIP COPS SUE ARTISTS FOR EXCLUDING FROM ILLEGAL SCREENINGS IN CHURCH BASEMENT.

We learned valuable things from these encounters. One, that the police depend first on our ignorance of our rights to gain entry and gather evidence and that by exercising our right to exclude them we will be made to feel as though we are doing something illegal. Were we being paranoid? Were we being threatened? Who knows for sure. What was pretty unanimous though was that everyone that used the form felt tense, harassed and a little unsure about their legal futures.

We also learned that the board/government wasn't going to let these screenings take place without their presence being felt. If we weren't going to go to them for a stamp of approval, they would come to us. The board remained virtually silent before and during the screenings; we can only assume that the police were sent on their behalf, that they were agents of the board, emissaries of the state. This "we deliver" practice punctuated the unfairness and absurdity of this arbitrary intervention into public communication. With this physical presence one no longer had to fantasize about possible benevolence and relative inconsequence. These state-trained and directed agents are big, insistent and humourless. If I can make an empirical observation here; artists, lawyers, film and video makers are, on the whole, a skinnier and shorter bunch than are government inspectors and police.

It wasn't simply that we didn't want police there because their presence would cause unwanted tension and allow them to gather evidence that could be used against individual members of the coalition. The police weren't supposed to be there. They had no reason to be there, no duty to perform. There had been no complaints registered and no warrants issued. Even with the statement we used, they can and do lie. Organizers had to be very careful about them and rely on their own instincts and fears. As a result several people who were not police or inspectors may unfortunately have been excluded from some screenings.

However unfair this was, it was not censorship. Part of the rights of communities to show, distribute and make work, is a right to limit audiences to the people that they choose. They can keep police out, or anyone whom they feel might disrupt the screening. This is not censorship. Those who are excluded can, in most cases, rent the work themselves and show it to anyone that they want. They can publicly challenge the group or person who has excluded them and better yet, they can create their own tapes and films for their own screenings and intentions. Screening organizers do not have a final power of censorship over people. In Ontario only the government has this power.

The necessity of these exclusions is more reason for all of us to support efforts to have these laws changed.

The coalition might have decided to let everyone into the screenings despite the possible consequences, but the objective of the week was NOT to have charges laid against people for exercising their rights (show films, see films, let people see films, etc.). Our objective was to conduct business as usual, as far as possible in the face of the law that threatened our freedom to do so. Our intentions were:

- to offer the greatest number of precedents possible, for creating, distributing and showing works that people feel are important to their communities — without their having to go through the time, expense and insulting process of prior-censorship;
- to show that a group of part-time provincial employees do not constitute a standard community;
- to state that our communities will develop our own standards and do so in the public realm. This project took co-operation from audiences, which in a few cases requires us to turn people away or ask to see their identification (something that we know the police would not show us).

We have been criticised by our neighbours in other provinces for some time now for being over-zealous, paranoid and obsessed. I wonder at what point in the continuous and expanding process of state intervention resulting from a single law, or declaration of territory, that these criticisms will be withdrawn. Will it be when one of their films has cuts demanded of it? Will it be when one of their screenings has to be cancelled? Will it be when one of our studios, artists' spaces or homes is raided by inspectors and police who seize material or lay charges for contravention of community standards or violation of the theatres act?

I ask these questions seriously because I know that I am in the minority, holding the view that, whether they use the law against us *at this time* or not doesn't matter. What matters is that they can at any time. That they already did once, twice or three times were not isolated mistakes. The incidents were evidence that the law is wrong, both by the standards of the system in which these laws were generated and by the standards of the legitimate community groups whose work, goals and right to speak are being threatened.

Actually in the last short while some other

ON MAY 31, 1984 TWO MEN FROM THE THEATRES BRANCH OF THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AND COMMERCIAL RELATIONS SEIZED VIDEO TAPES AND PLAYBACK EQUIPMENT AFTER A VIDEO SCREENING, PART OF THE BRITISH/CANADIAN VIDEO EXCHANGE. THEY STATED THAT THEY NEEDED NO WARRANT. NO CHARGES WERE LAID.



Seizing equipment and tapes from A Space

power of representation out of our hands, the state also takes away our power to deal with and understand the *real* questions of representation. Prior-censorship legislation allows governments to directly and indirectly suppress important subjects — to keep them out of circulation, without having to go through the courts. Prior-censorship is a quick, quiet and cheap alternative to unpopular and noisy post-facto prosecution.

In addition to the inherent problems of prior-censorship legislation (its arbitrary, discretionary, discriminatory powers, the rulings of which occur behind closed doors and are ultimately unappealable), is the precedent that such legislation sets for more of the same. My fear, which is shared by many, is that the government, if it remains unchallenged on these laws, will go on to design similar laws that force groups (for example birth control and abortion information groups, organizations and groups involved in political struggles) to submit their programmes and materials for prior-approval. However inadequate post-facto prosecution may be, it is by far the preferable practice; it is to our advantage at this time to hold on to it.

I'm not sure what to answer people who question the fight on the grounds that there are more important battles to be fought right now; peace, environmental issues, foreign policy etc. I know that it is possible that in facing one day a real bad situation, like the U.S. declaring war on Nicaragua or counting the minutes until the bomb arrives, we will have to answer to our consciences about what we have been doing for the last six months or six years. . . . But this is supposedly a democracy and our right to discuss peace, Latin America and the environment is in jeopardy. Women's right to discuss pornography was threatened by the censor board's ridiculous ruling over *Not a Love Story*. The same is possible for abortion, and other political issues.

We can't let them get away with the effects of these absurd and arbitrary actions. People begin to feel afraid; to doubt their rights to critique; to feel marginalized. These effects are only one step away from the most fundamental censorship — self-censorship.

It is impossible to say, exactly, how the censor board has effected artists' production of films and tapes in the province. To do so would require all kinds of dubious psychologizing about motives and intentions behind work. It isn't fair to the artists. They can, and will continue to, speak for themselves.

During *Six Days* a few artists took the debate out of its print habitat and started to put it on to film/tape. One piece produced specifically for the week of protest was *Citizens Against Censorship*, a tape produced at Trinity Square Video by Ian Murray, Cyne Cobb, Pat Wilson and a group of volunteers. In it several dozen artists, curators and writers delivered their statements to the camera about censorship and particularly the new censorship law. The tape goes on for over an hour and could go on for about six. Because of the way that it is structured, it has the character of a video-magazine that could quite easily develop into a

periodical. I felt that it acted as a kind of heterogenous backdrop to *Six Days*. It's the kind of tape that I'd like to take home to watch intermittently or half-watch at my leisure.

provinces have begun to increase their board's powers. I have been told that Quebec's censor board has approached several video distributors and asked that they submit work. As well, Alberta's censor board has informed the Development Education Centre of Toronto that DEC is now required to submit all films intended for distribution in that province.

None of the members of the coalition have forgotten about or set aside the concerns of women's and minority groups. We can't. As we check through the newspapers for coverage of our actions and events we find that we are sharing space with the coverage of the Keegstra, Zundel and Penthouse cases, etc. More than a few of us have been squirming in astonishment and frustration at the absurdity of such crimes or social problems being squished and squeezed into the inadequate structures of legal process. (Media treatment of such events is its own, though a related problem.) Inevitably, one ends up asking oneself "So, what *can* we do about these problems?" Fortunately, however, no matter how we frame it, or how we design the worst possible case scenario, the option of censorship is never justified as a lesser and necessary evil. However, we are not just throwing the problem into the lap of an archaic and inadequate legal system. We are saying that censorship legislation is not an answer to the problems and shortcomings of the present legal and social system. We are saying: TRY SOMETHING ELSE and we are offering suggestions about what can be tried.

Our government is using this legislation to try to cheaply and visibly dramatize that they are doing something about social ills (violence, sexism, child abuse) when they aren't. Any unquestioning support of the theory that pictures cause these social ills, and that the suppression of their reproduction will decrease their incidence is a lazy and ignorant position (given the amount of material that is currently available to read on the subject). By not challenging these myths and practices we allow the government to force evidence out of view. As well, by taking the

Another work that was produced specifically for the event was a response to the fear of showing work under current conditions. All producers, I believe, were aware of the possible legal problems they could encounter if their work was shown. Most people went ahead despite them. However even the broad base of support and participation was not sufficient to provide the openness for all producers to screen their work. Lynne Fernie, whose work could not have been construed as obscene and therefore would not have been charged under the criminal code, could not offer her work to be screened because of the publicity that would have resulted if the film, which dealt with lesbian sexuality, were seized for contravention of the theatres act (that means because it was not submitted for prior-censorship). If the film were seized and the title and contents made public, like the tapes that were seized last year from A Space, it could have jeopard-

ized the livelihood of some of the people who appeared in it. The film was originally commissioned for a specific community audience and Fernie wanted to keep it that way. A three minute untitled film replaced the one originally requested; this new film discussed the problem of self-censorship and power.

... What could the board do? Telephone bosses? The press? Pass the information on to cops? These are all things that state agencies do to lesbians and gay men. Real politics isn't the letter of the law; real politics is the entire arena of punishment that can be inflicted...

Not screening my film tonight is a painful decision: to withhold work because of the threat that the government can bring harm to women I love has exposed the ugly position the censor board plays in creating our own self-censorship.

from an Untitled film by Lynne Fernie

The third piece that was specifically developed for *Six Days* was entitled *Uncensored Movies* by John Porter. He billed it as "A personal critique of the Ontario Theatres Act using film, video and performance." Pat Wilson, who attended the performance/screening said it was an analysis of the various details of Bill 82 that concentrated on the individual's protest. Porter focused on the effects of the Ontario Theatres Act on super-8 experimental film production. The piece brought the stupidity and irrelevance of some of the laws to the fore, underlining how they can and do effect production.

The effects of the censor board's presence and force on the *lives* of producers and exhibitors are easier to discuss than the effects that it has on their productions. Simply put, people are unsure, angry, and at times, afraid. They are unsure that they can in fact, do and have, what their constitutional rights ensure. This spring was not the first time that artists have consulted with lawyers about owning and showing tapes. Several years ago when the board began to ask subtle questions at video distribution centres and began to harass the Funnel about their "open screenings" several producers, whose tapes included representations of sex and nudity, seriously considered moving their tapes out of their homes and studios. The issue isn't whether this is paranoid behaviour or not. The issue is that they cannot and should not have to try to second guess or independently interpret wishywashy legislation. The law should be clear, and practised clearly.

What we thought was extremely unlikely two years ago, happened this year. Everyone is trying to figure out the legislation and the board's erratic behavior. Producing, owning, distributing, showing and even watching work under these conditions is always flavoured by uncertainty. Just doing what we've been doing for years now requires strategizing and second guessing... Can they... Will they... should they... Is this gratuitous, is that unacceptable, will they charge me or the gallery, with obscenity or contravention of the Theatres Act. Will we win a court case or be given heavy sentences? How far can they get before the appeal? How many groups can they intimidate and force into this awkward position of choosing between fear and compliance?

This is one of the most insidious effects of censor-

ship. Paranoia and fear. The censor board becomes *the* referant for everything that deals with sexuality and politics — the internalized judge of what should be released and what should stay in the workshop.

I attended as many screenings as I could. The screenings of work that had been previously banned or seized by the board has a special poignancy. I found myself periodically wondering if the board would find this part seditious, that part obscene or gratuitous. I felt like I was wearing someone else's morality. This is a sign of a truly colonized mind.

One of these films, *Taxi Zum Klo* is not a great movie and as the representative of the German Parliament who introduced it said, "It's not a big deal." It's a movie about a homosexual and it tries to get in as many related issues as it can without being a think piece. The protagonist is a teacher — a good teacher. He's a good neighbour and a good, but ambivalent, lover. He helps battered women and tutors children with bad grades. He really likes sex and gets a lot of it. One mostly wonders if he gets that much off-screen.

But as I watched it in this context, which is the only context, in Ontario, that we can watch it in, other things came to mind. Like, given the board's reputation for making up community standards, would a film about a homosexual who *remains* a homosexual at the end of the movie make it onto the list of unacceptable or banned subjects, like the topic of children having sex? I would say maybe, and if the answer is maybe then the law should be stopped now, *before* the anti-gay sociological reports and hysteria-play that precede the banning of a subject. If we wait any longer the gay community may again feel compelled to go through things like media confessions and public relations about not wanting to be converted.

The Colombia committee's screening was also significant in this context. The tape originally advertised, which had previously been seized at the border and then returned, was not shown. In its place was a French documentary on Colombia called *Long Marches*. It concentrated on an analysis of the amnesty laws that have recently come into effect. As well there was a slide/text presentation of an El Salvadorian refugee camp in Honduras. Besides being an educational piece, in which the text was read live, it was designed to gain support for the refugees. In other words it was a propaganda piece. I couldn't help wondering about the unclear relationship of the board to other governmental ministries. The censor board has been known to at least restrict political material before, so they obviously see themselves as watchdogs for more than sexual gratuitousness. Canada has so far recognized the refugee status of some Salvadorians, and so long as we maintain our difference from the United States on this matter I'm sure that this sort of material would be okay, but the states are only an hour away... Could the board ever interpret its powers in a way that would allow them to ban, restrict, cut, or copy this sort of material? Those who present such material often have only the tentative status of political refugee. What does the forced submission of

their work to their host government for prior-censorship mean? Channelling such work through a government censor really feels obscene. If we are going to offer political asylum, let's *give* political asylum.

The coalition, as this goes to the printer, still does not know if the new government will continue to have the good sense to leave us alone. Time will tell if they will change the laws or continue to ignore the courts judgement that prior-censorship is unconstitutional.

As of right now, the *Six Days* Coalition is a large and growing province-wide organisation that will continue to keep Ontario screens open and to defend any group or individual who is persecuted for distributing or showing films and tapes in their communities. We will continue to seek new members and endorsements and hope to organize another province-wide action in the fall. In the meantime we hope to gain support from the provincial Liberals and New Democrats in efforts to have the laws changed and to continue to educate the public about the dangers of prior-censorship legislation.

Six Days of Resistance Against the Ontario Censor Board was a popular and political success. Ontario screens are open. Feminists, artists and community groups continue to conduct their business as they always have. If the board and government is serious in their concern about violence, misogyny and hate they will have to find new and *effective* ways to deal with these problems — ways that work and ways that do not threaten the freedom and power of the people that they purport to protect.

Kerri Kwinter is a writer, currently doing graduate studies in Social and Political Thought at York University, Toronto.

Some of the opinions expressed in this article are not shared by all coalition members, however some are shared, and I would like to thank the many people who have contributed directly and indirectly to the report and those who have supported the anti-censorship movement in Ontario.

