

THE CULTURAL NEWSMAGAZINE

FALL 1985

\$2.50

FUSE

*BENGALI PUBLIC THEATRE
ACTRESSES IN SOCIAL HISTORY*

*MEAN MOTHERS WOMEN'S BLUES
NOT YOUR DOWNTRODDEN VARIETY*

*FALLING SHORT ON SISTERHOOD
WOMEN'S STRUGGLES GLOBAL CONTEXT*



**THEATRE
SPECIAL**

Fuse take care!

I WAS VERY HAPPY TO RECEIVE the [Spring 1985] issue of *Fuse* with my article in it. On the whole I was quite pleased with the layout, the choice of illustrations, the sub-headings and most of the other editorial decisions.

However there were several alterations made to the text (without my consultation) which changed the sense and/or the tone of what I was attempting to say. The most notable change appearing on page 34, column 1, lines 8 & 9; I did not think Pierre Crépô's statement was careless. In fact, Crépô himself takes a pro-choice stance in relation to abortion and that seemed fairly clear in his show. Since this was not obvious in an early draft of my text, I felt it was worth mentioning. Perhaps I was careless in not clarifying this adequately in my manuscript, but I'm sure this and the other (less problematic) alterations of meanings could have been avoided if I had been consulted.

—Chuck Samuels
Montreal

OUR APOLOGIES FOR THIS MISrepresentation. A copy of typeset copy should have been sent for approval.

—Joyce Mason
Managing Editor

More Music to his Ears

AS AN AMERICAN COMPOSER and subscriber to *Fuse* I have watched for some political/aesthetic enlightenment that is totally (and I mean TOTALLY) unavailable from writers about music in this country. But I have been disappointed, both by the lack of quantity and the diffuseness of the little that I have seen. It seems that when political people turn to music they assume that what is *only* relevant to their work is Third World folkloric music or Western Rock, but not Western 'avant-garde', or 'post-modern' or what-you-will.

Partly I agree with an interpretation of much contemporary music that

shows its elitism, its self-idealization, and in the case of people like Glass/Wilson, its ruthless careerism, and pandering to tastes and to the cultural establishments that only show off its own emptiness — still, still, that is not the whole story and I think *Fuse* needs to find the equivalent to a Lippard of the Visual arts if one could be found. Such criticism when constructive might even influence the deadliness of the musical climate that I have just described. As a frequent collaborator with 'folkloric' musicians I do not have to belabour the point that folk music is a fundament and a touchstone and should continue to be one of several reference points.

However, I continue to wait with baited (sic) breath for the enlightenment I seek. If not from *Fuse*, then from whom?

—Daniel Goode
Neshanic, New Jersey

Another Masculine Voice

I AM WRITING RATHER BELATEDLY in regards to Chuck Samuel's review of "The Birth Project" in the Spring 1985 issue. I have not seen the work, but I believe there is sufficient questionable material in the review itself to warrant comment.

Samuels seems to have problems with the fact that male partners are portrayed in the work in a supportive, sharing role, and interprets this as one more instance of men "always in control". Given that some women choose to be heterosexual, what role does he think men *should* play? The traditional one of ignoring the pregnancy and then passing out cigars, or waiting in the waiting room "banished from his privileged (sic) position within the structure of couple-controlled birth"? Or should men try to shoulder the responsibility of parenthood and emotional support within an (admittedly) heterosexual structure? Samuels is right in suggesting that births involving single or lesbian mothers should have been included, as well as women of colour, but to interpret mutuality and sharing between men and women as *necessarily* implying that women be granted more control over their own

bodies only "in the company of [their men]" suggests to me that Samuels and not the authors of "The Birth Project" are prone to "oversimplified" and "tendentious" opinions.

Samuels accuses "The Birth Project" of "[isolating] birth from... reproductive rights...birth control, abortion, domestic violence, sexual self-determination, etc." The same criticism could be made of the numerous pro-choice demonstrations which fail to mention the issues of midwifery and women's right to home birth.

It seems that Samuels' real critique is contained in the last paragraph: namely, that "couple-controlled birth is...middle class" and "heterosexual", and hence "maintains the status quo". This is objectionable on a number of grounds:

- 1) home births used to be the prerogative of women of all classes — it is a right which has been stolen from the working class as much as from the middle class;
- 2) many working class women can't afford abortions — does this mean we abolish them or struggle to bring them within economic reach?
- 3) home birth is a "bourgeois" issue whereas abortion, domestic violence and birth control are not.

It seems to me that it is Chuck Samuels and not Wollheim's photographs that "may be described as yet another masculine voice telling women what they should do with their bodies."

—Don Alexander
Toronto

Apologies

to Roald Nasgaard, (A.G.O. chief curator) whose name was set incorrectly as Ronald, an error which was not caught in the proofing.

to A Space, for not mentioning that they originally solicited the "Six Days of Resistance" article, which we reprinted, for the *Issues of Censorship* exhibition and catalogue.

Freeing the Captive Audience
The Audience as Activist

KATE LUSHINGTON

THEATRE AS AN ARTFORM, BOTH performance and drama, is rooted in the here and now. It cannot be post-humously appreciated. (This has certain consequences for theatre as a political force.) A starving theatre artist cannot slave away in the obligatory garret, pouring inner vision into an external product which will outlive both the producer and the moment of production. The theatre artist's work both creates and is created by that moment; and that moment must be shared. This act of sharing requires not only an empty space, but other people, fellow workers, and an audience, preferably a crowd; someone to talk to, right now, out loud. One further proviso: not only the artist but the audience also must be alive.

Given a vital theatre and a lively public, we have a revolutionary proposition: a theatre which is all about change (presently known as "character development") which depends upon struggle (or "conflict"); which can tell stories about reality and the truth about dreams; and which, despite a relatively recent hierarchical tradition, is essentially an act of collective will.

Yet theatre in Canada as a general rule is enacted upon a passive audience rather than actively engaging them in dialogue. Instead of a medium for social and political change, the professional theatre in this country has become, by and large, the status symbol of the elite (\$150.00 a ticket for *Ra* — a twelve-hour musical spectacle set in Ancient Egypt which was sent to Amsterdam to represent Canadian theatre). Theatre attempts, despite substantial subsidy, to compete in the open market with movies and rock concerts for the "entertainment dollar", thereby alienating in form and content both the avant-garde and the progressive audience. Toronto bills itself as the third largest city in the

English-speaking world, and Canada as a whole has more theatres per capita than England, yet I'd be willing to bet that few *FUSE* readers ever set foot in them. Conversely, no one in the theatre community who doesn't have extracurricular artistic or political affiliations (and most of us don't) will ever have heard of *FUSE* Magazine.

Perhaps this issue can go some small way towards healing this sad state of affairs. Theatres are represented from all along a continuum, as different aspects of a larger transformational process rather than as oppositional elements striving for status: professionals and amateurs, critics and performers, individual artists and community groups, hierarchies and collectives, dance and agitprop, women in Bengal and Montreal.

Bob Wallace has written a fascinating account of the critic's temptation to become an objective arbiter of excellence. The Canada Council's stated criterion of "artistic merit" can be challenged on similar grounds. In British Columbia, Punjabi's are using theatre rooted in their community to educate and activate an audience that doesn't read books. These interactive kinds of theatre as well as children's and community (read 'amateur') theatre are often accorded low status, seen as didactic at worst, educational at best.

The situation of Bengali women in theatre, as reported by Himani Bannerji, draws a compelling portrait of the strength of women who have and continue to work in theatre in India. Despite vastly different social and economic restrictions in their everyday lives, I found their position *structurally* similar to that of Canadian women in the theatre since, although the patriarchal assumptions are covert here, we, like our Bengali colleagues, are often required to be "sensitive reflec-

tors" of male fantasy and are more frequently employed as volunteers than for money. "One woman, two women, without women" could well be used in Canada as an aide-memoire for our artistic directors.

Susan Feldman, in her report on the Theatre of the Americas' conference, writes of women in Latin America and the Caribbean countries who, in the face of their specific oppressive political and economic realities, are developing a theatre in which both audience and artists are actively and intimately connected with the material; in some cases, there is no apparent separation between them.

The articles in this issue of *FUSE* echo a question raised at the women's theatre conference in Montreal: So who is our audience? An audience gets the kind of theatre it demands and too often the politically aware neglect their responsibility because theatre is often viewed in Canada as "pure entertainment". I was happy to see the polarization between political theatre and entertainment rejected in such disparate pieces as the B.C. Punjabi theatre and Crowsfeet Dance Collective (C.D.C.). As Suchi Branfman of C.D.C. put it, "entertainment" is what gets in there and does something to people's spirit", freeing the captive audience to consider other options.