STATEMENT OF UNITY

We have joined together to protest and resist the Ontario Censor Board (now called the Ontario Film Review Board). Under the board's newly expanded mandate, film and video are the only forms of art and communication that require government approval before they are exhibited or circulated. We know from experience that:

1. While the censor board claims to protect women by "controlling violent pornography," it has a history of cutting and banning feminist and anti-sexist films;
2. While the censor board claims to protect citizens from depictions of exploitative violence, it has cut and banned anti-war films and tapes;
3. While the censor board claims to base its decisions on (unspecified) "community standards," it refuses to consider the context, and audience of any tape or film, thereby ignoring both the intentions of producers and the interests of particular audiences.

Therefore, we agree with the Ontario Supreme Court (1983) and the Court of Appeals (1984), which ruled the Ontario Censor Board is unconstitutional, violating the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We are artists, feminists, community organizers, people who watch and use film and video of contexts to explore and affirm human dignity in all its diversity. During the SIX DAYS OF RESISTANCE, we are exhibiting films and tapes that have not in any way been submitted to the censor board for prior-censorship, because we believe that our various communities can best decide what they want to see for themselves.

We call for the replacement of the Ontario Censor Board with a system of classification, which allows no cutting or banning. This system, commonly used in other provinces and countries, would apply to commercial film in commercial theatres only. While there are many films and tapes that are racist, sexist, violent and misogynist in their intent, we know that the censor board uses its power to silence the legitimate voices of minorities. The censor board is an arbitrary, undemocratic and regressive agency that deprives us all of our constitutional rights and freedoms — our right to speak to each other.

Censorship is a complicated issue for us all. Within this coalition, we have many different perspectives and concerns, based on our particular work and backgrounds. At each of our screenings, we invite you to come and discuss these issues from your own perspective. Join us in our SIX DAYS OF RESISTANCE.

Thursday, April 18

Republic at Art Metropole, Toronto
Performance/screening by Ulysses Carrion

Saturday, April 20

Ed Video, Guelph
War in Flowerland, Marlin Oliveros & Byron Black. Also, Ed Video showed artists' tapes and discussed censorship on the local cable channel during the week.

Sunday, April 21

Lesbian and Gay Youth Toronto at A Space, Toronto
Framed Youth (seized by the Ontario Censor Board, 1984)

Monday, April 22

The International Gay Association Conference Planning Committee, Toronto Women's Bookstore, Gay Asians of Toronto, The Body Politic, Rites Magazine, Glad Day Bookshop, Zami, Gay History Conference Planning Com-

mittee, Lesbian and Gay Pride Day Committee, Gays and Lesbians at the U. of T., International Women's Day Committee, Toronto Rape Crisis Centre, Feminists Against Censorship, The Right to Privacy Committee, Coalition for Gay Rights Ontario, Lesbian Mothers Defense Fund at Medical Sciences Auditorium, U. of T., Toronto. Freeing Our Films: Lesbians and Gays Against Censorship. *Choosing Children* Kim Klausner and Deborah Chasnoff, and *Taxi Zum Klo* Frank Riploh (banned in Ontario)

A Space, Toronto
Open film screening — bring your films, 8 p.m.

Hamilton Artists Inc. and Zone Centre for Experimental Films, Hamilton.
Interior, Vincent Grenier; *Trampoline*, Ellie Epp; *So Is This*, Michael Snow; *Opus 40*, Barbara Sternberg; *Second Impression*, Lorne Marin; *Seeing in the Rain*, Chris Gallagher.

V/Tape, Toronto
The Woman Who Went Too Far and *White Money*, Colin Campbell.

Issaacs Gallery, Toronto
Letter From Fatima, Managua, Jorge Lozano; *Manzana Por Manzana*, Eric Shulte, Mary Anne Yanulis, John Greyson.

Trinity Square Video, Toronto
The Radical Will, Susan Mackay; *Darn Those Hands*, Robin Collyer and Shirley Wittasalo, *T.V. Love*, Elizabeth Chitty; *Casting Off*, Jane Northey; *That Evening I Was Walking Home Alone*, Yvonne Dignard.

Tuesday, April 23

White Water Gallery, North Bay
E. Robert Forget; Not a Love Story, Bonnie Shere Klein.

A Space, Toronto
Audio Visual Installation/Opening, David Rokeby.

Music Gallery, Toronto
Rice Scented in Our Absence, *Third World Two Poems*, Pam Haines; *Sax Island*, Eric Metcalfe & Hank Bull; *Larry Dubin at the Western Front*, Hank Bull & Al Mattes; *Confused: The Video*, Paul Wong.

National Film Theatre, Kingston

Pretty Baby, Louis Malle (banned in Ontario). Cancelled by Queens University.

V/Tape, Toronto
Waiting for Lancelot, and *Some Call It Bad Luck*, Lisa Steele.

Trinity Square Video, Toronto
Revealed Silence, Ric Amis; *Straightjacket*, Heather Allin, *The Fourth Evidence is the Complete Absence of Mercy*, Dimitrije Martinovic and Christian Morrison; *Marriage, Part I*, Sally Dundas and Terry McGlade, *Timmins (Ont.)*, Geoffrey Shea; *The First Time*, Nancy Reid.

Wednesday, April 24

Trinity Square Video, Toronto
Citizens Against Censorship, collaborative tape by Ian Murray, Cyne Cobb, Trinity members, and Ontario citizens.

The Funnel, Toronto
Thinking of Leaving Ontario? Travelogues by Artists: Phonograph, Mike Hollboom; *No Job: Propaganda Film*, Munro Ferguson and Pascal Sharp; 69.8, Gary McLaren; *I Must Keep My Lips Together and My Teeth Apart*, Karen Saunders; *How Do You Keep 'Em Down on the Farm, After They've Seen Paris?*, Micky Fontana; *152 Picture Postcards*, Nicola Wojewoda; *Ross McLaren Around the World Here and There Now and Then*, (Unedited version) Ross McLaren; *Long Marches*, documentary on Colombia, and slide show on El Salvador.

Embassy Cultural House, Forest City Gallery, Farm Labour Action Group (FLAG), London Filmmakers Co-op, and CAR London at Embassy Cultural House, London
To Pick is Not to Choose, John Greyson and The Tolpuddle Farm Labour Information Committee, *The Oblivion Seekers*, Jamelie Hassan, Jerry Collins, Lillian Allen, and Wyn Geleynse, *Train Piece*, Murray Favro, Peter Denny, and Jerry Collins, and *Perishables. Snow Funnels, In Transit*, an untitled film by London Filmmakers Co-op members.

V/Tape, Toronto
Vancouver Canada and *Paradise Lost*, Kim Tomczak.

Toronto Community Videotex, Toronto
The History of Communications in Ontario, Pixel Productions; *Canadian Artists and Telidon*, Paul Petro; Tape by Tom Leonhardt.

Thursday, April 25

Development Education Centre, Toronto
Crime to Fit the Punishment, documentary about making of *Salt of the Earth*.

Forest City Gallery, London
Rameau's Nephew, Michael Snow.

Gallery 940, Women's Art Resource Centre, Women's Media Alliance,

Women's Cultural Building, Sparkes Gallery, Emma Productions at Gallery 940, Toronto
Escape, Phyllis Waugh; *Art for Whom?*, Carla Murray; *Selling Out*, I.S. Red Players and Nancy Nicol; *Erotic Text*, Madeleine Duff; *You Can't Take A Picture Where There Ain't No Light*, Kerri Kwinter; *Untitled*, Lynne Fernie; *Lani Maestro*, Margaret Moores.

The Ritz, Toronto
The Jewish Wife, Cayle Chernin; *Mother Daughter, Mother Daughter*, Sally Dundas; *The Mississippi Tapes*, Jane Wright; *Old Dresses*, Tess Payne.

Southern Edge Underground, Port Colborne
A Journey with Scott and Leo, Leo Talving; *Tickle People*, *Sunset Voyage*, *Circus Girl*, *Uranium Beach* and *Moon Message*, Larry Rosnuk.

S.A.W. Gallery, Ottawa
Lust for Fame, David MacLean; *The Art of Receiving Data*, Geoffrey Shey; *Because I know and You Don't*, Paul Landon; *Beach Party Blow-Up*, Michael Balsar; *Penultimate Day for the Peace Camp*, *Let's Party with Ronnie*, *Introducing the Kings of Sming*, Bill White; *Hitin' Up*, Chris Mullington; Untitled tapes by Ottawa University students.

V/Tape, Toronto
Blue Moon and *The Story of Red*, Rodney Werden.

Trinity Square Video, Toronto
Stronger Than Before, Marusia Bociurkiw and Ruth Bishop; *Trio*, Andrew James Paterson, *Points of View*, Michael Banger; *Beaware*, Gary Kibbins; *Industrial Track: Welland Canal*, John Watt.

Friday, April 26

Trinity Square Video, Toronto
Citizens Against Censorship, Collaborative tape by Ian Murray, Cyne Cobb, Trinity members and Ontario citizens.

Mercer Union, Toronto
It Depends, Paulette Phillips; *Once Upon a Time*, Randy and Berenice; *My Mother Makes Soup Noodles*, *My Father Cuts a Simple Thread*, Dimitrije Martinovic; *Letter from Fatima, Managua*, Jorge Lozano.

K.A.A.I., Kingston
The Airplane Film, Betty Ferguson; *Surface and Tala*, Nicholas Kendall, *Blecker Street*, Emil Kolompar; *The Mountainays*, Frank Cole.

Artists in Resistance Ottawa (ARO), with Focus Magazine at Gallery 101, Ottawa
Cold Electric Blue, *Suction*, Paul Landon; *One Big Change*, *New York Depression*, Michael Balsar; *Manhattan*, Mano Morin; *Ritual of a Wedding Dress*, Wendy Walker; *On The Line*, James Mclean; *The Lovers*, Paul Couillard; *TBA*, Rhonda

Abrahams.

Lakehead University Film Society and KAM Theatre, Thunder Bay
Some Call It Bad Luck, Lisa Steele; *Jungle Boy*, John Greyson.

Womanspirit Gallery, London
Films by Maya Deren.

V/Tape, Toronto
The Ebb and Flow and *Icarus*, Danielle Depeyre.

Saturday, April 27

YYZ and Gallery 76 at YYZ, Toronto
Jungle Boy, John Greyson; *The Bridge*, Nicholas Jenkins; Untitled Videotext work, Rob Flack.

The Funnel, Toronto
Performance, film/video: Uncensored Movies, John Porter.

V/Tape, Toronto
Lunar Reappraisal, Clive Robertson; *The Last Screening Room: A Valentine*, Vera Frenkel; *Orientations*, Richard Fung; *The Fountainhead*, Brendan Cotter; *The Person by the Person*, Shalhevet Goldhar & Meg Thornton; *Television Intervention*, Susan McEachern.

Monday, April 29

Shaw Festival, Niagara on the Lake
The Woman Who Went Too Far, Colin Campbell; *Letter From Fatima, Managua*, Jorge Lozano; *Framed Youth*, Lesbian and Gay Youth Project.

Thursday, May 2

Art Metropole, Toronto
A reading from *Disposables* and a screening of the video-document *Passports of Love* by Andrew Paterson.

DAILY EVENTS

Artculture Resource Centre, Toronto
Multiple Reruns: Girl Meets Boy. Girl Kills Boy, Rhonda Abrahams.

Pages Bookstore, Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre and The Funnel Experimental Film Theatre at Pages, Toronto
Rear-screen projection of films in the bookstore window on selected evenings. *Kisses*, Betty Ferguson; *Work, Bike and Eat*, Keith Lock and Jim Anderson; *Red Ball in California*, Martha Davis; *Assassination Footage*, David Bennell.

Artspace, Peterborough
M.I. Wired R.V., Chris MacGee; *Under Interrogation. Theme and Variations*, (Work in progress), Dennis Tourbin; *Artspace Steps Up*, Bryan Follis; *First Annual Peterborough Bongo Jamerama A-Go-Go*, Nick Hooper; *Apocalypse Box*, Peter Wikler; *Oracle*, Stacy Speigel.

N.Y. INDEPENDENT CINEMA

Berenice Reynaud

ONE OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS OF independent cinema in New York is that of its distribution: alternative spaces, art galleries, and universities do not constitute a market. In the eighties, with the advent of reaganomics, money has tended to become scarce, while the cost of film production has increased. The two main sources of government funding, at federal (National Endowment for the Arts) and state (New York State Council on the Arts) levels, have meager resources to mete out amongst the full spectrum of independent filmmaking.

Many outstanding filmmakers often spend five to six years raising enough money for their next movie, a new generation, feeling excluded in advance from the funding sources and distribution network of the "avant-garde", has strived to create its own milieu and its own market. With these realities in mind, I would like to take a look here at what is happening in the New York independent film scene.

It started, back in the seventies, with a "movement" whose inheritance is now refused by the very filmmakers that generated it, but whose spirit is still alive in the clubs and dives of the East Village.

The Super-8 Movement is an example. In December the *Limbo Lounge*, a club in the East Village, organized a three-day "downtown festival" showing exclusively slide-shows and super-8; some of the best movies were later picked up by the programming director of the *Collective for Living Cinema*, an alternative showcase for avant-garde movies in the south of Soho, where they were screened to a sold-out house. So was the *Kitchen*, a Soho multi-media alternative space, when it programmed four programs of

"Super-8 Motel" in March: a new generation of super-8 filmmakers is ready to invade "the scene".

If the sophisticated abstractions of the conceptual movies produced in the sixties and early seventies by visual artists and structuralist filmmakers were striving to reduce or eliminate human presence on the screen, the "figure" made a roaring come-back with the New Wave. The characters populating these movies — "icons" rather than signifiers — are "stars" or "personages" reminding us of the golden years of Andy Warhol's *Factory* or Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*: East Village gallery directors, "new rock" musicians, filmmakers, poets, critics, professional "dominatrices", artists, graduates from Andy Warhol's or John Waters' gang etc.

Since the same characters kept appearing from film to film, "playing" the same part, they became, along with the crummy little East Village apartment, the outrageous clothing, the girls' shrill voices and the guys' cynical looks, the elements of a grammar with limited permutations, whose presence was enough to signify that the filmmaker was part of a certain "scene".

At the beginning, filmic "écriture" was minimal and not exactly rigorous — since the filmmaker's inexperience, the easy access to equipment, and the low cost of shooting in super-8 made movie-making a rather playful activity. In some cases a motionless camera was just planted in front of people who were "fooling around". Eric Mitchell's *Kidnapped* (1978) is composed of long shots of various characters moving about in a small apartment; when the camera runs out of film, the "performers" do not stop the "action", and the shooting resumes with a jump cut

and minutes of dialogue abruptly missing from the sound-track.

This aesthetic, if inspired by Warhol's first films, is also indebted to conceptual and minimal art: behind representation there is nothing; human body is, at best, a "medium" like any other, at worst an object lost in the midst of a collection of objects. It is significant that many "New Wave" filmmakers are art school drop-outs or reconverted visual artists. This first, radical aesthetic, however, was incompatible with the desire to tell a story, and, even in the golden age of super-8, one could notice centrifugal tendencies.

First, several filmmakers (Amos Poe, Michael Oblowitz, Manuel de Landa, Jim Jarmusch) either started working directly in 16mm or did not show their early movies. Since the beginning, their work has shown a rigorously composed image, a coherent and complex editing and, in de Landa's case, an extreme visual sophistication. Manuel de Landa first became known through his 16mm shorts, *The Itch Scratch Itch Cycle* (1977), *Incontinence: A Diarrhetic Flow of Mismatches* (1978), and *Raw Nerves: A Lacanian Thriller* (1980). He later re-edited some of his early super-8 footage, then directed two super-8 shorts, *Isms*, and *Judgment Day*. Since he had not received any funding since his beginnings as a filmmaker, he was seriously considering switching to video, but having recently received a New York State grant, might work again in super-8.

Second, more and more filmmakers are attracted to narrative structures. Sometimes a conflict emerges between the desire of the image and the desire of the story which is, after all, in psycho-

Lydia Lunch in Scott and Beth B's *Vortex*

analytic terms, normal, since the first one expresses, beyond the codes of modernism, a specular fascination for the body (of the Mother)¹ and the second, the return of the repressed narrative, and consequently the necessity to pay one's debt to the Father.²

The tension between these two poles was exemplified in the late seventies by the films of Vivienne Dick, Scott and Beth B., and Amos Poe. Dick, who was working in super-8 only, when she was living in New York, produced extraordinary movies centered on female characters (*Beauty Becomes the Beast*, *She Got Her Gun All Ready*, *Liberty's Booty*). Unravelling unconventional,

¹see Julia Kristeva's "Motherhood according to Bellini," in *Language and Desire*.

²Lacan, Rosolato et al. stress the relationship between the resolution of the Oedipus complex and the development of narrative structures.

broken-up narrative lines, they revolved around conflictual situations, shot in an expressionistic and decadent style (oblique angles, violent and artificial colors...). Back in her native Ireland, Dick directed a 16mm feature, *Visibility Limited*, a very mastered narration/meditation/collage on the political situation between Protestants and Catholics.

Amos Poe's last 16mm movie, *Subway Riders* (produced and shot by Johanna Heer) owes more to an intelligent use of a *doppelgänger* situation (the role of the mad saxophonist being performed both by composer/musician John Lurie, of the *Lounge Lizards*, and Poe himself) and an outstanding treatment of colors during beautiful night scenes than on the story's internal logicity. It comprises, however, some of the themes that

made a success of his earlier *Foreigner* (also masterfully shot, but in black and white): the fascination/repulsion for New York City, the lonely flight of a doomed hero, alienated from himself and from the others, a gallery of intriguing female characters, the impossible and ever-missed communication, the final, quasi-sensual embrace of death.

Scott and Beth B's movies are also defined by a tension between a careful visual composition — they acknowledge the influence of German expressionism, film noirs of the forties, and artist Ida Applebroog (Beth's mother's work — and the search for a narrative form. Formally speaking, *Letters to Dad* (1979) is their best super-8 movie: a series of short static shots where, one by one, people on whom such a violent light is shed that they are no longer recognizable, read excerpts sent by the cultists to Reverend Jim Jones before their collective suicide in Jonestown in 1978. *The Offenders* (1979), which is one of my favorites, tries to recapture the spirit of the early *serials*, from Feuillade to the *Perils of (nasty) Pauline*, with the intricate story of a rebellious daughter, her lesbian friends, her punk enemies and/or accomplices, and her wicked bourgeois father.

The conflict between visual and narrative concerns created a space where other forms of cinema developed. In particular, during the second part of the seventies, a corpus of theories borrowed from (lacanian) psychoanalysis, (althusserian) marxism, (Juliet Mitchell's) feminism, and (Barthes' and Eco's) semiotics, became quite popular in the cinema studies department and the avant-garde circles. And so, some filmmakers endeavoured a modernist deconstruction of texts and history. Among the movies thus produced, one has to mention *Sigmund Freud's Dora*, collectively directed by filmmakers Anthony McCall and Andrew Tyn-dall, and film theorists Claire Pajaczowska and Jane Weinstock (a significant division of labour between the sexes!). The film attempts to analyze the historical and sexual misunderstanding between Freud and Dora, within the context of the patriarchal order.

Another film-as-reading: Leandro Katz's *Splits* cuts up Borges' *Emma Zunz* story into small elements, and depicts female identity as a self divided by capitalistic alienation. Through the

Filmmaker Su Friedrich with her mother, from *The Ties that Bind*

character of a woman, Katz deals with his own problems with the Father (whose text he tears apart and digests, inverting its parameters, dodging some of its episodes, and presenting it as a truncated version on a divided screen) as well as with dominant ideology (his "cannibalization" of Borges is visually echoed by the obsessional image of Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Children* which, in turn, generates in the spectator's mind, the picture of Moloch in Lang's *Metropolis*). The Father is a "bad" father, equated with "the masters" of the current social structure. The only way open to "Emma" is political murder and terrorism.

It is worth noting, in fact, that political terrorism inspired several important movies at about the same time in New York: Scott and Beth B's *G. Man*, Bette Gordon's *Empty Suitcases* and Yvonne Rainer's *Journeys from Berlin*.

Leslie Thornton's movies combine the density, the opacity of an image whose content and fascination are never completely elucidated, with a theoretical investigation on woman's place in relation to language. In her *Jennifer, Where Are You?* (1981), a little girl smears her face with red lipstick, strikes matches, smiles, while, on the sound-track, a man's voice (her father's?) repeats, again and again, the

title question. *Adynata* (1983) starts with two black and white photographs of a Chinese Mandarin and his family taken by an English traveller in 1861: it is a meditation on the linguistic and physical codes (make-up, bound feet, metaphorical equation between women and flowers, fascination for the enclosed world of Japanese gardens and Turkish harems, etc...) which construct "the woman"³ as an Other in a position of subjection. Far from being an "un-dimensional" militant movie, *Adynata* examines women's unconscious involvement in this construction, their own fascination for a superficial and facile eroticism of the Other, combined with their partial exclusion from the field of discourse (it is not possible to be a sign and manipulate signs at the same time). Like the multi-layered images of this complex movie, the sound-track is extremely dense, expounding a wealth of cultural references — from American pop music to Chinese operas — in a "cacophony that engenders muteness", as the filmmaker was quoted in Jonathan Rosenbaum's *The Front Line 1983* (Arden Press). Her own voice is significantly present as the onomatopoeias uttered by a madwoman — the

³In *Encore*, Lacan systematically writes "the woman", to signify that, in so much as she is the Other, the Woman exists only as a gap within male discourse, as a "not-whole". This is important to understanding Thornton's intellectual position in *Adynata*.

ultimate figure of the Other excluded from discourse in the private fascination she creates.

Su Friedrich is another filmmaker who endeavours to bring together experimental filmic text and female/feminist discourse. *Gently Down the Stream* (1981) presents, in black and white, fourteen dreams, excerpted from eight years of personal diary. The dream's *latent content* is scratched word by word, sometimes letter by letter, on the surface of the film emulsion; the images ("manifest content") are not a commentary of these words but are there, according to the filmmaker, "to suggest certain desires or movements" (*Heresies*, No. 16). She recently completed *The Ties That Bind* (1984), a 55 min. experimental documentary. It is a questioning of the life history of her mother who, growing up in Nazi Germany, was forbidden to go to school and then brutally "drafted" in the middle of the night for having retained her friendship with Jewish classmates and refusing to join the Hitler Youth. Later, having lived through the mixed blessing of the Allied Occupation, she marries an American; he takes her to New York where she ends up going back to work as a secretary to pay for his tuitions, and is eventually deserted after fifteen years of marriage. The filmmaker's presence is asserted as a void:



Christine cannot repress her curiosity about the male spectators in *Variety* (director Bette Gordon)

her questions to her mother are not heard but, as in her previous movie, scratched on the film. Friedrich tries to compare her mother's modest and stubborn rejection of Nazism to her more structured political involvement as a feminist and peace activist. This courageous and often disturbing film leaves some questions unresolved (the legitimacy of such a comparison, for example, or the role of the filmmaker's father), but it succeeds in juxtaposing formalist concerns, feminist awareness, and a reflection of Germany's place in history.

Another feminist filmmaker, Bette Gordon, directed a series of deconstructed collaged movies (*Empty Suitcases*, *Everybody's Woman*) which were questioning the "male gaze" and the dominant representation of female sexuality, before reaching international fame with *Variety*. Reverting the usual parameters of feminist theory (male-subject-voyeur-sadist/female-object-exhibitionist-victim) Gordon's heroine is a woman who returns men's looks to discover — what? — an empty space. Moonlighting at the box-office of a cheap porno movie theatre,

FUSE

Christine cannot repress her curiosity about the male spectators, their tastes and habits, the male bondage created by the "skin trade" milieu (peep-shows, go-go bars, porn shops, etc.). Not only does Christine invade these sanctuaries, provoking rather embarrassed reactions among the customers, not only does she deliver, in a deadpan manner, pornographic stories to her reluctant boyfriend (the dialogue is signed Kathy Acker), but she starts following one of the regulars of "Variety". He is a restaurant-owner-cum-mafioso, involved in some shady dealings in the fish market and obscure transactions in boring New Jersey motels. It is a disappointing chase — save for a porno magazine that Christine snatches from the man's travelling bag, *there is nothing to see*.

So, what do men see when they look at women? Maybe, what they see is that these women see them looking. So, the next logical step would be for Christine to give that man *something to look at*, so that he could, in turn, show her something. And what would he want to look at, if not another porn picture? And so Christine, gaudily made up, in high heels, garter belt and black stockings, calls her flabbergasted "prey" for a date. The last image of the film: a deserted street. Neither of them has showed up. Maybe there is not an equality of gaze after all, and between men and women the eye-contact is never made.

Also generated by the conflict between image and narration is the transformation of the notion of "performance", and the reappearance of the need for "real acting" in independent cinema. The filmmaker who is at the origin of this reflection is Yvonne Rainer. As a dancer and choreographer in the sixties, she was one of the influential figures of the Judson Group. Her compositions included daily actions (walking, running, carrying objects) and her "performers" represented nothing but the sum of the actions they carried out during the show. Her concerns were quite similar to those of minimal artists of the time. There was, however, a major difference: Rainer's raw material is *the performer*, and her work deals with the body, the dialectic acting/non-acting, the representation/expression of a text. She left choreography for film because she needed a medium that "could express the new meaning of (her) work, i.e. the emo-

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tions".⁴ Film, through montage and disjunction between image and sound, can also raise the following questions: "Who speaks?", "Whose story is this?", "What is the relationship between that body that moves and this text being emitted?"

Rainer works both with professionals (dancers in her first films, actors in the last one) and non-professionals, which, like the occasional appearance of performers with a foreign accent, creates an impression of heterogeneity, of stylistic "inconsistency". "Disjunctive techniques" and "alienation effects" are the result of a very interesting work on the performance itself, which makes impossible any identification between actor and character, and breaks the unicity of the narrative structure. The same "part" will be enacted by several performers: the central couple in *Lives of Performers* (1972) or *Film About A Woman Who* (1974) is played in each film by two different pairs of performers (which allows for humorous or perverse permutations); the heroine of *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976) appears first as a buxom blonde lion-tamer on a black and white snapshot, then as several young women and finally as the filmmaker herself wearing a glittering circus bikini, in bed with her sailor lover; the psychoanalyst in *Journeys From Berlin* (1980) is alternatively a middle-aged man, a young woman with a German accent, and a little English boy; *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985) is played by two professional actors (one of them is Bill Raymond, of the experimental theatre group *Mabou Mines*).

Also, Rainer never complies entirely to a genre (genre being the Trojan Horse that allows many to deal with narration in spite of their modernist training); she uses the codes, habits, and conventions of performance art, melodrama, soap opera, thriller... and mixes them with her own brand of realism. "What I am interested in", she says, "is the extreme difference between these melodramatic situations, on one hand, and those fragments of completely ordinary life, on the other. The dialogue between abstraction and drama is still very exciting to me." (from a conversation, February 1982). Her movies collage original scenes and

⁴From a letter to Nan Pienne, January 27, 1973. Reproduced in Yvonne Rainer: *Work: 1961-73* (The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, 1974).

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quotations; but the quotations themselves are always on a different register, they are not homogeneous with one another. They include various modes — from simple visual indexes (photos, excerpts from mainstream movies) to elaborate re-creations (reconstruction of stills from Pabst's *Lulu* with the characters of *Lives of Performers*), from written texts within the film (excerpts from the *Letters from Soledad* glued on the filmmaker's face while she is part of an ambiguous erotic triangle in *Film About A Woman Who*) to various forms of voice-over (Rainer trying to tell her own (dead) mother the story of a pre-war German movie she had just seen, in *Journeys*; New York intellectuals reading to each other, while cooking dinner, from the memoirs of 19th Century anarchists, also in *Journeys*; etc...)

In her most recent film, *The Man Who Envied Women*, Rainer goes one step further in her attempt to deal at the same level with emotional (and sometimes extremely private) material and formalist concerns. The relationship between men and women, their attraction, repulsion, hatred, love, missed encounters, mismatches... are one of Rainer's major concerns as a filmmaker. *The Man* — called Jack Deller, for 'Jack, tell her' — is a self-satisfied but "sensitive" womanizer who is left by his second wife (of whom we only have a quick glance, from the back), lectures his students on French theory, talks to his shrink "about his sex life", and listens unobserved to women talking to each other in public places. Most of his lines are entirely made up of quotations: Michel Foucault and American scholars on sex and power, New York intellectuals on art and politics, Raymond Chandler's letters on women... When he talks to an unseen psychoanalyst — theoretically seated where the spectator is — scenes from classical film noirs or melodramas (*Gilda*, *Dead Reckoning*, *Caught*, *Dark Victory*...) appear on a screen behind him, showing how "real men" have handled women in our cultural past. At the same time, the woman, present only as a voice (that of dancer Trisha Brown) comments on one of her dreams and the artwork she has left behind her, and expounds on the contradictions of her life as an artist, as a political activist and as a woman discovering the "extreme sadness" and the possibility of living "not without men, but without a man", finally in-

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venting the word "a-womanness".