Theatre is an abiding passion with me — I believe it can be a force for political change just as I believe politics can change the theatre into a voice for the silenced, a showcase for the invisible, and a challenge to complacency; a reflection of my own fears and desires as well as a window open onto other worlds. We must begin by activating ourselves as audience to demand the theatre we deserve.

Kate Lushington

Life Under Expo Free Enterprising with Women's Lives

SETTING OUT TO CHRONICLE the now yearly atrocities of the B.C. Social Credit government is a depressing process. Nonetheless, while forest fires rage at an unprecedented level, fueled by the recent cutbacks in forest maintenance resources, the government faces a few blazes in the city, as well.

In 1983, when the now infamous restraint package was tabled, the government first stated its intention to dismantle Vancouver Transition House. This shelter was, on one hand, the bane of the government and on the other, a model for other feminist services. Directly funded by the Ministry of Human Resources, it provided twenty-four hour support — including counselling, legal assistance, crisis intervention, childcare and child therapy. It was operated by a collective of unionized feminist staff, whose wages, benefits and negotiated conditions (such as a car for emergency pickup) created a standard for decent wages and treatment in non-union transition houses in other parts of the province.

A public opinion poll in 1983 indicated that indignation at cutbacks was highest in regard to services to battered women and their children. Rather than completely eliminate Vancouver Transition House, the Social Credit government chose a politically expedient, but potentially devastating, solution. It "privatized" the house, placing a tender call in the local newspapers and taking bids from various groups prepared to administer the house with indirect government funding. The YWCA, the applicant most favoured by the feminist community, picked up the contract. But the hidden costs of privatization: the drain on internal resources, volunteer hours and administrative funds, as well as a less-than-enthusiastic attitude towards union workers, proved to be overwhelming. One year later, as renewal time rolled around, the YWCA dropped the house like a hot potato.

As the end of the tender neared, Grace MacCarthy, Minister of (In)human Resources for the B.C. government, announced that the province intended to

close the house for good because, according to MHR, there were other facilities within reach of the city. (These included emergency placement in hotels, and transition houses in nearby cities — 100 kms away and usually full.) The move created a wave of indignation. Ever mindful of public opinion, MacCarthy changed her tune. A new tender call was in the paper. It stated that the service was now to concern itself with the integrity of the family. A deadline for re-opening the house was not mentioned. A safe home programme (where women are farmed out to foster homes on a temporary basis) or a house run by the Right to Life, similar to one recently funded in Quesnel, was to be the fate of what was once the model transition house in B.C.

The closing of the house would make Vancouver the only major Canadian city without a battered women's shelter. On the eve of the shut-down a public meeting of over three hundred men and women called for the house to remain open. Delegates from the meeting were dismissed when they went to Victoria the following day — it was clear that action more drastic than lobbying was needed.

On June 28th, the YWCA proceeded with its final inventory, as residents of the house were dispersed to hotels or went home. A group of women visited the house, ostensibly to say goodbye to this essential resource. They explained to the shocked staff and angry YWCA supervisor that individuals from many organizations and varying feminist positions had met and decided that the shelter must remain open. Several minutes later, reinforcements arrived. The struggle to save Vancouver Transition House had escalated dramatically.

One month later, the occupation continues. The occupiers have been running the house as a shelter for battered women, with a crisis line and support services provided to the limits that volunteer labour will allow. Vancouver police have even agreed to refer to the house and to assist in crisis calls. Pickets at Grace MacCarthy's office, a large sing-out rally with Judy Small, Connie Kaldour and the Righteous

Mothers, and hundreds of telegrams, letters of support and positive press, have built the campaign to save the house.

The government has retreated to some extent. Tender hearings were accelerated, with MHR promising an immediate resolution to the crisis. When it appeared that the service would not be returned to the public sector, feminist groups, offering various services to battered women, met to establish acceptable criteria for a "new" service. Central to these were the principles that women do not deserve to be beaten, have the right to self-determination and self-help in a supportive environment. The "summit" also demanded that the service remain unionized and that the current, feminist staff be rehired.

To date a number of groups that could meet these criteria have applied. MHR has rejected all existing applicants, making it clear that they want to break the union and fire the existing staff. To do this, they must evade union successor rights, which means funding a substantially different operation. Support for the reopening of the house is needed, not only in Vancouver but from all over Canada. FUSE readers can help by sending a telegram demanding that Transition House be reopened, to Hon. Grace MacCarthy, Minister of Human Resources, Parliament Buildings, Victoria, B.C.

Update

The Socred government has awarded the service tender to the Salvation Army and a private group called ACT. After a short stay at the S.A., women will be placed in therapeutic safe houses. Women's organizations, minority groups and unions have held meetings in which all expressed their complete dissatisfaction with this decision. A broader fight is being organized and the occupation of the house will continue until a fully operative feminist house for battered women is established.

Sara Diamond

Learning the Hard Way

STUDENTS RETURNING TO PUBLIC schools in September will face drastically cut teaching staffs and

resources. In a remarkable display of arrogance, the Social Credit government fired two elected, local school boards, in Vancouver and Campbell River. The Boards had refused to undertake the prescribed budget cuts. A well-paid Socred appointee took the place of the fired board members. Boards across the province had defied the new computer-set guidelines, declaring the funding levels unworkable. However, threats of suspension and firing had pulled other boards into line. Some, like the Burnaby Board, bargained with the government until their budget was increased.

The Vancouver Board was targeted for dismemberment because it had provided consistent leadership in the fight against cuts. Its majority were members of the Committee of Progressive Electors, a left-wing civic slate. They had run on the basis of defying the sweeping cuts to teaching, support staffs and materials budgets. In an act of further arrogance, the appointed trustee proceeded to override the province's budget limitations for Vancouver, bringing next year's budget close to the original recommendations of the fired trustees.

Although the Boards remain ousted, the fight against education cuts has not ended. Action from the B.C. Teacher's Federation is expected in the fall, as the government forces teachers to bear the brunt of salary cuts, expanded classroom sizes, and the chopping of support services (ESL and school counsellors to name just two).

Sara Diamond

Lesbian & Gay Pride Day

ON JUNE 30, TORONTO CELEBRATED its fifth annual Lesbian and Gay Pride Day, which was held this year in conjunction with the seventh annual International Gay Association conference (see report below). This gave the day a more international flavour and boosted participation figures. As many as 8,000 lesbians, gay men and their friends converged on Cawthra Square Park, the 519 Church Street Community Centre and its environs, to dance, drink beer and be entertained. Later the crowd swelled through downtown streets under a hot summer sun in what organizers claimed as the city's biggest pride march ever.

FALL 1985



Smashing Borders Sex & the State

IN THE WEEK FOLLOWING LESBIAN and Gay Pride Day, Toronto hosted this year's International Gay Association Conference, "Smashing Borders, Opening Spaces". Simultaneously, the Canadian Gay Archives sponsored a 4-day conference of Lesbian and Gay history entitled "Sex and the State: Their Laws, Our Lives". Both conferences promoted numerous cultural events including *Gay Gaze*, an exhibit of 27 Canadian Lesbian and Gay artist's work at Gallery 940 and A.R.C. (Artculture Resource Centre) and *Rumours, Rules and Resistance*, a collaborative installation by JAC and the Flying Femmes at Sparkes Gallery.

John Greyson's new video *Kipling meets the Cowboys* was screened on Lesbian and Gay Pride Day and the conference screened other independent films and videos, including the Canadian Premiere of *Before Stonewall*, experimental works by Kenneth Anger and Mido Onodera and a documentary by Richard Fung. Thomas Waugh delivered a lecture on the historical transformations of male homoerotic films, which was highlighted by Curt McDowell's avant-garde diary film, *Loads*.

In the evenings, as a break from lectures, workshops and committee meetings, several slide shows were presented. These covered topics ranging from "Lesbians and Gays in the Harlem Renaissance" to Sue Golding's playful interrogation of lesbian eroticism, "Aesthetics, Transgression and the Politics of Sex."

On the live side, the Rivoli hosted a men's poetry evening and a lesbian performance night; Gay Bell's play *Danger: Anger* was premiered, and the conference closed with a porn extravaganza called *Lesbians in Search of a Smut of Our Own*, and Gay Asians Toronto's *Celebrasian '85*. *Celebrasian* featured W.S. Choy's play *Smashing Borders* and a variety show featuring the anarchistic revels of *Psychological Freaks and Social Misfits*.



In the Sun

Led by the Amazons, on their bikes, the parade snaked its way up Yonge Street to the general amusement and consternation of onlookers. A myriad of banners included those from other parts of Canada and around the world, carried by their IGA Conference delegates, and gave the march a global representation it had never had before. All in all, this was the largest and perhaps most successful Pride Day ever held in Toronto; let's hope for many more.