Another reflection on the notion of performance in film was born out of the great number of "dance films" produced since the late seventies. While some pretend to nothing more than documenting a live concert, others are original creations where the choreographers/filmmakers use the conceptual concerns of post-modern dance to create new filmic forms. One of the best examples are the films produced in collaboration between Merce Cunningham, Charles Atlas, and Elliot Kaplan (*Fractions*, *Channels/Inserts*, *Coastal Zone*). The camera jumps from one spot to another, playfully following the dancers, who start a gesture in one space and continue it in another, under a different camera angle: they have to keep dancing, by involving the camera as an evasive and unpredictable partner. The virtuosity of the camera work, the brilliance of the special effects (split screen, baroque editing) are a powerful stylistic counterpoint to the dancer's talent and Cunningham's inventive use of forms.

Dancer/choreographer Yoshiko Chuma produces either movies initially designed to accompany her "multimedia performances" (*The School of Hard Knocks*, *Champing at the Bit*, *Ragged Valley*) or heroi-comical virtuoso exercises about the deconstruction of image, narration, movement... (*Splish Splash*, *Commercial Eruption*). Like her performances, her films are bursting with humour and energy; they alternate bits of narration, quotation from popular culture (television, rock, advertising, mainstream cinema) and comical moments based, like Jacques Tati's films, on gesture alone, on the skillful interaction between performers and settings (subway, streets, diners, escalators, houses, landscapes, etc.) or with more or less reluctant objects (like the two-foot tables in *The School of Hard Knocks*).

Ericka Beckman is one of the rising stars of experimental cinema in the eighties, and her movies are often shown as part of dance film program-

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mes, because they share some of the basic concerns of the genre: how to create a narration without resorting to the traditional means of doing so, from the sole combination of rhythm, color, props, movement, music, drawings, and special effects (double exposure and matte technique)? Having first worked in super-8, she switched to 16mm with *You The Better*, in which objects brilliantly painted with the Bauhaus colors (red, blue, yellow) appear and disappear, according to the framing and editing pace. Performers establish relationships based on a collective game that loosely resembles baseball. Such an aggressive, cheerful competitiveness can be read as the filmmaker's vision of American society.

Since 1966, Meredith Monk has directed or co-directed twelve films and videos — some of them presented as part of her own or Ping Chong's performances — the first *Quarry* (1975), *Humboldt's Current* (1977), the shorter version of *Ellis Island* (1979) — some as films standing on their own. Her best achievement in "pure cinema" is the 30 minute version of *Ellis Island* (1981), shot on this desolate island a few miles from Manhattan where the immigrants were sorted like cattle (and many of them brutally sent back to their original countries) under the serene gaze of the Statue of Liberty. Monk dressed the members of her company to reproduce old pictures of the time — such as Lewis Hine's famous portraits of Eastern European immigrants. The film combines visual quotations, beautiful camera movements concealing and then revealing groups of dancers performing in a large space, and humorous shots of the "linguistic assimilation classes" inflicted upon the immigrants.

Another performance artist involved in cinema, Stuart Sherman, produces small conceptual exercises of a few seconds or a few minutes (*Scotty and Stuart*, *Tree Film*, *Hand/Water*, *Baseball/TV*, *Roller-Coaster/Reading*, *Theatre Piece*, *Flying*, *Chess*, *Fish Film*, *Portrait of Benedicte Pesle*, *Mr. Ashley proposes* etc.) in which he reorganizes

the world according to the laws of implicit "plays on words" (that are also "plays on image" and "plays on editing"). Sherman appears often (but not necessarily) in his movies, fixing the camera with a look of absolute concentration which has often been compared to both that of a child involved in an absorbing game, and that of a catholic priest celebrating mass. If he is, as a live performer, prisoner of his own collections of objects (see my article "Stuart Sherman: Object Rituals," *October* No. 8), he is, as a filmmaker, a first-rate manipulator, playing with framing, editing, light, special effects and, in his latest movies, with color and sound, to create "sentences" that make us laugh but whose secret meaning is never completely revealed.

Either as a result of the influence of dance and performance films, or because they needed a physical support for their narratives, the most talented of the "post-New Wave" filmmakers have re-discovered how important it is to work with professional performers. Independent cinema has thus two options. The first, since movie stars are expensive, is to draw from the inexhaustible crowd of television actors. It is, unfortunately, difficult to find something else than a very flat, standard, soap-opera-like mode of acting, and *Alpha-bet City*, Amos Poe's first 35mm feature suffers from such a casting mistake. The movie has the same visual and poetic qualities as his previous work — in particular an hallucinatory scene of horror, humiliation, and police arrest in an empty building reconverted into a drug-peddling center, which reminds us both of Eisenstein and Dante) — but, to say the least, the acting is not very convincing. So the story, in spite of its linearity, is less interesting than the dead-end mysteries of *The Foreigner* or the complicated plot of *Subway Riders*.

With their first 16 mm feature, *Vortex*, Scott and Beth B. have tried to combine the best of both worlds: a young actor they had seen in an independent movie shown on television (James Russo), and two East Village "stars" (singer/performer Lydia Lunch, and actor/painter Bill Rice). The different modes of acting between the three heroes are used to translate the harsh conflicts that oppose them. Rice is the tyrannical and childish director of a corporation manufacturing some secret weapon, and Russo is his unscrupulous, paranoid, and ambitious assis-

tant. When a politician about to request an inquiry on the activities of the corporation is murdered in his Lower Manhattan office, Lunch, a very bitchy and very sexy private eye, is hired to investigate. Most of the characters' interaction takes place in the confined, oppressive, blue-grey atmosphere of a claustrophobic image, and the final scene — a rape followed by a struggle to death on top of a skyscraper — is a compelling mixture of film noir pessimism and East Village camp mythology.

The second option open to the "new narrative" filmmakers is to remain faithful to their "milieu" and collaborate with "downtown" actors, trained by years of work with experimental theater groups: *Mabou Mines*, *Ridiculous Theater Company*, *Squat Theater*, *Wooster Group*. These actors know how to produce outstanding results on a shoestring budget, and they can read or "deconstruct" a text, in the "post-modern" tradition; their acting has a depth and scope unknown to television actors, without being melodramatic or hyper-realistic.

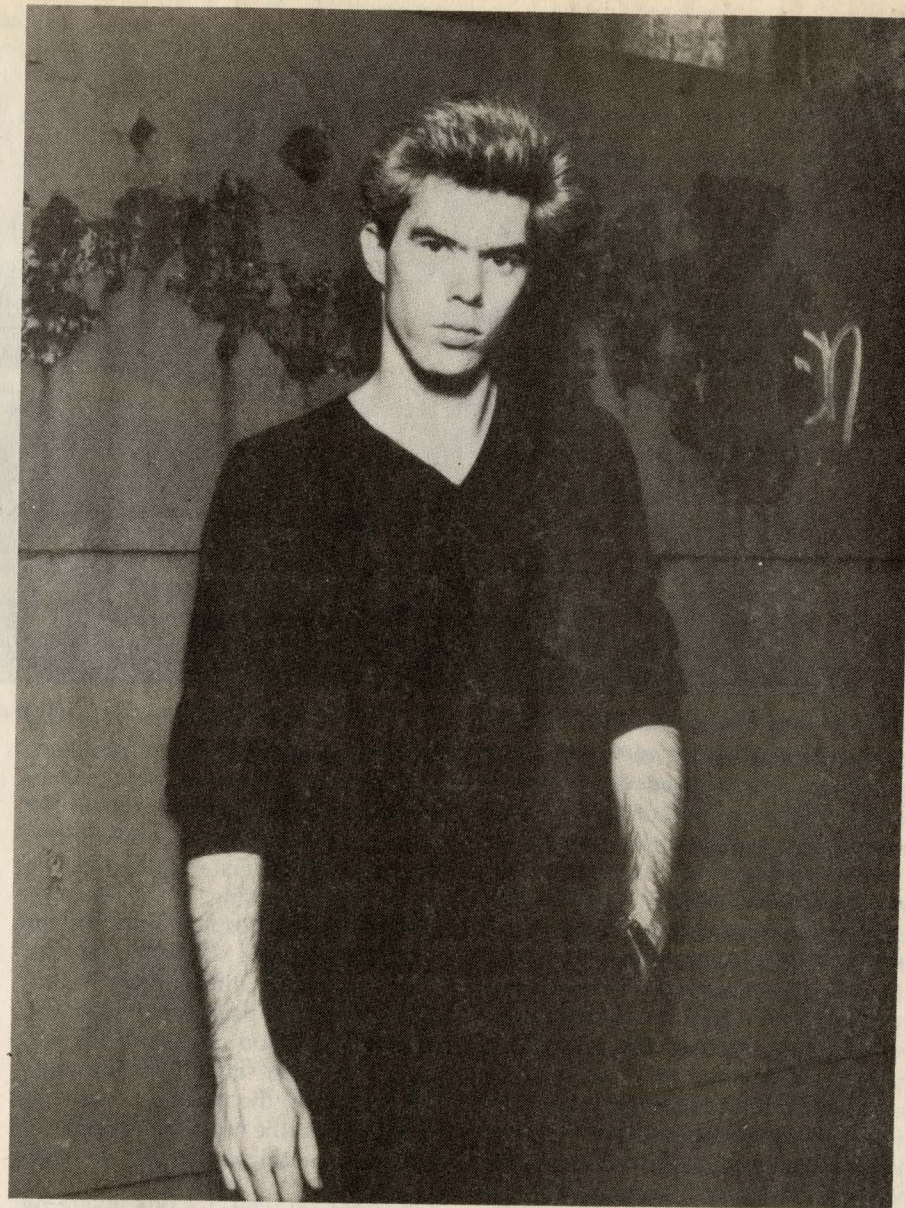
Mark Rappaport is one of the main independent filmmakers having consistently worked with professional actors for years, and he tends to reuse the same people (Michael Burg, Randy Danson, Marilyn Jones, Charles Ludlam, Ellen McElduff). Acknowledging the influence of such classical masters as Wilder, Sturges, Hawks, Capra, La Cava, Lubitsch and Mankiewicz, Rappaport directs brilliant, sophisticated, bittersweet comedies of manners with convoluted plots. If his heroes fall in love, become depressed, or mad with jealousy, etc., they are much more interested in analyzing the dialectical development of their feelings or in talking endlessly about them in a deadpan manner, than in expressing them to their partners.

The characters of *Casual Relations* (1973), *Mozart in Love* (1975), *Local Color* (1977), *The Scenic Route* (1978), *Imposters* (1979) and *Chain Letters* (1985) are generally too "civilized" to aggress one another physically (although the crazed Viet Nam vet and the homophobic mercenary soldier in his last film do end up killing — the former his assumed rival, the later his ex-male lover) but violence is omnipresent — in the tartness of the dialogue, and in the way the director manipulates his characters, pitting them one against the other, within a network of

oblique looks and visual tension. The stylization of the actors' performance, delivery and spatial positioning is echoed by a "mise en abyme" of the narration through vanishing painted backdrops, slide projections, quotations from classical painting, and the obsessional, ironical repetition of iconographical "clues" which seem to address the spectator and tell him, like Rimbaud, that "real action is somewhere else". On the other hand, Rappaport constantly undermines the psychological aspects of the acting, resorting to various forms of "alienation effect", as he says, "I like the fact that you can create a discrepancy between what characters say and what you see of them" (quoted from Rosenbaum's *The Front Line*, 1983).

Rappaport's last completed film, *Chain Letters*, intertwines two plots: a government scheme to spread a new form of virus (is it an allusion to AIDS?) via a network of visually-oriented chain letters; and the story of nine characters (plus two hookers) who have various forms of hetero- and homo-sexual affairs with one another — in a cool, detached way, where bitchiness, irony, and self-complacency play a more important part than sex itself, where it is easier to say "I loathe you" than "I love you". The two plots intersect not only because the heroes keep sending to others (rivals, hated siblings, ex-lovers or spouses, passing friends) the supposedly contaminated "chain postcards" as an ironical coda, but because the film maintains some ambiguity about the reality of the plot. It might all be a paranoid delusion of the shell-shocked Viet Nam vet. One of his girl friends (they both leave him towards the middle of the film) functions as a metonymy for the entire movie: she is unable to decide between two men *who are brothers*; behind the superficial appearance of freedom given by our permissive society, we are locked in — "chained" to — our private fantasies, and are all the more alone. This is a movie about the transience of desire, the emptiness of eroticism, the ridiculous aspects of "the human comedy", but also about the unquenchable needs we have of others. "I was unhappy with you, but I am so much unhappier without you", reflects the Viet Nam vet, alone in bed.

It is on the fringes of the "post-New-Wave" that the come-back of the actor is all the more remarkable. Since his

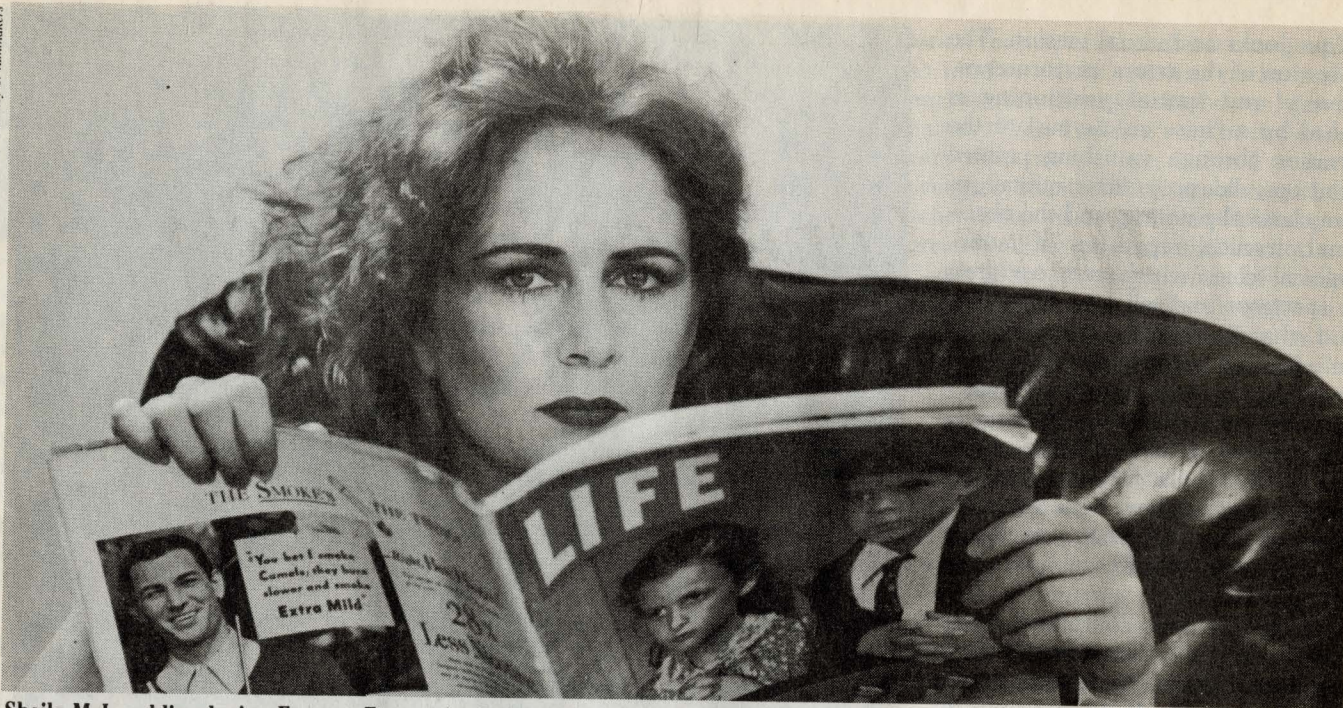


Filmmaker Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* achieved international success

first movies, Michael Oblowitz has worked with performers of the *Wooster Group*, in particular with Ron Vawter, whose professionalism and intensity give an extraordinary depth to his role as the screwed-up psychopath in *King Blank*. His acting is a counterpoint to the cool, withdrawn presence of Rosemary Hochschild (Queenie Blank), who keeps playing herself from film to film. Oblowitz also managed to cast extremely talented performers for the bit parts: *Mabou Mines'* Paul Newman plays a garrulously "pervert" client of the strip joint where Queenie is waitressing, *Wooster Group's* Peyton Smith and Nancy Reilly are witty and bored hookers, performance artists Fiona Templeton and Stuart Sherman are respectively a tired waitress and a

bartender. In spite of an often inept dialogue, the film will be remembered for its bleak vision of Queens around JFK Airport: gaudy motels, depressing coffee-shops, kinky strip joints, brothels, porn-shops, deserted streets, pay phones standing in the middle of nowhere... A visual poem of urban despair.

Perhaps the international success of Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* (1984) is also due to the fact that it tells its story through the interaction between three strong performers. The film narrates the arrival in New York of a young Hungarian girl, Eva (beautifully played by 19 year old Eszter Balint, who has worked since childhood with the Hungarian experimental group *Squat Theatre*). Jarmusch has played



Sheila McLaughlin playing Frances Farmer in the visually compelling *Committed*, which she co-directed with Lynne Tillman

on the physical shock of her ill-fated encounter with her seedy East Village cousin Willie (John Lurie), by contrasting her cool, dark beauty to Lurie's striking and disquieting appearance. For Willie, Eva is just another pain in the neck, and the strange couple tries to achieve an often comical status quo in his cramped little apartment. A third character intervenes, Eddie (Richard Edson) Willie's buddy and partner, who has a silent crush on Eva, but everybody starts getting pissed off at everybody else, nothing happens, and Eva takes off for her Aunt Lottie's in Cleveland. The trio meet there a year later, travel to Florida, where they resume their hit-and-miss interaction, until the connection is (spectacularly) broken down for the last time.

One must also mention two remarkable movies directed by women and born out of a desire to write a powerful and complex part for a talented actress. Sara Driver's forty minute film *You Are Not I* (1982)⁵ is inhabited by the quietly haunting presence of Suzanne Fletcher as Ethel. We see her cross an iron gate and arrive on the scene of a multiple car accident. Burnt bodies, wrapped in white clothes are lined up by the road; Ethel sticks little round stones in their mouths, then breaks down when one of the rescuers tries to stop her. Taken to her sister's house,

⁵Sara Driver is also the producer of *Stranger than Paradise*.

who is not at all happy to see her again, Ethel remains serene and silent, while her voice-over explains to us that she has a secret plan to get rid of her sister. We gradually understand that the iron gate at the beginning of the film was that of a mental hospital, and that the heroine is probably schizophrenic. But Driver maintains until the end the ambiguity between real and imaginary, between the vision of each of the two sisters (the "you" and "I" of the title). The seduction, the magical "touch" of the film lies in the mystery, the opacity of people and things that we can never elucidate.

Sheila McLaughlin and Lynne Tillman's *Committed*, shot over a period of 4 years with very limited means, is not just another movie about the life of Frances Farmer, but a visually compelling, minimalist meditation that brings us quickly to the essential, with the precision and subtlety of a Japanese painting. Rather than gaudily reconstructing the Hollywood of the time, the filmmakers have chosen to show us Frances (played with strength and vulnerability by McLaughlin) in the three main relations that shaped and dominated her life: with her obsessive, dominating mother (conflict with the family), with a self-satisfied and tormented Clifford Odets, played by

⁶Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames*, another remarkable movie produced in New York under similar financial conditions, was discussed at length in a review by Joyce Mason (*FUSE*, November/December 1983).

Mabou Mines' Lee Breuer, with whom she was in love when they collaborated together at the Group Theatre in New York (conflict with the male order), and with a female nurse in the mental hospital (conflict with the institution).

The unravelling of these three complex interactions (neither the mother nor Clifford Odets are typical "villains", and the psychiatric nurse, another victim of the system, is quite sympathetic to her patient) is punctuated by scenes of physical violence, enacted symbolically rather than graphically through use of extreme close-ups and of 'off-screen' space in scenes of Frances' court appearance for drunken driving, her arrest by two male attendants in her mother's house, and the endeavors of the psychiatrist (played by performance artist John Erdman) to humiliate and mutilate the actress' body (the scene of rectal search at the hospital) and the harrowing moment when Frances understands that she has been "condemned" to be lobotomized. Yet, the heroine of *Committed* is not shown as a victim, but as a strong, rebellious, and politically active woman (hence the play on word of the title). At the end of the movie, apparently defeated by the male establishment, Frances still has the courage to return its gaze.

Berencie Reynaud is a film critic living in New York City.

Three Canadian Narratives Moments of Recognition & Patterns of Meaning

JOYCE MASON

IN THESE REVIEWS, I WILL LOOK briefly at three independently produced Canadian films — all of which were released approximately one year ago. All three were shown last fall at the Toronto Festival of Festivals, and have seen few exhibition venues since, though they are highly deserving of audiences. Access to audience is, in fact, the most commonly missing element in the chemistry of Canadian films; and without this — without the filmmaker/audience relationship which is a dynamic of challenge and critique — the entire process of production (including the expense, energy and ideas required) stops short. The work is unleashed into a vacuum.

Venues available for independents in Canada are minimal and are generally ones which audiences must actively search out. The result is a pronounced lack of familiarity with our own national cinemas, or for that matter, with most national cinemas excepting American (and to a lesser extent European) commercial film. Indeed, the situation lends double meaning to the adjective 'inaccessible' when applied to Canadian films which are not formula pictures.

Both *Stations* and *Low Visibility* are feature length dramatic films which use innovative narrative forms: stories circle back on themselves or jump from one 'line' to the other. *Storytelling*, the third film which I'll look at here is, if shorter in length, more directly representative/investigative of the processes and conventions of narrative and narration.

Low Visibility

directed by Patricia Gruben
16mm col. 1984
99 min.

Distribution: Noema Productions,
Vancouver

THIS, THE FIRST FEATURE FILM OF filmmaker Patricia Gruben, is perhaps my favourite film of the last year... although I hesitate to make these kinds of relative meritorious lists. It is a sensuously brainy film, the images exhibiting a wide range of qualities and richness — from the grainy greys of a highway at dawn, to the rich lushness of a B.C. forest.

The film begins with the voice of the filmmaker and a travelling shot from a car, along a highway in the mountains at dawn. The screen is alternatively black/blank and filled with the image from the passenger/filmmaker's camera. Passenger and driver, both women, talk about breakfast. It is a classic scene of car-vacationing — the conversation about breakfast, the implied 'early morning start', the scenery, the camera 'capturing the landscape'.

They pass a man staggering along the side of this deserted stretch of highway. The dialogue which results from this chance encounter is a comic/pathetic interpretation of how we rationalize our conflicting socialized impulses — to sustain/help another and to protect ourselves from possible dangers.

The opening sequence touches indirectly upon the themes and concerns

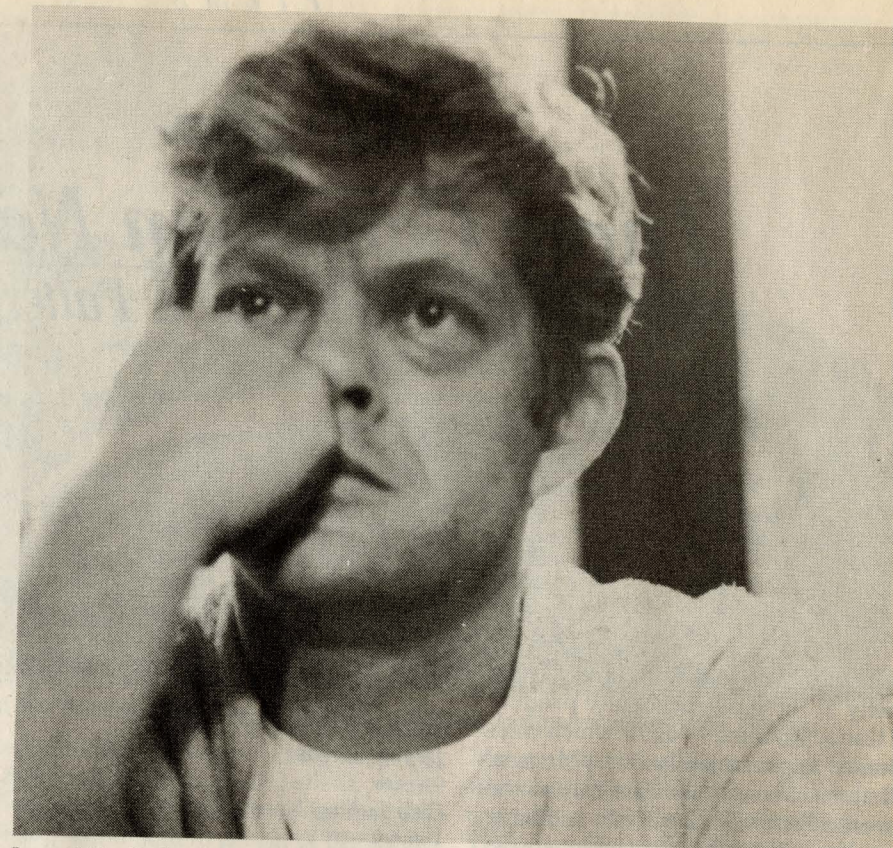
which will be evident throughout the film — culture, nature, media and the mediation of experience, fear of the 'other', language, communication. The film is an anthropological mystery story in which the culture under observation is our own and the mystery functions on more than one level. On the most immediate level, the questions are: who is this man, found wandering on a road in the mountains? where did he come from? why doesn't he speak? On another level: what is man? how does he function socially, psychologically, morally? what is natural? what is cultural? what are our taboos? how do we cope with transgressions? what can be said? and finally, whose story will be told?

The story which does unfold has the peculiar quality of a combination psychological thriller/avant-garde experiment. It unfolds through layers of perspectives — each character seemingly intent on his/her own investigation: the psychic, nurses, psychologists, police, journalists, and patients. Perspective switches constantly — surveillance cameras; point of view shots (nurse, patient, doctor); an omniscient view of the psychic's hands, a view from her car (her perspective), and of her visions.

Voice-over explanations, which overlap various scenes — interpretations (hospital assessments), investigations (police interrogations), and revelations (the psychic's search for clues) — provide transitions, the limitations of the perceptions providing ironic undercutting.

Throughout the film, the man appears as passive, responding only to actions and to demands placed upon him. His role as 'straight man' is commented on when the nurses name him Mr. Bones; yet, like his vaudeville namesake, he is the initiator of the routine enacted.

The investigation's unfolding is fragmented, complex and not without confusion...but it is also intriguing and intelligently appropriate. The characters are fascinatingly well-played, their peculiarities making them so 'real'. Delightful idiosyncrasies, whether the inadvertant result of peculiar acting styles or intentional characterisations, elicit a response of pure delight in the variety of human expression/communication. Both the cliches and the individuality of human behaviour are evident, presenting the familiar in a way which makes us 'recognize it — giving the sense of knowing it better for knowing it *again*? Such personal reflections and the fragmented structure of the film also led me to contemplate the role of the observer (my own role), the interpreter of meanings, the moraliser, the one not implicated.



Larry Lillo is the enigmatic Mr. Bones

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In the end, both facts and police speculations prove unsatisfactory as solutions to the mystery that has been exposed. We learn that there was a plane crash, that the others died, that Mr. Bones is the only survivor. Canibalism is implied. Nevertheless, the *meaning* of the experience seems to elude us.

The surveillance and news media are, given the situation under investigation, quite appropriate. In addition, their presence provides a metaphor for the shifting perspectives and a symbol of our culture — evoking questions about that culture and our ability to understand and to communicate.

The role of the psychic was also provocative in this context, since it is that of 'medium', a transmitter of information, collected randomly, in fragments, which must be interpreted in order to find a pattern or meaning. In the end it is the psychic who hints that we may have been following the wrong story all along. Her voice, as she speaks with the woman who died in the crash in the wilderness accompanies a shot from a plane over the mountains and clouds:

Where are you? (Falling, I'm flying)
Are we in the plane? (no)
And the baby? (It's moving)
It's you I want, you know; he was just all

we had — the alive one.
Did you tell them yes? (Yes? oh no, I couldn't. I couldn't talk; they never asked me)
You don't need to talk now? (Can I now? Can I talk?)
the blue wings fade and it's all only blue...

Although the institutions (media, hospital, police, etc.) must look through the man's experience, it is the woman's story which remains to be told.

Stations

directed by Bill MacGillivray
cinematography by Lionel Simmons
screenplay/editing by MacGillivray & Simons
16mm col. 1984
100 min.
Distribution: Picture Plant Limited,
(Halifax, N.S.)

THIS FEATURE FILM BY MACGILLIVRAY, like the others in this grouping, has a high degree of self-consciousness in its construction. Film, television, the mass media and the institutions which govern and direct film production in Canada are central characters in the plot.