Beth Raymer

FUSE

Scott Kerr

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Canadian Feminist Periodicals Conference

REPRESENTATIVES FROM THIRTY five Canadian feminist periodicals met outside of Montreal in June for a conference that focused on skills exchange and networking. Conducted in French and English, this conference, the first of its kind in five years, signalled the beginning of a national liaison effort of all self-named feminist publications. Represented were well-known journals such as *La Vie en Rose*, *Kinesis*, *Herizons*, and *Fireweed*, and local feminist periodicals from all corners of the country including *Vernon*, B.C.'s *images* and the Yukon's *Optimist*.

Recent attempts by right wing organizations to sabotage funding of such magazines as *Herizons* (see *Fuse* reports, Summer 1985) affected the climate of the conference, giving women a critical view of the tenuousness of government monies and the imperative to remain or achieve financial independence as soon as possible. In the mean time, conference participants acknowledged the necessity for continued government interest in the feminist press and planned to extend solidarity to all feminist publishers who maintain their editorial integrity despite the present threats of financial disinvestment. Publications are recognizing their economic vulnerability and much of the conference was spent sharing trade secrets, demystifying buzz words and discussing ways of "packaging feminism so that it sells".

In doing so, they may be changing the kind of values that previously were feminist standards. "Design never used to be feminist" says *Broadside* editor Phil Masters, acknowledging that attitudes, and feminist presentations are changing. *La Vie en Rose's* Françoise Pelletier spoke of the enormous creativity required to "package a message that is undiluted", to look attractive enough for the newsstand and yet maintain a feminist ethic. Those ethics are not without a financial impact: in the July-August issue of *La Vie en Rose* a full page ad, found to be sexist, was withdrawn as the magazine went to press. In its place (opposite an editorial on pornography and the Frazer report) a blank page with "Non" in bold letters

and a brief explanation appeared.

There was, mercifully, no attempt to arrive at political consensus among the thirty five presses attending the conference. Most publications document, and are answerable to, the women's movement as it evolves in their own communities. As a group of publications we benefit from our naturally occurring diversity, and coalition work was avoided, as was competition. One of the conference resolutions was, however, to implement joint subscription campaigns in the hopes that all would benefit from the cultivation of a feminist readership base in Canada. A further resolution promised on-going communication between the presses, and annual conferences beginning with one in Toronto next May.

Ingrid MacDonald

Sister Vision

IN JUNE OF THIS YEAR SISTER Vision launched its first publication — a book of poetry entitled, *Speshal Rikwes* by Ahdri Zhina Mandiela. *Sister Vision* is Canada's first feminist press for black women and women of colour.

The project grew from a need to encourage and make available more work by black women and women of colour in this country. Makeda Silvera and Stephanie Martin have, since founding the press in the summer of 1984, worked with other Toronto women to organise public events and fundraisers, including two concerts held in the spring: in April, Casselberry and Dupree (a *Sister Vision* benefit) and in May, Jane Sapp (a concert which they co-sponsored). Concerts and fundraising ventures will, according to Makeda, remain on the agenda for this fall and winter as well, since government funding has remained absent to date. But more than a means of raising funds for a worthwhile cultural cause, these events are themselves an enrichment of our cultural lives and we look forward to their continuance, along with events by local and Canadian artists.

Publications currently in the works, for release in 1986, include two child-

ren's books: a novel by Himani Bannerji and a collection of stories; and an anthology of writings by lesbians of colour in Canada. In general *Sister Vision* plans to focus on four areas for publication: women's oral history, creative writing, books for children and young people, and theory/research.

The *Sister Vision* press has provided us with another link in the continuum of spirited women making visible and audible the strength and diversity of our lives and our history — from Marie Joseph Angelique (a Black Montreal slave who launched the first documented act of defiance against slavery) and Mary Ann Shadd (first woman editor in Canada and publisher of one of our first Black newspapers, in the 1850's, *The Provincial Freeman*) to women of colour in Canada and in the Caribbean and Third World women the world over today. It is a welcome and long-needed addition to our feminist presses.

The press is particularly willing to work with women who have not identified themselves as writers, and welcomes input, ideas and manuscripts from other parts of Canada. They hope to "encourage works by women of all cultures, sexual preferences and classes" and while drawing a conscious political distinction between Black women and women of colour because of the particular historical experience of Black women in the world (namely slavery and its aftermath) and while laying claim to the need to focus on the consequences of that history, they "will not be limited by it, and will continue to recognize our commonalities and share the writings of our Native Sisters, our Asian Sisters and others who define themselves as women of colour."

To send manuscripts or ideas, to place orders, or to make a donation you can write to: *Sister Vision*, P.O. Box 217, Station E, Toronto, Ontario M6H 4E2.

Joyce Mason

Canadian Dimension Managing Editor

Canadian Dimension is a nationally distributed socialist magazine of news and analysis. The editorial collective requires a full-time staff person to handle production, organizational, promotional, and editorial tasks. Knowledge of issues of interest to Canadian socialists and feminists is required. The successful applicant will have a demonstrated ability to control costs. The salary will be \$20,000 per annum. Resumé & references by Sept. 30 to

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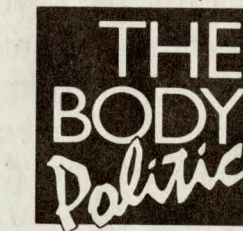
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Union Activism Punjabi Theatre in B.C.

David Jackson

SINCE ITS BEGINNING, THE CANADIAN FARM-workers Union has rarely held a public meeting that did not include a substantial cultural programme, with dance, drama, poetry and songs. Initially the programmes were intended to draw people to political meetings: much of the content, though political, was necessarily taken from other issues, other places. However, because the union works closely with a network of Punjabi cultural workers, many of whom are also strong CFU activists, it has been increasingly possible to develop cultural programmes that directly address the experiences and concerns of farm-workers. Thus cultural work has assumed greater and greater importance in terms of CFU's organizing.

Health and Safety Demonstration, Vancouver 1984



CRAIG CONDE-BERGOLD

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE significance of this, it is useful to view CFU not just in the context of the trade union movement, but as a social movement firmly rooted in the Punjabi community of British Columbia from which it draws its strength. As such, it finds itself associated with other similarly grounded groups concerned with racism, problems faced by immigrant children, religious (communal) harmony and, to a certain extent, politics in India. Within the community these issues are seen as totally intertwined, and as having common underlying causes.

At the same time as problems are interconnected, so the positive aspects — people's sense of security, satisfaction, identity and happiness — are firmly rooted in the context of the community. These are closely connected with family networks and with a sense of culture which, in an insular immigrant community, are very strong.

Any social movement which intends to gain support or relevance must work within this fabric. It must address (or at least support) a wide range of concerns, and it must cater to the positive aspects of people's lives as well as the problems. This may explain why CFU public meetings are generally attended by entire families, and why the cultural programmes are very important.

There is another complicating factor, however. Within this all-encompassing community are many powerful elements whose interests CFU cannot possibly represent, especially farm owners and labour contractors who exert a strong influence on the politics of the Sikh temples, which in turn are the most powerful social institutions in the Punjabi community. Because of this, resistance to CFU reverberates through the complex webs of family and social ties.

If CFU cannot plug directly into the networks of the mainstream Punjabi community, then in asking farm-workers to give up (or fight) their dependence on those networks, it must provide powerful alternatives.

Socially, this means that CFU must promote social relations and activities which break down rather than reinforce the feudal hold which growers and contractors exert through the temples. At the same time, it must respect and uphold the positive aspects of existing social structures and traditions. Any social gathering of farm-workers where they can freely express their concerns without fear of reprisal, as well as have fun and meet friends, is a small but positive step in this direction. Cultural work is an important way of doing this.

The first Punjabi cultural work in North America dates from 1912-1915, when the California-based Gadhar Party published revolutionary poetry in its newspaper, *Gadhar di Goonj*. Poems glorified Sikh history and demanded India's independence from Britain. In the early 1970s, the Punjabi community in Vancouver greatly expanded with new waves of immigration and many young college students and some writers joined the ranks of the community. With growth came intensified problems of racism and economic exploitation. Within a decade a united front of organization had risen to combat these issues. From 1971 on, several cultural and literary associations formed, including a monthly literary magazine called *Watno Dur*. All were explicitly left-wing and as the years passed they tried more and more to address local political and social issues, through poetry, short stories, song and, later, drama.

Since 1979, these groups have produced plays on a variety of local subjects including sexism and violence within Indian families, racism, the deportation of hundreds of Indian workers from Vancouver in 1908, and the struggle of the farmworkers. They have maintained regular contact with groups doing similar work in Punjab, and several of these troupes have visited Vancouver.