The story is that of Tom Murphy. Murphy (played by Newfoundland

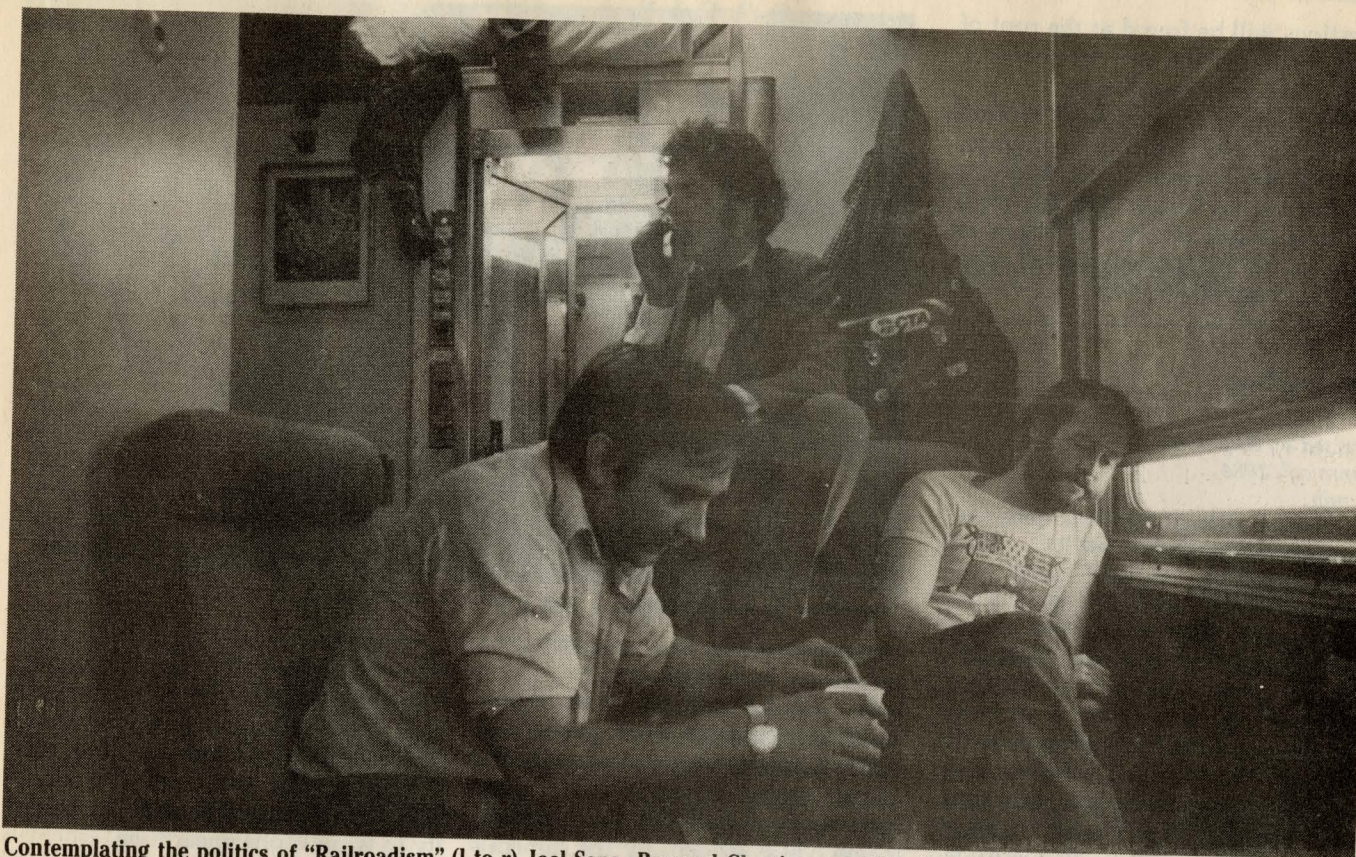
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filmmaker Mike Jones) is a successful television journalist from the 'smooth demeanor/tough questioning' mold. The insensitivity and exploitation of suffering that he participates in finally come home to roost for him when, in the process of making a documentary investigation of "the nature of failure", he interviews his old friend Harry — digging deep with questions about the effects and implications of 'failure' in his friend's life. When shortly thereafter, Harry kills himself, Murphy finally feels his own implication in the stories which he investigates.

After a brief forced vacation, he is sent out by his producer to interview Canadians on a cross-country train trip, which will take him from his current home in Vancouver back to his native Newfoundland. This train trip is the core of the film. In *Stations* the train, the national mass media and our cultural institutions are not mere plot furnishings. They figure in our understanding of the film which, at times, seems to be a story about transportation and communication and about the search for meaning within their structures.

Canada is, as historical mythology would have it, a nation created by an act of parliament — by the construc-

SUMMER 1985



CHUCK CLARKE

Contemplating the politics of "Railroadism" (l to r) Joel Sapp, Bernard Cloutier and Mike Jones

tion of a national railroad system. Communications and transportation systems string the regions into a tenuous economic union. There have also been attempts to bring the country together culturally by means of broadcasting and national film board circuits. But the search for an identity, the recognition of regional allegiances and the desire to speak and to see ourselves reflected seems still to elude full realisation.

On a structural level, the model for this film may well be the channel-hopping so common in this land of cablevision. We jump in and out of a series of stories which are connected, one surmises, by the consciousness of Murphy himself as he attempts to make sense of his profession and his life. The intertwining of his memories, experiences and projections are complex and at times even a bit confusing. But, memories of childhood, train tracks rushing toward the horizon from the rear car of the train, the picaresque journey, telephone calls, his home, his friend, are all elements in the understanding which Murphy must achieve.

It becomes evident, while crossing the country, that Murphy's attempt to interview have run aground. When, finally, he receives the response of "not gonna interview me you stupid fuckers...being used." and the disdainful challenge, "Film any accidents man? ...How many?...How much money do you make off us?", we know that Murphy's career will be taking a change in direction. Standard plot construction, where the hero encounters a series of obstacles which force him to grow or change, becomes irrelevant. The conflicts which occur on the train haven't the power of cathartic shifts. Even the suicide of his friend in some way seems more coincidental than motivating. The fact that he was making a film on the subject of failure in the first place is perhaps the only clue to his almost self-indulgent despondency.

But storyline aside (and I must admit I don't care very much about this successful media professional's personal crisis), what really impressed and moved me was the train ride itself. Interestingly, the further east we move, the more challenging, insightful and articulate the passengers become. But the people on this train do not make a story in the standard sense of what a story should be. They have conversations with Murphy which may or may not, in some oblique way, affect the development of the plot. (The plot

moves unhesitatingly forward, or eastward, with the train.) But it is the train-ride which holds moments of quiet recognition, disquieting in their effect. In these ad-libbed or 'real' conversations, we recognize people whose stories are seldom told — the unemployed, the homeward-bound, the disillusioned. We are placed in the context of our own forgotten experience, thus making evident its underrepresentation.

We are also given a glimpse of our own pre-conceptions. When a man singing a love song reaches the final verse, disclosing that the song is for his son, it is one's own eagerness to judge this as clichéd or irrelevant that is called into question.

For me, the poignant value in this work is in these glimpses of our own experience and in the simultaneous sense of their impermeability to precise or imposed meanings. The conversations with passengers and employees on the train may, at times, conjure up thoughts of anthropological relativism — isn't this man's theory of 'railroadism' as useful a political theory as those which are presented as legitimate in this mass communications networks? — but such inventions, playful intelligence, stories, jokes and

FUSE

questions will be found at the root of both our enjoyment and our questioning of the world we live in.

The problem (or salvation) of Tom Murphy on this cross-country voyage, as a producer of corporation culture, is that he can no longer edit out these voices as irrelevant; he has begun to converse (to be engaged) as well as to ask questions.

Storytelling

directed by Kay Armatage
16mm col. 1984
55 min.

Distribution: Atlantic Films and Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre



Constance De Jong recounts a 'post-modernist romance' in *Storytelling*

courtesy CHMNC

KAY ARMATAGE IS A FILM-maker, a professor and a programmer for the *Festival of Festivals*. *Storytelling*, her most recent film, directly represents the phenomenon of narrative and reflects on developments in 'narrative theory'. But whether one knows about the theories of 'new narrative' or not, all of us know something about narrative itself — as Gertrude Stein put it, "One thing is certain and sure that anybody telling what they want to tell or what they will tell they tell a narrative." — and most of us love a good story. If you do, this film contains enough of them to ensure your enjoyment.

The above Gertrude Stein quotation opens the film. In fact, the film is divided into three sections by intertitle quotations from this great literary experimenter of the early 20th century (infamous for her transformations of standard language and narrative forms). What lies between these intertitles, logically enough, are the stories. Eleven stories, nine tellers (if you wish to be literal, seven tellers, two showers).

Included are stories of creation, transformation, adventure, morality and survival through adversity, as well as *Shadow Puppets* and *String Figures* which are, for me, less susceptible to categorisation. The speakers tell their tales directly to the camera, but constant cutting between stories interrupts the unfolding of each of them. What is surprising in this is how easily we follow each story, in spite of the repeated interruptions. In this experience is, perhaps, the understanding that non-theoreticians can take from this film — a recognition of how we

find the narrative, how we participate as listeners in its creation.

In making this film, Armatage "wanted to produce an analysis of narrative [she] didn't want to produce a non-narrative" (*Opsis*, Spring 1984). Her respect for the storytellers themselves is evident by the camera's inobtrusive directness. The tellers speak directly to the film audience and both their performances and tales are captivating. Each is placed in a particular environment — suburbs, inner city, empty warehouses, glacial rock, country road or park. The shifts from story to story, from setting to setting, thus provide additional visual interest. But the core of what is visually interesting are the faces and expression of the tellers themselves and the images that their stories evoke in our imaginations. This is not to suggest that *Storytelling* is not a visually beautiful work — it is; but to note that its effect is more than the sum of its shots.

In the same way that we produce images for the stories told, the inclusion, in this context, of 'String Figures' by Ken McCuaig and 'Shadow Puppets' by Hank Bull provides the other face of this imaginative process. For in these sections of the film we find ourselves searching for (and completing the images with) meanings. They become stories too.

What Armatage has made here is a didactic film of delight.

It remains to be said that the stories themselves disrupt many notions of which stories are possible. They do this because they are, in many cases, uncommon stories. They do not always

conform to the patterns of those usually told in this culture. Because of this and their folkloric quality I found that I was simultaneously wondering about the richness of cultures buried beneath the morass of mass media and delighted by this opportunity to witness one unearthing.

Joyce Mason

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tapes reviewed include:

If The Jet Plane Bombs You Down (Marilyn Burgess & Peter Sandmak), *This is What* (Jane Wright), *Apocalypse* (John Marshall), *Spaghetti: une obsession* (Martin l'Abbé), *Rubicon* (Jan Zarzycki), *Trimin' and Burnin'* (John Will), *Relative Activities* (Paula Fairfield), *Ritual of a Wedding Dress* (Wendy Walker), *Pie Y Cafe* (Jan Peacock), *Peaux d'Ame* (Francois Barbès), *Changing Parts* (Mona Hatoum).

THE 1985 EXHIBITION OF CANADIAN Video Art, presented by Ottawa's SAW Gallery as a budget variation on the International Festival of Video Art held at the gallery on two previous years, resembled nothing so much as a blind intersection. Before the festival began, politics collided with aesthetics in the form of disputes over the gallery's decision to acquiesce (albeit begrudgingly: the adopted strategy called for "compliance under protest") to the freshly instated regulations of the recently retooled Ontario Film Review Board (a cagey bureaucratic euphemism which makes the censors sound like a benign klatsch of concerned critics). "Compliance under protest" meant that descriptions of all videotapes intended for public display would be submitted to the Board. For "review", presumably.

"Compliance under protest" was not unanimously embraced as a strategy of state-censorship resistance. True, the gallery had scheduled an invitation-only evening of screenings in order to contravene the Review Board's "public display" stipulation, comprised of

works by artists who refused to submit "plot synopses" of tapes for Board scrutiny, but even this would not appease those artists who, like Toronto's John Greyson, felt that any acquiescence to Board regulations amounted to nothing less than surrender. Along with others, Greyson refused to allow his work to be shown under any circumstances that weren't unequivocally "public". Invitation-only screenings were not the answer, he told a small group attending a panel entitled *Artists Against Censorship*, "because that just reinforces the leper colony status of artists. We want a public for our work".

Greyson is one of the organizers of the "Six Days of Resistance", a province-wide series of exhibitions of unsubmitted films and tapes which was held in late April. Described by Greyson as a "red flag event for the censors", the Six Days event was expressly designed to test the Board's now reconstituted muscle (see this issue, p. 26) by provoking it to act upon its threats. "The Board has only laid charges once, against the organizers of *Canadian Images*, in its entire history", Greyson noted. He firmly but gently admonished the SAW organizers for their decision to comply, even under protest, with the Board: "Refusing the jurisdiction of the Censor Board completely is the only way. There's no middle ground when it comes to artists dealing with the Board."

Facing accusations that they had let down a unified front of resistance among video artists, the festival organisers (one of whom admitted to not having known of the long-planned province-wide protest until it was too late to drop the festival entirely) nevertheless pressed on under fire. The strain of conscience was, however, ap-

parent. During the panel on censorship, Blair Sharpe, an artist and spokesperson for the SAW Gallery Censorship Committee, sheepishly confessed, "We made the wrong decision." At the "invitation-only" evening, festival curator Michael Balsler was thanked by SAW director Lolly Frankel for doing such a great job "even though he didn't agree" with the Gallery's decision to give in to the Review Board. On the closing evening of the troubled event, in fact, Balsler was nowhere to be seen — he had headed for Toronto.

In terms of delineating and distinguishing cultural politics (what artists do) from the politics of culture (what artists are allowed to do), however, the Ottawa festival was as illuminating as it was stricken by controversy. But the confusion was necessary: basically, video and film artists in Ontario are being singled out by the state's image-regulating entity. Thus, artists rightfully see themselves as the subjects of an arbitrary process of persecution that is not (as a matter of legislated policy, that is) applied to artists working in any other medium. The problem is, the Board doesn't see the fine thread of philosophy connecting video artists and like-minded peers working in paint, ink or danskins. What it does see is the obvious technological connection between video art and commercial videocassettes. The sin video artists are now paying for is one of guilt by association or resemblance. Private manipulators of a formerly mass medium, who have individualized the form and radically broken from its one purely commercial function, video artists in Ontario are still being made to pay for that mass media heritage — because the Film and Video Review



top: *This is What* by Jane Wright, from a story by Noel Harding
bottom: *Spaghetti: Une Obsession* by Martin L'Abbe



Board can't see the difference. Listen to Mary Brown, defending herself in *Cinema Canada* (April 1985) from an accusation made by Tom Perlmutter that the Board is insensitive to and preys upon films with artistic intent:

I don't think we're talking about art here. We're talking about a very commercial medium... A very, very commercial industry. Now, you're talking about the art community who are using the film [or video] medium as an art form. I'm telling you that in the last five years since we went to the documentation process we have not censored anything that is an art film, unless you consider *Sweet Movie* an art film.

Video artists (whom she never mentions in the interview), must seem to Mrs. Brown and her Board something of a contradiction in terms: how could such serious and pure intentions be applied to such a "very, very commercial" medium? Moreover, are video artists, like film artists, any less so because Mrs. Brown might not consider their video — as she did not consider Makavejev's movie — worthy of the exalted mantle, Art?

Scary stuff and strange days indeed. But inescapable and essential, too: if the SAW Gallery's strategy of acquiescence put them smack in the center of a head on collision course between the forces of art and politics, it's only because the strategy itself assumed those forces were neatly separated in the first place. "Getting the work shown to the public" was stated as the Gallery's first priority and rationale for compliance under protest, but having it shown under state-sanctioned circumstances not only subjects the works to a set of arbitrary prior conditions that effectively dictate what is and (using the *Sweet Movie* anti-logic) isn't art, it implies an essentialist conception of art as something above or beyond the sticky earthly matters of politics, protest and paying bills. Presumably, as long as the work gets out there and people have access to it, there'll be no stopping it, since the value of a work of art, in this view, is something transcendent, too sublime for words or issues. It does not vote.

Curiously, if the SAW Gallery's "compliance under protest" position implied an essentialist notion of art as a force capable of triumphing over politics because of some superior function or design, the tapes exhibited during the festival itself seemed to harbour

no such ideas. Quite the contrary, in fact: if an apparent threat wove the selections of curators Michael Balser together, it was the practical (and political) notion of the absolute inseparability and mutual invigoration of art and politics. Some tapes, like Marilyn Burgess's and Peter Sandmark's *If the Jet Plane Bombs You Down* and Jane Wright's *This is What*, quite explicitly deal with mingling of social and aesthetic issues.

Jet Plane, using a standard TV reportage style, establishes a link between artistic endeavour and state policy by recording the often aghast response of artists confronted with the fact that the Canadian government is prepared to spend thirty million dollars for the production of fighter planes. Stimulated more by the figures than the hardware, most of them begin to speculate — with the glaze of 'artists' starvation' in their eyes — just what they could do with that kind of money.

This is What, shown in the context of the invitation-only program, blends blackout comedy and epic theatre in a veritable parade (characters pass on a conveyor belt) of postures and attitudes which regard art as the exalted product of divinely gifted beings. Alternately direct and evasive, didactic and ambiguous, *This is What* undermines the apoliticism of bourgeois notions regarding the function and position of art in society by holding these views at a safe, parodic distance, and by placing the lofty pontifications in a drone-like, industrial-minimal context: the relentless passage of people and postures on the belt suggests nothing so much as an ideological assembly line, the job of which is to turn out issueless art equipped with an eminently safe and socially acceptable set of ideas.

In less explicit but equally apparent terms, the concern with the production and reception of art as a social process seemed to determine the formal and thematic thrust of most works in the exhibition. Even concessions to more purely popular interests and idioms displayed a political perspective or concern. John Marshall's *Apocalypso*, a rock video showcasing the Devosque Singing Fools, funkily intercuts images of pure party mayhem with TV news and archival footage of nuclear explosions replete with commentary from Ronald Reagan, whose down-home doublespeak comes across as nothing more sinister than a square

dance call for the dance of global destruction. *Spaghetti: une obsession*, by Martin l'Abbé, applies grand guignol dramatic conventions to the most banal of situations: three characters argue, with near foamy intensity, over the merits of a theory for the proper preparation of pasta. The possibility of murder committed over a pile of noodles is eminently plausible here — as Buñuel so profoundly demonstrated, those pent-up middle-class anxieties tend to vent themselves under the most 'civilized' circumstances.

A straight narrative morality tale set to science fiction conventions, Jan Zazycki's cynically funny *Rubicon* shows a man whose domestic activities are monitored by hidden technocrats, whose attempts to create the ultimate stress-free environment for their subject actually drives him to attempt suicide.

Among the most cunningly structured and brutally effective tapes on display in the festival was John Will's *Trimin' and Burnin'*, which begins as an almost *Sesame Streetish*, grade-school video primer. In the terms of a cowboy mythology, the meaning of terms like "cow bunny" or "heat your saddle" are explained as childlike scrawls and drawings are superimposed over images of Alberta cowpokes at work. But the tape gradually evolves into a systematic, ruthless deconstruction of cowboy codes by concentrating on the ritual process of animal mutilation which comprises much of the workaday world of the saddle tramp. The tape's power to unsettle lies in precisely the contradiction of impressions created by the tension between childlike romantic mythology (an impression enhanced by the lonesome-sounding prairie odes heard on the soundtrack) and savage actuality: "trimin'" and "burnin'", we learn, is cowboy slang for the castration and branding of calves.

In terms of both formal and thematic concentration, the most cohesive group of tapes were bound by an exploration of the intermingling and mutual transformation of the private and social realm from a feminist perspective. Taking the traditionally cloistered perspective of the woman whose world consists of home appliances and furnishings, and for whom an image of the outside world — and her role in it — is ideologically mediated by images of the happily sub-

missive housewife-toy, a number of the tapes made by women probed strategies of representing the breakdown and supplanting of this perspective by a broader, more politically comprehensive one.

Adopting a cinesemiotic, post-Godardian approach, Paula Fairfield's *Relative Activities* and Wendy Walker's *Ritual of a Wedding Dress* analyze the role of language in the maintenance of the relationship between patriarchal ideology and the institutionalized oppression of women in patriarchal society. *Relative Activities* is a hilarious deconstruction of the narrative of Harelquin Romances, demonstrating the frequency with which matrimony is deployed in texts as the only structurally logical (and satisfying) way of resolving the narrative. Similarly, Walker's *Ritual of a Wedding Dress* foregrounds the extent of fetishistic worship — of both language and objects — involved in the marriage ceremony, while showing a woman slowly suiting up for the big day.

Echoing, but with a more explicitly political sensibility, the dinner table social dynamics of l'Abbé's *Spaghetti*, Jan Peacock's *Pie Y Cafe* intervenes on the process of passive food consumption by putting its politics where your mouth is: images of coffee and cake are rendered radical by a commentary that makes explicit the semantic and ideological link between the language of eating and the language of multinational corporate consumption. Thus, the once innocuous offer of "another piece of pie?" takes on the unappetizing taste of global economic exploitation. You are what you eat and what you are can be hard to swallow: Take one part history, add economics, stir in political analysis....

Particularly at a moment when the pornography debate seems to have polarized into opposing forces either against any or for all sexual representation, François Barbès' *Peaux d'Ame* is as visually captivating as it is politically provocative. A sinister survey of the textures and objects that comprise the woman's domestic environment (and shot to emphasize the frequently phallic nature of the landscape of that environment), *Peaux d'Ame*'s inventory of a killer kitchen gradually gives way to subjective fantasies of bondage, submission and rape. It culminates in the camera's silent stalking of a sleeping female



top: *Ritual of a Wedding Dress* by Wendy Walker
bottom: *Pie Y Cafe* by Jan Peacock



photo by PAULA FANFIELD

nude, a shot which ends with the suggestion of rape by the camera: the off-screen sound of a fly unzipping. Straddling precariously the razor's edge between pure and mediated pornography, the tape is maddeningly evasive in terms of its position regarding the relationship between socially condoned sexual images of women in patriarchy and women's brutalization by patriarchy. Instead, it seems content to court controversy by indulging in the production of those images with only a minimum of apparent self-criticism or deconstruction. By raising so volatile an issue apparently only to avoid taking sides on it, *Peaux d'Ame* is as frustrating as it is fascinating.

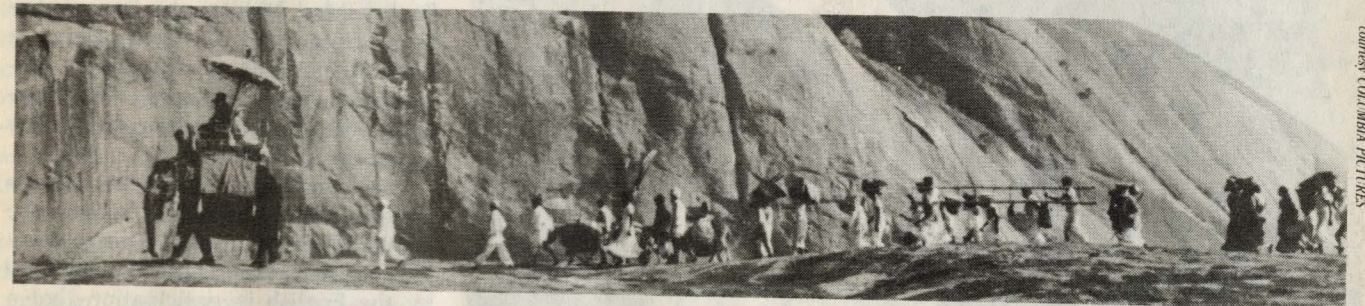
Similarly structured and methodically paced, Mona Hatoum's *Changing Parts* suggests a logical and inevitable descent from the apparently safe and secure domestic environment to a condition of profound alienation, paranoia, and pain. But it does so without the 'mondo bondage' imagery of *Peaux d'Ame*. As studied, slow and determined as a Tarkovsky movie, Hatoum's tape begins with a series of stark, domestic still-life images: faucets, cupboards and radiators are studied to the accompaniment of classical music — a veritable symphony of order and sanity. In time, this harmony decomposes into a horrific vision of entrapment and impending death: fragmented and floating, a woman seems to be suspended (drowning? dead?) in a large tank, possibly swallowed by the images of sanitary orderliness and security so deliberately studied earlier on. The spectre of death hidden in the domestic sphere is what both *Peaux d'Ame* and *Changing Parts* so starkly illuminate, if with strikingly different styles and attitudes.

As ironic as it was invigorating, the SAW Gallery's 1985 exhibition of Canadian Video Art was at once torn by administrative policy and bound by artistic preoccupations. That both policies and preoccupations revolved around the necessary symbiosis of art and politics in a society where the survival of the former depends upon a process of constant confrontation with the latter made for stimulating fare. If only they'd revolved in the same direction.

Geoff Pevere is a film programmer at the Canadian Film Institute and a critic; he lives in Ottawa.

Passage to Nowhere *Nostalgic Distortions of An Empire*

MARLENE PHILIP



courtesy COLLEEN HARTMAN

EVERYONE WHO HAS HAD THE unique experience of living under colonial rule would do well to see David Lean's *Passage to India*, to observe how the death throes of the Empire continue long, long after its actual demise. The body may be dead but it still twitches as if remembering the life it once carried in its limbs — Africa, India, the West Indies. *Ghandi*, *Kim*, *The Far Pavilions*, *Jewel in the Crown*, *A Passage to India* — each of these represents a twitch of a now defunct empire whose only present value lies in being a missile base for the United States.

Forster's novel recounts on one level the stories of Adela Quested, an English woman (on a visit to India for the first time); her fiancé Ronny Heaslop, city magistrate of Chandrapore, India (whom she is visiting to decide whether she will marry him); Ronny Heaslop's mother, Mrs. Moore (who accompanies Adela on her visit and is also visiting India for the first time); Dr. Aziz, the Indian doctor who becomes involved with the two women; and Mr. Fielding an English teacher who befriends Dr. Aziz.

The backdrop to these stories is India which the two women want 'to see', and the English community that rules Chandrapore. The nub of the novel is what happened in the Marabar caves when Dr. Aziz, in a gesture of spontaneous and, in hindsight, misguided hospitality takes the two women to visit these caves. Adela Quested

returns from the visit in shock and alleges that Dr. Aziz attempted to rape her. The city divides into those who believe in Dr. Aziz's innocence — the Indians, Mrs. Moore and Mr. Fielding — and the English who want him punished, if not killed — his innocence or guilt being irrelevant to them; it was sufficient that an English woman had accused an Indian. Dr. Aziz is acquitted when Adela Quested changes her story on the stand and denies that Dr. Aziz assaulted or attempted to rape her.

It has been suggested that the mystery about what happened between Dr. Aziz and Adela Quested in the Marabar caves is a metaphor for the relationship between the English and the Indian during the British Raj. The deliberate distortion of Forster's work by David Lean is, I suggest, a metaphor for the distortion that has always permeated most attempts by colonisers to represent the peoples they are intent on colonising.

Sitting through this long film, I was aware of two simultaneous reactions: I was entertained, on a very superficial level (I wish I wasn't); and I was also aware that there was much that didn't ring true with the film, although I had not as yet read the book.

All Indians in this film are presented as caricatures. Prior to the verdict acquitting him, Dr. Aziz is presented as an obsequious sycophant who fawned over the English whenever he could; who had to experience incarceration before becoming aware of himself as

an Indian and taking pride in it. After the trial he is presented as a very proud Indian who has now taken to wearing Muslim dress.

This is a complete distortion of the book, where from early on, the character of Dr. Aziz reveals him to be very aware of living as an Indian under the British Raj. Forster describes him as well-read, often quoting extensively from Persian, Urdu and, less so, from Arabic poetry. He has a strongly developed sense of himself as a Muslim, whose people had been in India from the time of Mogul rule.

One of our earliest contacts with him in the film is a scene in which he is summoned to the residence of his superior, the Civil Surgeon who is white and English. Forster's treatment of this incident reveals much about Dr. Aziz: he dawdles; expresses displeasure at the Civil Surgeon's summons; suggests to his friends with whom he has just smoked pan* and is about to eat, that the Civil Surgeon knows that this is the time at which they usually eat; that he only summons him to exercise his power. When his friend suggests that he clean his teeth (so that the Civil Surgeon would not know he had just smoked pan), Dr. Aziz refuses, "If my teeth are to be cleaned, I don't go at all. I am Indian, it is an Indian habit to take pan. The Civil Surgeon must put up with it."

In the film none of this resistance is

* pan is a combination of betel, areca-nut and lime.



Judy Davis plays Adela Quested, a Brit girl during the (in)glorious days of the Raj

shown; Aziz is made to rush off immediately as he is summoned thereby creating quite a different sense of his character and personality.

Godbole, the Hindu mystic, is depicted in the film as something of a Shakespearean fool — full of subtle buffooneries. Forster's Godbole is a wise person, if somewhat removed from the drives and desires of ordinary people — the Indian parallel of Mrs. Moore. In the novel it is in fact the English Mrs. Moore who appears the more foolish of the two, being a somewhat querulous old woman, pre-occupied with Christianity. She is certainly less substantial than she is made to appear in the movie.

Lean's magistrate is caricatured as a useless, pathetic colonial bureaucrat; Forster's presentation is a more complex one: Mr. Das is clearly being used by the English in anticipation that a guilty verdict by him would be less politically volatile.