One organization, Vancouver Sath, recently completed a twenty-five minute play called *Picket Line*, based on a mushroom farm strike in June 1984, in which CFU was involved. So far it has been performed twice, for



Hoss Farm Mushroom Workers, Picket at Frazer Valley Mushroom Co-op, Summer '84

audiences of 450 and 700. CFU is planning to take the play on an organizing tour to various towns in B.C., and Vancouver Sath plans to videotape it for wider distribution.

Sukhwant Hundal and Sadhu Binning, co-authors of *Picket Line*, speak here with David Jackson.

DAVID JACKSON: Could you explain how *Picket Line* came to be written?

SUKHWANT HUNDAL: During May 1984 eleven workers at Hoss Mushroom Farm decided to form a union. So they signed the cards and on May 28th, the employer found a union campaign was in progress, so he fired

five of the eleven workers. The next day the union put up a picket line, and he fired the other six workers. From that day on, Sadhu and I were there, as supporters of the union, on the picket line. It went on for one week and two days at the farm and five days at the Mushroom Growers' Co-op. Standing on the picket line was tough. You had to get up early in the morning, go there at four, and stay there until seven or eight at night.

But the thing that inspired us was that all the women were very strong and determined to fight.

SADHU BINNING: We got the feeling of the struggle very directly and first-hand. That gave us confidence

CRAIG CONDE-BERGOLD

that we could say something about it in a play. We were in very close contact with the workers. Whenever we talked with them, we listened very carefully because we wanted to write something. **DAVID:** What was the play about? **SADHU:** It starts with a group of women discussing their work problems after a long shift. They're very frustrated, and after a great deal of discussion they decide to go to the union. In the second scene one of these women goes, with a union organizer, to another worker's house to sign her up. Her husband is against it because of all the financial responsibilities they have, but eventually she joins in defiance of him.

The third scene takes place at the farm. The grower has found out about the union and he tries to fight it by hiring scabs and getting help from other growers. The fourth scene is on the picket line itself. The workers are fired and they're picketing the farm. But two workers think if they walk around with placards they're hurting the honour of their menfolk and they're very worried. They still have very feudal ideas of labour, from being peasants in India.

But the other workers and the organizer convince them that they're workers now, and to struggle is their right. They demystify the myth that the farmer is like part of their family, "Those relations you think are there are all false. They're trying to cheat you. Don't be fooled if anyone calls you 'sister' and still gives you \$1.50 for all the work you do." In the end they're convinced, they join the struggle.

DAVID: Can you explain the relation between your cultural work and the politics you're involved in?

SADHU: Being a writer and politically conscious, these things go hand in hand. You want to do active political work and at the same time you want to do creative writing. The logical conclusion is to join the two. That's what we try to do. Through the magazine we publish, *Watno Dur*, most of the local material that we've done is either about farmworkers or racism. Our priority has been to select stories and poems with local content, the problems faced by people here.

The same goes for Vancouver Sath's cultural programmes here. We try to give some sort of political message through the content, through the poems, the plays, even the dance, and at the same time have some political

person give the message directly. When there is a political meeting we often go, in order to give the audience the feeling that other people are thinking about it too. You have to join culture and politics, that's the whole idea behind Sath.

SUKHWANT: To forward the people's struggle, you have to do two things: educate people, and then mobilize them to do active political work. In our community we think these can be done at the same time. By doing cultural things, we try to educate them, and then the political person comes and says, "Come out, let's do the action." Those two things are joined there.

DAVID: What kind of audience is a "good" audience for your work?

SUKHWANT: In the Indo-Canadian community, if we just educate the farmworkers, we are not going to get anywhere. We have to educate their families, even if they are not working on farms, because they have the decision-making power.

SADHU: If you are trying to organize people in a factory or a mill, then you can have direct contact with the workers, and then you can convince them. But with the farmworkers there is very little chance of direct contact with all the workers. Also, you have to have a general agreement within the community that something needs to be done. So when you do a play or write something, everybody in the community is a good audience, because you need a consensus.

DAVID: Are there advantages to live performances over written media for getting this agreement?

SADHU: I think live performances count for more because they have a direct effect on the audience. When you have an audience sitting in front of you, there is an atmosphere already built up. They listen. But in the case of reading material the majority of them simply read it for the sake of entertainment.

SUKHWANT: We know for sure that 400 people have seen the play. In our community there are no reading habits! Nobody reads literature. It's very minimal. So the only way is to go directly to them, and I think doing plays is the best way to do it.

SADHU: Especially to the type of audience that we would like to address our writings and our plays. But we want to create an audience that reads. It's happening: people do read more than they did twenty years ago in Pun-

jabi. Things are changing, but not with the speed we would like.

DAVID: Do you think that art can serve a purpose in political organizing different from more direct approaches like political speeches?

SADHU: Both art and political ideas have a function. When you say something through art, it involves emotions: relaxation, entertainment. Especially in this society, people don't read political articles or go to demonstrations. So you have to make political ideology part of life, and that's where art comes in. The function of art, for political people, is to get political ideas into people's lives. Art makes it easier, although it's vague, and it doesn't have the same effect as a political speech or a political article would. But through a play people are being entertained, ridiculed at times, and it stays with them, becomes part of their unconscious.

SUKHWANT: There are times when you can't say things directly to people. If a worker comes from eight or ten hours work and you start giving him an article or a political speech, he might say, "Fuck off! I don't want to listen to you!" But if you say the same thing in a play or a short story or a poem, that will entertain him, he will forget the harshness of his work, and also he will get that idea.

DAVID: When you write, do you start with a conscious conclusion or message in mind, or does that emerge out of the process of writing?

SADHU: My being a writer came out of my political awareness. You select what you want to focus on, and that selection is very conscious. It's a thought process that you go through. When I select something, it's a conscious decision, and I think about it with my political awareness, and it comes out with a political colour.

I think you do have some idea what you want to say when you start. I think the message with political people is always there; there's just one big message that you want to give. My political conclusion is it can't be done under this system, the system has to be changed.

SUKHWANT: Whatever a person does is political. There are people doing it consciously, and people doing it unconsciously. I'm doing it consciously. My first thought is always, "What do I want to say?" Then I decide in which form I can do it best.

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Paul Binnings Dance Company, in traditional dress

BHANGRA

OF ALL THE CULTURAL TRADITIONS to emerge in B.C.'s Punjabi community, the most energetic, exciting and accessible to westerners is men's dancing or *bhangra*. Visually it is spectacular: a team of six to eight dancers dressed in bright red, green and yellow silk with fanned turbans, sometimes performing delicate moves with grace and subtlety, suddenly leaping three tiers high onto each other's shoulders with perfect coordination. All of this is accompanied by a costumed singer playing a goatskin drum or *tole*.

Originally performed by Central Asian tribal peoples before going to war, it later was adopted by Punjabi farmers and performed at harvest time. Now in India it is performed mainly in competitive college circuits, in accordance with strict regulations, and in commercial movies. In Vancouver, however, it has taken a much more popular form and begun to tie in more and more with political organizing.

A leader in these developments has been Paul Binning, who first learned to do *bhangra* with his friends while still in high school, from a newly arrived friend from India. They soon began performing with the intention of promoting Punjabi culture in mainstream Canadian society; and they did so very

successfully, having logged nearly 1,000 performances since 1971. Most of the early performances were in churches, hospitals, and old people's homes. At that time, *bhangra* was viewed suspiciously by most Punjabis: traditionally, the dancers had a reputation for being "wicked", a view reinforced by the bawdy lyrics of the accompanying songs. (The Anglo audiences were probably unaware of this.)

In 1979, Binning made a major shift which set the course for the years to come. Leaving the adult team, he assembled one then two teams of boys ranging in age from ten to sixteen. In accordance with their youth, they performed "cleaner" songs, which helped the dance's popularity in the Punjabi community.

Since then, there has been a steady "politicization" of *bhangra*, beginning with the choice of audience. The teams began performing more and more for trade unions and other political groups, including progressive Punjabi organizations such as the Farmworkers Union. Then they replaced the innocuous songs with works by revolutionary Punjabi poets, often writing their own music to them and dedicating the performances to individual freedom fighters and to organizations like CFU. Still more recently, they have begun to adapt the moves in the dances to the new content of the songs,

visually depicting the ideas and themes.

The most recent and exciting development is a kind of *bhangra* "ballet", where dancers explicitly act out a story sung by a narrator. The group has adapted one dance from a story concerning Indian politics by Gurchuran Singh, and applied it to Social Credit politics in British Columbia. The dance begins with smiling workers happily working and dancing, when suddenly a symbol of power arrives and starts ordering them around. Eventually they are dancing as if half-dead: without emotion, without rhythm. Then Solidarity, the symbol of hope, happily dances in and does a "battle dance" with the symbol of power. At this the other dancers perk up, begin dancing happily again, and oust the dictator.