In Forester's novel the histrionics and emotionalism of one of Dr. Aziz's lawyers who removes himself from the case during the trial is at a minimum. Lean's presentation of this scene however fosters and panders to the stereotype of the emotional native who can't control his feelings, even in the interests of his friend and client. In fact, in the film the only Indian at the trial who appears to have any control is Mr. Amritrao, the lawyer brought in from Calcutta; and his is but a cameo role.

India, we know, is a crowded continent, but how many crowd scenes do we need to make the point? Several, according to Mr. Lean who juxtaposes such scenes with those of the calm stoical English being all stiff upper lip and what ho. Many of these scenes are gratuitous and serve only to make India more exotic to Western audiences.

The exotic becomes full blown in Adela Quested's visit to ruins, where she is confronted with huge statues of men and women locked together in Karma Sutra positions, exuding, yes, an Eastern sensuality. She is, naturally, deeply affected by this display of eroticism; that, combined with her being chased by rather ferocious monkeys, pushes her, we are asked to believe, to decide that she will marry Ronny, whom she has recently told otherwise. This scene does not appear in Forster's novel and represents, I suggest, another attempt to reinforce the

image of India as a strange, exotic and mysterious land.

At the end of the novel, Dr. Aziz tells Fielding, "If it's fifty or five hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then, and then you and I shall be friends." Fielding, somewhat plaintively, wishes to know, "Why can't we be friends now?" What Forster says here is that friendship between ruler and ruled, no matter how well intentioned, is not possible, at least not until colonial rule is over. But Lean will have it his own way — he chooses a 'happier' ending — one that reunites Fielding and Aziz as friends, ignoring the fundamental impediment to their friendship.

But why this sudden and profuse production of Raj films? Why the sudden interest in India? For the preoccupation now extends to book and magazine publishers as well as the television industry. When interviewed by the *Times*, David Lean gave the following as his reason for wanting to make a film of Forester's novel:

I haven't seen Dickie Attenborough's *Ghandi* yet, but as far as I am aware nobody has yet succeeded in putting India on the screen.

Either David Lean is not aware of the fact that the Indian film industry dates from 1898 (newsreel footage), or at the latest from 1913 when the first feature film was shot; or he discounts the successes of Indians like Mehboob and Satyajit Ray in putting their people and their country on the screen.

Lean had more to say, about Forster and *A Passage to India*:

Forster was a bit anti-English, anti-Raj and so on. I suppose it's a tricky thing to say, but I'm not so much. I intend to keep the balance more. I don't believe all the English were a lot of idiots. Forester rather made them so. He came down hard against them. I've cut out that bit at the trial where they try to take over the court. Richard [Goodwin, the producer] wanted me to leave it in. But I said no, it just wasn't right. They wouldn't have done that.

As for Aziz, there's a hell of a lot of Indian in him. They're marvellous people but maddening sometimes, you know....He's a goose. But he's warm and you like him awfully. I don't mean that in a derogatory way — things just happen to him. He can't help it. And Miss Quested....well, she's a bit of a prig and a bore in the book, you know. I've changed her, made her more sympathetic. Forster wasn't always very good with women.

One other thing. I've got rid of that 'Not yet, not yet' bit. You know, when the Quit India stuff comes up, and we have the passage about driving us into the sea? Forster experts have always said it was important, but the Fielding Aziz friendship was not sustained by those sorts of things. At least I don't think so. The book came out at the time of the trial of General Dyer and had a tremendous success in America for that reason. But I thought that bit rather tacked on. Anyway, I see it as a personal not a political story.

Interview with Derek Malcolm
The Guardian, January 23, 1984

The resurgence of Raj fever; the desire for the exotic; the retelling of histories (often distorting) from the perspective of the former coloniser is all of a piece with the present day coverage of these countries by the Western press — either famine, death, war, natural catastrophes or exotica — and it all covers a refusal to see the other as human and not as a cultural object or anthropological curiosity. It also justifies the continuance of imperialist policies.

In his essay "Outside the Whale", Salmon Rushdie writes:

The creation of a false Orient of cruel-lipped princes and dusky slim-hipped maidens, of ungodliness, fire and the sword, has been brilliantly described by Edward Said in his classic study of Orientalism, in which he makes clear that the purpose of such false portraits was to provide moral, cultural and artistic justification for imperialism and for its underpinning ideology, that of racial superiority of the Caucasian over the Asiatic. Let me add only that stereotypes are easier to shrug off if yours is not the culture being stereotyped; or, at the very least, if your culture has the power to counterpunch against the stereotype.

The Empire no longer exists but cultural imperialism continues and in the entertainment industry all things work together to foster its continuance: the misappropriation of peoples' lives and cultures as it is served up as entertainment to Western audiences; the deliberate falsifying of an author's intention and work (during his life Forster refused to allow his novel to be filmed; it is unfortunate, having seen David Lean's attempt, that this prohibition could not be continued after his death); the film award system which validates such attempts; the lack of any criticism dealing with the issues underlying this film and others like it; and not least of all, the hiring practices of the film industry.

One small compensation for the pre-occupation of the Western film companies with the East might be increased employment for Indian actors, but mere walk-on parts is all most of them can expect, and often as 'bad guys'. For the most part lead roles are played by Whites in black or brownface — Ben Cross, Alec Guinness, Christopher Lee, Omar Shariff, Peter O'Toole and Amy Irving.

I would concur with Salmon Rushdie that,

[There] can be little doubt that in Britain today the refurbishment of the Empire's tarnished image is under way. The continuing decline, the growing poverty and the meanness of spirit of much of Thatcherite Britain encourages many Britons to turn their eyes nostalgically to the lost hour of their pre-eminence. The recrudescence of imperialist ideology and the popularity of Raj fictions put one in mind of the phantom twitching of an amputated limb. Britain is in danger of entering a condition of cultural psychosis, in which it begins once again to strut and posture like a great power while in fact its power diminishes every year. The jewel in the crown is made, these days, of paste.

"Outside the Whale",
Granta 1984

The popularity of this film with Western audiences — former or present colonial powers, is especially significant in light of the current struggle to divide the world into two empires. David Lean's *Passage to India* is the most recent example of a neo-colonialist attempt to make British rule in India more palatable; to suggest that 'it wasn't that bad after all'. This attempt and its cultural products fit neatly the hegemonic designs of the United States who, in the genealogy of empires, is England's successor.

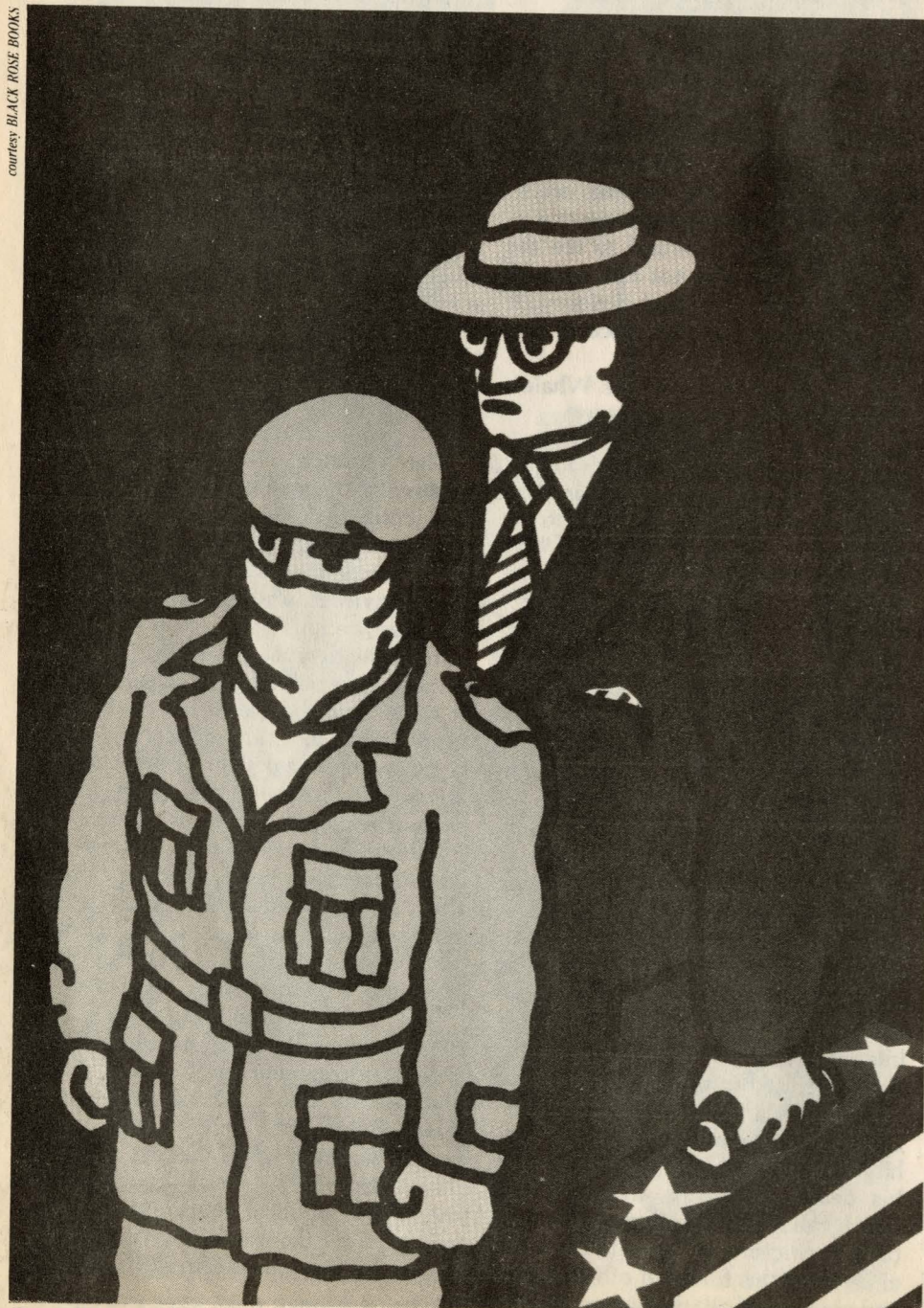
For myself, I cannot wait for the day when Americans begin to make films about the 'good old days' of Americans in Nicaragua, or Grenada. If *Passage to India* is any indication, it will truly be proof that that empire has also ended.

The last word must go to E.M. Forster, who once described British rule in India as a combination of social insult and political injury. David Lean's attempt to 'put India on the screen' can best be summarised by the first part of this description — social insult. That the days of political injury are over is evidenced by the nostalgic promptings and urgings to make a film such as this.

Propagating Terror and Control Networks in Service of "National Interest"

ROGER MCTAIR

courtesy BLACK ROSE BOOKS



Cover illustration by J.W. Stewart

The Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and Propaganda.

Edward S. Herman,
Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1985.

DOUBLE TALK IS THE LANGUAGE of politics. In *The Real Terror Network* Edward S. Herman cuts through the seamless surface of contemporary political double talk to reveal the reality of murder, mass terror and social conditions which are covered up by the selective use of facts and by a mass media that serves "national interest" either by default or design.

Herman, a professor of finance at the University of Pennsylvania, writes about American policy and 'national interest' in the world. He sets out to show how much of the public's perception of events is obscured by disinformation and doubletalk masquerading as fact and news, and that there is much more to the news than the pronouncements of politicians and the reports of "objective" journalists.

The Real Terror Network does not pull its punches. It accuses the U.S. mass media of selecting information on the basis of "principles related to power and interest, not truth and human relevance". It criticizes the double standards of the politics of the cold war; "frightful abuse in the enemy sphere equals a return to stability in the client state".

He documents how cold war authors like Clair Sterling, *The Terror Network*, ignore the total picture of international violence and makes "terrorism" a catchword for any act by groups that do not have official sanction by the powers in "our" sphere of interest.

Herman makes the argument that deflecting attention from the conditions of many underdeveloped countries with versions of the Red Scare is in fact a strategy to ensure that we continue to get cheap resources and cheap labour out of these countries. There is, he says, "a huge tacit conspiracy between the U.S. government, its agencies and its multi-national corporations on the one hand, and local business and military cliques in the Third World on the other, to assume complete control of these countries and 'develop' them on a joint venture basis". Latin America is the obvious example of this with the highest degree income inequality in the world, exceeding income inequality even in Africa and Asia.

Latin America suffers from hunger, illiteracy and widespread health problems, while under the system of military rule only an elite minority benefits. And any challenge however moderate to the powers of the ruling minority is equated with communism, and people who espouse 'communism' are subject to the full weight of state

repression: murder, mutilation, torture and disappearance.

In the interests of 'anti-communism and 'security' thousands of people have died all over the world: labour leaders, students, priests and nuns. For many of these elite minorities and military rulers, true 'communists' are people struggling for basic rights. And the only security threat is posed by trade unionists and majority rule.

Herman shows how right-wing barbarism does not get the kind of sustained and detailed news coverage that Soviet dissidents get. Nor does it get the kind of vilification that the present government of Nicaragua gets. He demonstrates that there is wide-spread co-operation among a network of security agencies that have killed, kidnapped and intimidated people often beyond their national borders. These agencies have power, real power. Only when their activities become too blatant do they receive publicity, as in the case of the Chilean security service actions in the U.S. and the well-documented activities of the South Korean security ser-

vices in Japan and the U.S.

The Real Terror Network is persuasive in its thesis that the cold war is used internationally as an excuse to deny civil liberties, avoid the rule of law, reinforce economic dependency, train police forces and military establishments and keep social, political and economic control away from the people who need them most — the poor of the underdeveloped countries.

This book is a strong addition to the many which confront the roots of Third World misery and shows how the institutionalized media and American-dominated view of the world with its emphasis on sensation and catchphrases do not portray the reality of the world. Herman has written an informed book showing the scope of institutionalized terrorism, why it is employed, how it is organised and who benefits from it. Black Rose Books presents us with this, still timely, first Canadian edition.

Roger McTair is a writer and filmmaker living in Toronto.



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and Cultural Festival*

LABOUR DAY WEEKEND

**August 30th, 31st and September 1st
in Kildonan Park
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

Featuring:

Anishinabesug Theatre
Lillian Allen
Jennifer Berezan
Suzanne Bird
Heather Bishop
Elaine Calgary
Natch Gloria
Sheila Gostick
Karen Howe
Connie Kaldor

Dorothy Livesay
Tracy Riley
Audrey Rose
Louise Rose
The Seacows
Sherry Shute, Gwen Swick
& Catherine Mackay
Lucie Blue Tremblay
and many more

MUSIC DANCE THEATRE POETRY

For more information
contact the festival office

**3-D 161 Stafford St.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3M 2W9**

Phone 477-5478