As it has evolved, *bhangra* has become more and more important for CFU public meetings, both for Anglo and Punjabi audiences. Its appeal is powerful at all levels: visually, intellectually, and emotionally, and it's an excellent example of the kind of cultural work CFU is trying to promote and make use of. On the relation between his art and his politics, Binning himself is very clear: "The struggle and the dance both belong to people; it makes sense to put them together. Why not talk about these issues from the heart?"

DAVID: How would you describe the kind of theatre you are developing?
SADHU: It might become a theatre that includes farmworkers, problems of racism, problems of immigration, problems that young people are having; a sort of community theatre concerned with the everyday problems that people have.

SUKHWANT: We could call it problem-posing theatre, where you pose the problems to the community through plays.

DAVID: Do you think it's important to be as concrete and realistic as possible?

SADHU: We're trying to make our plays simple to understand; that may not be close to reality. In theatre you're doing drama, you have to do things in that style. In reality a strike takes three months to develop; in a play you have to do it in twenty minutes. You're showing reality in a different manner, but making it clear, without any mysticism in it. When we did *Picket Line*, the topic was known to everybody in the community. Everybody knows these problems exist. There was no problem of understanding the issue. So they enjoyed the play right from the beginning, and understood everything. We feel they were moved by it.

DAVID: Are you working out of a tradition of theatre that Punjabi people are already familiar with?

SADHU: There were traditions in the villages of stage plays, but they were an older type: religious plays that were the same thing every year, without a lot of political content. The new political theatre is developing now. There are a number of groups active in India. But people here in B.C. really don't have stage art as an ongoing tradition. So we hope to build it!

SUKHWANT: In the audience of *Picket Line*, there might have been some people who were seeing a play for the first time in their life. In that way, we think we were very successful that people enjoyed it. Relatively it might be at the very bottom — but for the Punjabi community it was at the top!

DAVID: So how does your work here relate to the new political theatre that is developing in India, such as Gurchuran Singh's group in Punjab?

SADHU: There might be a slight difference, because their whole movement is concerned with political change in India. When we're doing a

play about the problems kids are having in school with drugs or with racism, it might stretch things too far and be too artificial to draw the same conclusion over and over that you need to change the system, whereas in India you can do that in every play! Here you may have to pose the questions instead of giving the solutions.

SUKHWANT: But our group is impressed by Gurchuran Singh's technique. It is very simple: he takes new actors, doesn't rely on professionals. He believes in people, that they can act. Also he uses minimal props on stage, so he can play anywhere.

DAVID: Some of the cultural work you've been involved in seems more concerned with Indian politics than Canadian. Does that reflect your preoccupation, or the audience's?

SADHU: It's on both sides. The political activists and writers and artists are part of the community, and the whole community is preoccupied with things happening in India. But I think we've tried to make people understand that we cannot ignore what's happening here, in the fields, to our kids in the schools.

SUKHWANT: Also when something happens in India and starts affecting the life of the community here, such as the Khalistan issue, then we have to talk about it.

DAVID: In the past you've been very critical of Indian mass culture, particularly Hindi movies and their influence on people here who spend hours watching them on video. Yet something about them obviously appeals to people. Is there any way to take advantage of this appeal?

SADHU: The content is the problem, not the form. The form can be used for other purposes: for distributing other ideas. For the last ten years, some Hindi movies known as "New Indian Cinema" have been politically oriented — good movies which use the form and simply change the content. They have become very popular, but they're competing against very big money on the other side. Also, in Punjabi a lot of revolutionary writers have written good poems using traditional metres — beautiful revolutionary poetry. So there's nothing wrong with the forms themselves; it's the content you have to change.

DAVID: You seem to have done a lot of your work collectively. Has this been a conscious decision?

SADHU: For us collectivity is very important, almost a requirement, to the extent that sometimes we criticize people for having individual goals. The whole idea of Sath came out of the conviction that we wanted to work together. Articles and plays can easily be written collectively. Our experience has shown that you can do much better this way.

SUKHWANT: We want to be involved in political struggles. That takes time, so there is not much time left for creative work. Individually we don't have time, unless we just sit in our rooms. But then we'd lose touch with the community — we wouldn't be able to produce things which have real content. If we are active in political struggles, we have less time, and we have to share our time.

Also it helps in your development. If we are doing it collectively, the responsibility lies with everybody, and the credit goes to everybody. Even a person who just has one line in the play will think he has produced the whole play, and he will develop and learn.

DAVID: Since a lot of support for farmworkers and other issues such as racism comes from Anglos, are you interested in doing any work in English as well as Punjabi?

SADHU: We would like to reach an English audience, but that doesn't mean we're going to leave our own language behind. For us Punjabi is important, and we want to develop these things in Punjabi. Who else would do it in Punjabi if we went out and did it in English?

SUKHWANT: It is the responsibility of Punjabi writers and actors to do plays in Punjabi. At the same time, in order to reach the younger generations, kids who were born here, sometimes we feel we should start doing things in English in combination with Punjabi.

DAVID: Anything else you want to add?

SADHU: Our long-term goal is to develop relationships with political artists active in other ethnic communities and the wider Canadian community. We have our own Canadian experience, but other groups have different angles on it. We can read articles and books but we really need physical contact with other groups.

David Jackson is the co-ordinator for the English as a Second Language program for the CFU.

Crowsfeet Dance Collective

Rachel Vigier

CROWSFEET DANCE COLLECTIVE IS ONE OF THE two new groups formed from the *Wallflower Order Dance Collective*, which was a women's dance group founded in Eugene, Oregon in 1975. Committed to increasing political awareness and social action through their art, the *Wallflower Order* explored various techniques and toured extensively in the United States, Canada, Europe and Latin America. When the collective went through major changes in 1984, Suchi Branfman, Pamela Gray, Andrea Ko Harmin, Marel Malaret and Dana Sapiro decided to stay together to continue this work. They formed the *Crowsfeet Dance Collective*, a multicultural group of dancers which has its base in the San Francisco Bay area and an office in New York City. In this conversation, Suchi and Marel discuss the birth of *Crowsfeet*, the goals and working principles of the new collective and their past experiences with the *Wallflower Order*.

Suchi Branfman grew up in California where she studied ballet as a child. Later she studied modern dance and moved to New York City, studying with Viola Farber and Gus Solomon, Jr., among others. She taught in several schools and universities on the East Coast and performed with different companies before joining the *Wallflower Order* in February 1981.

Marel Malaret grew up in San Juan, Puerto Rico where she studied ballet, flamenco and jazz dance. In 1976 she moved to New York City where she studied at Barnard College and graduated in dance from New York University in 1982, having concentrated on modern, jazz and the Dunham technique. She has taught at different studios in

New York City and worked with community programmes in East Harlem. She joined the *Wallflower Order* in 1983.

For reasons of space, only Suchi's and Marel's comments appear in this edited version of an interview taped in New York City in May 1985.

SUCHI BRANFMAN: In the *Crowsfeet Dance Collective (CDC)* we learn and purposefully choose to work from a multicultural base and our material reflects this international perspective. The way I see it, this is a natural progression for the *Wallflower Order Dance Collective (WODC)* because as we started developing politically and working with other people we opened up our vision to a bigger picture of society. We started dealing with class, racism, apartheid, liberation struggles and the effect of our government on these issues. We expanded our vision and continue to bring our perspective both as women and from our varied backgrounds to these issues in a personal way, so hopefully our work is not didactic but personal as well.

MAREL MALARET: Mostly the divisions started as WODC began integrating and developed from a white middle class women's group to the understanding that this society is composed of many cultures and races. Also as WODC developed politically and people joined political parties we had to deal with the fact that not everybody supports the same political lines. How do you go on working as a collective, integrate the group and deal with political differences? People became frustrated and basically it exploded last year, so we stopped working

together last summer and reached a compromise in the middle of January 1985. When I look back and try to explain it I don't think the differences could have been solved. They were irreconcilable. We were not trying to pull back together and settle our differences. We were going two different ways. The problem was how do we make the decision.

SUCHI: Everyone in CDC has trained in different areas.
MAREL: But we all have trained in some way as dancers so we all, without talking about it, have a common standard.

SUCHI: We could say that we all have a common base, in that we have all studied ballet. We have come to realize that generally people in this country believe that if you have trained in ballet or a rigorous modern technique then you have "good technique". African, Afro-Haitian, Afro-Caribbean or Cuban dance are never included in what is called "high quality" technical training. It is a very westernized and racist standard of technique and we are trying to break with that in our new work.

MAREL: Some of us didn't start with ballet though. Pam is a working class woman and she is a very strong

when we teach choreography we try to have people experience these different tools and combine them with dance movement. All kinds of people come to our workshops although the participants are still mainly women from the women's movement. We would like to do more outreach.

SUCHI: And we still can't afford to give enough scholarships for those who can't afford to pay. We still don't provide childcare and people who work can't easily come to a 3-week workshop from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. There are many contradictions because we can't afford to do certain things even though we would like to.

MAREL: We have political study groups. We bring in women to talk, short films, materials to read. We stress that people are dancers, but not just dancers. They are interested in doing cultural work and in growing, using art for their political work. It is not limited to dancers. People who are not dancers can be very creative.

SUCHI: For most of the workshop we put people together, but we do technique classes in levels which some people find hard to deal with. There is the concept that dividing people according to levels in incorrect.



performer technically but she didn't start early with ballet. She started later in life with modern dance.

SUCHI: In workshops we talk about what the standard is and why. In fact it is very racist and ethnocentric because there are other levels of strength, power and technique in those other movements. I have learned a lot from...

MAREL: ...the diversity. For example we have a highly trained dancer who was a principal with the *Joffrey Ballet* and the *Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre*. Because of our different training we move differently which is very exciting on stage so we are able to have these different kinds of dancing, choreography and approaches in our show.

SUCHI: And then we are all training in other things at different times. Now some people are focussing on capoeira*. In our workshops, which change as we learn and evolve, we teach many different things. In a workshop we don't expect people to become experts in anything. They probably won't make an incredible piece but they will get a flavour for many things. It will give them possibilities, new ways to look at and deal with the creative process and also other things to think about while they are doing their work.

MAREL: The main goal of our workshops, and of our work, is how to use different tools to give out a message. We use sign language, martial arts, theatre and song, so

FOOTNOTE:

* A martial art developed by the slaves in Brazil. Banned because it was used as a weapon, the slaves added music to the movements, turned capoeira into a game and so continued to practice it.

MAREL: It's right in a practical way; you don't want people getting injured.

SUCHI: Also people learn different things at different times. It doesn't mean that those who are more advanced are better people or even necessarily better dancers. It's just where they are in terms of their training.

MAREL: It has a lot to do with who we are also. As dancers we don't have to go up on stage and just be technically good. We have to project, be politically committed, act, choreograph. I have a lot of respect for a beginner class because I know I can take it and work in a variety of ways. But this society teaches us that words like beginner and advanced have negative connotations.

SUCHI: In our workshops technique is not over-emphasized. We also teach choreography in which very often the most creative and least limited stuff comes from people who haven't had as much training, but are doing what is coming from themselves. We purposefully don't divide that into levels. We say the goal of this is not to make a dance but is a chance to see what all your options are. We also spend a lot of time talking. People get to know each other and open up issues in study groups such as: Who becomes a dancer? Why? Who doesn't? How do you take class? And then we address the larger issues of how to integrate work into society and make it accessible.

MAREL: Basically our political goal is to make dance accessible to people. We try in our show and with the group to be artists who are a part of society. This doesn't mean all of our dances are political in the way we usually think of the word. We also educate people with the music we choose, with the way we dance.



SUCHI: This touches on the [fact] that dance performances, in addition to being educational and politicizing, are also entertainment. This issue often comes up for people who want to do political art work or political performance because all of a sudden the evil word 'entertaining' appears. But entertainment is what gets in there and does something to people's spirit.

MAREL: That's what art does.

SUCHI: And then you put something on top of it and it becomes powerful, wonderful and inspiring. Don't say it can't be entertaining because it is. It makes you think. It makes you respond. It can and should do all of these things.

MAREL: It's very political.

SUCHI: Yes, it's so easy to think political means a certain thing and it doesn't. That doesn't mean we don't have priorities. We do. We spend a lot of time talking about what we want to say and why. What is the best tool? Are we succeeding? What is our audience response? Then we say we want a dancey piece, we want to wear bright colours.

MAREL: It's the endless dialogue of artists doing political work. I was discussing this with Luis Enrique Julia [Puerto Rican classical guitarist] who is a member of *Conjunto Cespedes*, a group which plays Cuban folklore. Their songs do not talk about revolution and they get a lot of criticism because of that, yet they are from Cuba and support Cuba. They want to establish ties between this society and Cuba and they do it through entertainment. Many people who would never go to a political rally or to a CDC performance do go and dance to the music of *Conjunto Cespedes*. The music they play is a political act in itself and that's what he considers an important part of his political work to be.

SUCHI: Chris Iijma wrote an article that we've discussed intensely in workshops in which he says that form, content and context are all political ways of dealing with issues. People very often think of the content as political, but the context can also be political. For example, after the Cuban revolution the *Cuban Ballet Company* performed in the cane fields. Maybe the content wasn't political, but the context was in terms of taking ballet to workers who had never seen that before.

MAREL: And then there is the other evil word "commercial". When good, conscious artists become commercially viable, everybody criticizes them; but that artist, depending on his or her consciousness, will have the means to reach a broader audience. Given the chance to do an MTV video I would run for it, put punk clothes on and say something because that is what is reaching everybody and how a whole society is being indoctrinated. It is a way of reaching an audience because touring and producing is certainly more limited in North America compared to Mexico, for example, where we performed at a

festival where the show was free.

SUCHI: That is a big dilemma for us, because if you want to work professionally you want to get paid which means you have to go to a community that will pay you which means there has to be someone in the community who considers it important to bring in cultural groups. If there is not, we can make the choice (which we frequently do) to train a producer and say we will work with you very closely and we will just take a portion of the door. But we can only do a limited amount of that.

MAREL: You need a society that is more conscious of bringing culture to its people. You need organizations that can afford to produce festivals and make it very open for the whole population to be interested in culture. We do so much work trying to get the company on its way that for us to say we are going to perform for free, while we are waitressing and trying to make a living, is not possible.
SUCHI: Block booking is one way to do it. Also performing in community spaces and trying different ways of getting funding. Libraries have programming money even if it is minimal, community centres also have money. Trying to resource into your community also broadens the audience and the people who go to the performance by putting it into a space people go to. It's making the choice of going to the community rather than going to dance spaces that only dance audiences go to.

Breaking the alienation starts way before the performance, in the choice of a producer who will do outreach in the community. In the performance situation itself we usually warm up on stage and encourage people to come in before the show. We play music while people are coming in and at the end we applaud the audience because they have given us the material, the impetus and the inspiration to do our work. We also introduce ourselves at the beginning of the performance. Usually we dedicate the show to someone or talk about what is going on in the world or whatever action is happening in that town. We do this on purpose so we can break down that barrier and the audience can see us talking. We are people, you are people and now we are going to perform and hope you like it. We thank people and we encourage them to talk to us.

MAREL: And we take it very seriously. We encourage them to give feedback and people do come to talk to us. A lot of pieces have changed gradually because of the feedback we get.

SUCHI: We could do more. We would love to stay the following day and have a workshop about how we work, find out how you work, teach some movement but we often can't afford to because if we perform Friday night in Chicago, we can perform Saturday night in Milwaukee. Economically producers can rarely afford to pay us to stay two days.

The feedback we have gotten from performing in places like Nicaragua and Mexico and also the influence that has had on our work are to me the most hopeful and positive responses. I see myself as part of a much larger thing and can see so clearly that our work is not alien to people but is something that inspires them and makes them think.

I've also learned a lot from working with Grupo Raiz, with Marel, Pam, all the different people we work with, learning what their reality is, seeing how it comes out on stage and in our internal process.

MAREL: We have been in situations that haven't seemed positive at first but have had positive outcomes. For example when we were touring with Grupo Raiz we found ourselves in places where women's production companies did not want to produce us because we were performing with men. When we discussed it with the producers we found that they themselves were divided. A majority had voted to produce only *Wallflower Order* but it had created dialogue among them about producing women artists who also work with men.

SUCHI: Or when someone said to us, "You used to dance about women and you just don't anymore." Yet when we looked at the show in that light we found that there *were* pieces about women but they weren't all about women she knows. The pieces were about black women, women in Nicaragua, women in El Salvador, women in South Africa.

MAREL: For us, all of our pieces are about women. They all come from our perspective as women and they all deal with women.

SUCHI: Another discussion we have had with other women performers in women's festivals concerns the idea that whatever we create is o.k. because it is created by women. As a group our response is, "Fine, but as women we have to take responsibility for what we say and do, for how we do it and who we do it with."

MAREL: We are part of a society made of not only women. We have also heard the criticism that *WODC* is not feminist, it's leftist. Does one exclude the other? Obviously for us one isn't exclusive of the other but for some people or producers it is.

SUCHI: The other discussion we have had concerns sexual preference. Before class, racial or cultural backgrounds are brought up, people will ask about the sexual preference of the members in our group. We address that question by turning it around and stating what we do have. We address women's issues from so many levels that we refuse to identify ourselves as a lesbian collective. We prefer to look at ourselves from another point of view — which is a difference from *WODC*. There was a time when *WODC* was separatist and woman identified. *CDC* is woman identified, but that doesn't exclude being internationally and cross culturally identified.

The despairing aspect of it has so much to do with economics because we are not getting any younger. It sounds

funny but it is a concern as we get older, as we have mothers in the group, as other people want to have children, as we want to be able not to have to work every minute. For years now we have been working constantly to keep the group alive and sometimes we haven't been able to pay ourselves. Whenever we have, the pay has been minimal and there are no benefits.

MAREL: Just trying to make a living and survive and do the amount of work it takes to make the company go is impossible. We work in our spare time. Dance classes are expensive. How do you keep yourself in shape? And when do you take them?

SUCHI: And our society doesn't provide for childcare. It doesn't provide for medical or dental care. It just comes right down to the basic level of existence. It burns people out which means we can't keep doing our work or doing it effectively. But we get strength from seeing the responses, from seeing what it means to people. You see yourself as part of a bigger movement happening in the world, a movement toward justice. It really does feel like that when I remember what we are doing.

MAREL: For performers, you perform — that is one of the first rewards. Then you affect people and get their appreciation. But sometimes even in performances we don't see the extent of what we do.

SUCHI: We are doing a tour in the fall of the East Coast and the Midwest in the U.S. and Canada. We are working on a show we've tentatively named "Barbie's Revenge". It's the reality of Barbie come to life and she has to deal with abortion, pregnancy, welfare, Ken being drafted and going to Central America. When we went to Mexico we made a new body of work, a piece about the disappeared in Chile and Argentina, a piece about Sandino. Hopefully, after we do the tour we'll be going to the Caribbean to perform and to learn what is going on, teach some workshops. It seems that the more we travel the bigger picture we have of what is going on and the richer our material gets.

We'll continue trying to balance all our possibilities, children, relationships, making money, performing, teaching. As women and also as activists in this country, we have to try not to limit ourselves in what we see we can do and not set ourselves back, out of our own lack of vision. Rather we have to continually see ourselves as an important part of a larger movement and continue the work we need to do.

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Crowsfeet will be on a tour during fall 1985 to raise material aid for, and consciousness about, the situation of the people of El Salvador. For information you can call (212) 677-5867 or (415) 763-8660.

Rachel Vigier is presently writing, dancing and working in Toronto.



Mean & Marvelous Foremothers

An Interview with Rosetta Reitz by Connie Smith



Rosetta Reitz

IN 1980, AN ALBUM APPEARED ON THE market titled *Mean Mothers, Independent Women's Blues, Volume 1*, an apparent contradiction for anyone who believed that blues — particularly women's blues — was only of the downtrodden variety. The music inspired many to look behind what they had been told; *Mean Mothers* became the record Alice Walker listened to while writing *The Color Purple*.

Since that time, Rosetta Reitz ("as in women's"), has issued a total of 12 albums, (7 compilations and 5 single artist collections), on her own independent New York-based label, Rosetta Records. She will be releasing 4 more albums shortly, and has another 12 in the works.

This enormous collection of lost women's music, as well as Rosetta's extensive liner notes, represent an astounding contribution to the history of blues and jazz.

She has also salvaged dozens of film clips which have been assembled into a programme called "Shouters and Wailers", and she has presented "Shouters" at such diverse venues as the Hollywood Bowl, the National Women's Music Festival and the Smithsonian Institute. She is currently working with Greta Schiller, (*Before Stonewall*), and Jezebel Productions on a documentary about the legendary *International Sweethearts of Rhythm*.

But as she says, not without irony, "editors think that the important blues was by men, and that the women are not a broad enough subject", so the book she has written on jazz and blues women has yet to be published.

Rosetta Reitz was in Vancouver this spring.

ROSETTA REITZ: I've always been a jazz buff. I was one in college. But it wasn't until the women's movement that I began to question. Well, where are the women? Why is this a male domain?

CONNIE SMITH: You could have wondered all your life. Instead you went in search of the answer. What motivated you?

ROSETTA: The women's movement made the crucial difference because women were looking in every discipline to find out where the women were. I don't like to give myself that much credit because this happened to be a field that I was interested in. I just never identified in terms of doing anything about it because it was so clearly a male establishment. Male dominated. Male critics. Men always gave me jazz, so to speak. I always had boyfriends who were jazz buffs. Women didn't own it. It's a very crazy thing about the history of this country in that sense.

CONNIE: I assume you started out to find out why women weren't in jazz.

ROSETTA: Right.

CONNIE: How did you feel when you realized that women had been in jazz all along?

ROSETTA: I felt cheated. Why didn't I know that?

CONNIE: And then it was 6 years later that you founded Rosetta Records.

ROSETTA: Well, I wouldn't put it that way. It just seemed a very natural thing. I was especially interested in the blues women I discovered because of the way they confronted their lives. They weren't interested in keeping the crazy kind of false morality going or any cultural cohesiveness. They were honest women and they were singing about their honest feelings, and I loved that. So whenever anybody would come to my house, I'd say, listen, you've got to listen to this woman. You've got to hear this. You won't believe this. And people would get very excited and say, "why don't you put that on tape for me. I'd love to hear that again". Or they'd come by and say, "play those good songs you've got". So it got to be that it wasn't such a big step on a certain level of my getting involved because I'd been telling people about it for some time.

CONNIE: Did you have any idea

how to do such a thing?

ROSETTA: No. That's what took me 6 years. No, I just started looking around and questioning and got myself acquainted with other independent record label people and started hanging out with them and going where they went just trying to learn as much as I could.

CONNIE: I would think there would be an incredible amount of difficulty, at first, finding the material you needed.



Cover *Mean Mothers Independent Women's Blues, Volume 1*

ROSETTA: Yes there is. I buy 78's at auctions and there's a whole system of auctions through the mail. And I go to certain places where these things are for sale. So I just keep building up my collection and as soon as I have enough that would make an album to satisfy me, I issue it.

I have my idea about what I want to do. I want to retrieve material I consider to be of great value that has been lost, so to speak. For example, that Georgia White album [*Georgia White Sings and Plays the Blues, Foremothers, Volume 3*], I think she was very important, and it's hard to believe that the woman recorded 100 songs and was the main one on the race label Decca for a period, and nobody knows who she is. So little is known about her and she's been left

out of the books. That's one of the biggest problems I have — getting biographical information on these women. So wherever I go or whoever I think might know, I ask them and then I put together these various little pieces.

CONNIE: Tell me about the period between 1920-1927.

ROSETTA: That is an extremely important period in history. My original creative point that I claim, is that from 1920 to 1927 is what I call

The Women's Reign. And it's never happened before in history when a group of women had power. Now I certainly admit and recognize that their power was limited. But within that restricted area, they did have a power to be themselves and sing their own songs. That was before the producers started telling them what to do. And then in 1927 the men took over in terms of greater import in sales, so that wonderful freedom that the blues women had for those 7 years ended. CONNIE: Why did that happen? ROSETTA: History was moving, changing. I think there are many elements involved. One of the elements was a kind of backlash. A lot of people were tired of having the women — *If you can't do it, I'll get another sweet papa who can.* The

women had gone very far so there was the element of backlash. But I don't think that was the major one.

CONNIE: You once said the blues women weren't burdened by Freud's mistake. Now, I'm amazed at how much those women knew about their anatomy, especially since I was raised with the myth of the vaginal orgasm. ROSETTA: Press my button. Ring my bell. It's something that's very interesting, I think. Don't you? CONNIE: Why did so many of those women have such a positive sexual outlook?

ROSETTA: You see, the chief thing is they didn't have to be dependent on a man (not that some of them didn't want to be), but the men weren't making the livings as much as the women were. There weren't enough jobs for men, particularly in the South. So when women don't have to be involved with their living from a man, they're much more independent. But when they're dependent on a man for room and board, they've got to do what he wants.

CONNIE: The women who sing the songs on *Mean Mothers* and *Super Sisters* seem so completely sexually aware.

ROSETTA: It's because they were freer in that sense than white women were. There's this whole other thing in the black culture that's involved in this, too, and that is that sexuality is taken as much more of a natural phenomenon. One for joy and enjoyment. It's a much more acceptable part of the culture. It has been in this country. It is simply something that is not shied away from in the way it has been in the white culture. It's not looked upon as dirty. It was looked upon as a much more natural thing.

CONNIE: There appears to be freedom as well for women to sing about their affections for other women.

ROSETTA: People were generally more human and more realistic.

CONNIE: None of this seems very blue to me. Is it safe to assume that the blues has been misrepresented. I think you've called it "an overload of victim-variety blues".

ROSETTA: The blues has really been suffering from a bad reputation. From poor press, so to speak. The blues is really a form of music, a technical formulation. But it fits into a whole lot of systems better if it's seen as moaning, whining, crying music.

There were joyous aspects to the blues. When the woman uses the blues form and sings *I baked the best jelly roll in town* or *the best cabbage in town*, whatever the euphemism is that she uses, I wouldn't call that sad and blue and lonely. I'd call that a pretty wonderful view of yourself.

CONNIE: Why are victim blues the only kind that has been available to us?

ROSETTA: The fact of the matter is, all kinds of blues were bought by people all of the time when they were first issued. That's what was so wonderful about that free period of women, 1920-1927. Women sang on the record the songs that they sang in the clubs and in the church shows and in the places where they performed. And there was a combination. A mixture.

The trouble is, when they were re-issued and brought out for the white market there was a preponderance of that victim variety. Now, it's a very difficult thing for a white producer to identify with *I'm a one hour mama*, so a *one minute papa ain't the kind of man for me*. That embarrassed him. It's easier for him to identify with *daddy won't you please come home*, *I'm just so all alone*. So I believe that a lot of this distortion we have comes from the editing by the producers, and by the writers, because I couldn't put my hands on this material if it didn't exist. I'm not making it up.



International Sweethearts of Rhythm, 1940's first integrated women's jazz band

ghettos were so terribly crowded. People slept in half beds. They couldn't even rent a whole room. If they worked the night shift, they slept in the day, and another person who worked the day shift slept in the same bed at night. There was such crowding. Such terrible conditions. Yet the history books in this country tell us that the train was a symbol of freedom.

CONNIE: You have a theory that women originated the boogie piano. [Boogie Blues: Women Sing and Play Boogie Woogie.]

ROSETTA: Oh yea. Well I just feel that the women were there in the churches keeping the beat. Women at the keyboards kept that beat going while everybody was hallelujahing and stomping. And the women and children are the only ones that were in the churches primarily.

CONNIE: You have brought forward hundreds of musicians. What has been your most exciting discovery, personally?

ROSETTA: Well, the Valaida Snow story I think is terribly exciting. [Hot Snow, Queen of the Trumpet; Foremothers, Volume 2.] Her story is such a classical mythological mode of the hero searching for the golden fleece, the fleece being one's own freedom, one's own self, and travelling to distant lands for it. For freedom. And then her near death in the concentration camp. And her rebirth.

I'm also crazy about the *International Sweethearts of Rhythm* too, because to think that they were an integrated group in the 40's. It is just so unbelievable when there are problems still today. [International Sweethearts of Rhythm: Hottest Women's Band in the 1940's.] I'm in touch with them and the thing they had together with each other is so unbelievable it has lasted for 40 years. They shared something that was so special and so rare.

CONNIE: Women are generally seen as accessories and you have proven that women are contributors. Now without these women, specifically without the singers, how do you think the sound of blues and jazz would have been different.

ROSETTA: It would have been very different, because the women, for example Bessie Smith, Clara Smith and Ida Cox, chose the musicians they wanted. And they told them concretely — faster, slower, no, I want this.



BESSIE SMITH

Ethel Waters, for example, used to pound on Fletcher Henderson to get him to play the sound she wanted. Well what does that mean. It means that Ethel Waters affected the way Fletcher Henderson played. Then Fletcher Henderson went on to become a very important band leader and arranger. This was when Ethel and Fletch were travelling for the first black label that ever existed called Black Swan. When Ethel described to Fletch what she wanted, that's what he had to give her.

When Bessie Smith and Ida Cox were running reviews, they were the ones that hired the band and hired the chorus line. They had power. They weren't victims. And if they weren't getting what they wanted, they had the power to fire the people and get people who would give them what they wanted. No question about it.

CONNIE: I heard Bessie Smith had Louis Armstrong working for her.

ROSETTA: No that really isn't true. What actually happened, on a couple of record sessions Columbia suggested that Louis come in and she went along and was agreeable. But after the second session, she wouldn't take him again. He just got too pushy and she got Joe Smith back, her regular.

CONNIE: If you had had this music when you were growing up, do you

think your life would have been different?

ROSETTA: If I had heard a woman sing about *If you can't do it, I'll get another sweet daddy who can*, it would have been a revelation to me. Absolutely. If I had had that someplace in my background I wouldn't have lived through the dark fifties in the way that I did.

But on the other hand, there are some other women my age who did have it and what did it do for them. I don't know. It's a very long question that kind of requires a certain kind of elaborate discussion. I think it would have changed my life.

Connie Smith is the producer and host of *Rubymusic* on CFRO radio in Vancouver. She writes a monthly music column in *Kinesis* and is a frequent contributor to *HERizons* magazine.

Rosetta is currently compiling the music of Merline Johnson, who recorded at least 100 songs under the name The Yas Yas Girl. She would welcome any photographs or biographical information. Write to: Rosetta Records, 115 West 16th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011.

ROSETTA RECORDS

ONE WOMAN TWO WOMEN WITHOUT WOMEN

Himani Bannerji

* সঙ্গ প্রকাশিত নতুন নাটক *

চাক ভাঙা মধু || মনোজ মিত্র

বিখ্যাত সিরিয়াস পূর্ণাঙ্গ ১ টি নারী চরিত্র ৭'০০

গোলাপে রক্ত || জ্যোত বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়

সামাজিক পূর্ণাঙ্গ ১ টি নারী চরিত্র ৬'৫০

মধুরেণ || গোতম রায়

দ্বিধা ত চাঁদীর পূর্ণাঙ্গ ১ টি নারী চরিত্র ৭'০০

হোমো স্যাপায়েন্স || অবরুদ্ধ লেনিনগ্রাদ

প্রণীর দত্ত

শ্রেষ্ঠ পুরস্কার প্রাপ্ত ১ টি একাংক একত্র ৭'০০

জগদানো ক্রনো || সময় দত্ত

নারী বর্জিত পুরস্কার প্রাপ্ত একাংক ৫'০০

বিবর্ণ বিষয় || দোতুল দোলা ||

মানুষ নামে মানুষ || রাধারমণ ঘোষ

তিনটি প্রথম পুরস্কার প্রাপ্ত একাংক একত্র ৭'০০

লু-সুনের তিনটি একাংক নাট্যালখন: অমল রায়

মৃতজনে প্রাণ || পথ বেঁধে দিল ||

পণ্ডিত মূর্খ ক্রীতদাস কথা

প্রথম পুরস্কার প্রাপ্ত বিখ্যাত তিনটি একাংক একত্র ৬'৫০

উদ্ভুটে রাজার বিদম্বুটে কাণ্ড ||

সুত্রত মুখোপাধ্যায়

নারী বর্জিত কিশোরদের মজার পূর্ণাঙ্গ নাটক ৫'০০

পরিবেশক: নব গ্রন্থ কুটির

৫৪/৫এ, কলেজ স্ট্রিট, কোলকাতা ৭০০ ০৭৩

from a Bengali theatre magazine, *Group Theatre*

Gender Construction in Bengali Theatre

A CURIOUS TITLE? BUT IT CAN BE EXPLAINED. IF ONE WERE TO THUMB THROUGH the pages of Bengali theatre magazines (and these magazines are expressions of progressive/alternative/left theatre producers, critics and theatre-lovers), one would come across these curious lines. They would be found in the ads announcing the publication of new, often revolutionary plays. They are an appeal to theatre groups who buy the plays, to consider staging them, because they would not be put through the difficult task of finding women for the cast.

The groups, it should be clear from this, are mostly male — with a few women dotting their compositions — therefore "one woman, two women, without women" is the safety code, the no risk sign. For me, these innocuous words epitomize both the history and the current status of women in Bengali theatre, its gendered construction, the social situation and availability of actresses, the duration of their acting careers, their roles, their economic security, their artistic independence and strength.

Without Women: A History of Women in Theatre in Bengal

PUBLIC THEATRE IN BENGAL from its beginnings in 1873, like theatre elsewhere, has been a man's world. Wherever performing activities lost their ritual character and became 'entertainment', and where society split into private and public spheres, theatre has been considered a 'public' domain. This and the fact of patriarchy — which relegates women to the status of property and producers of heirs (male) — has assigned women, in spite of their hard labour in fields and elsewhere, to the private sphere as their proper domain. The more 'civilised' the society (i.e. private property, surplus exploitation and class-based societies), the more the 'interiorization' or 'privatization' of women. 'Good' women (wives, mothers, daughters and sisters) have paid for their 'goodness' by complete subordination, illiteracy and absence from the public sphere in decisive roles.

And so, it is not without reason that those women who fell from (or left) that enclosed sphere were and are designated as 'public' women. In fact, in Bengali the euphemism for prostitute is "Bajarer Meyechhele" — a "market woman". Women in general, however, were protected from becoming 'bad' or going 'public'. Furthermore it was feared that their presence, if not always actively corrupting, would at least create problems in the theatre world. Until recently, and even now in the Bengali countryside's indigenous theatre form called Jatra, men still play women's parts.

In the first phase of Bengali public theatre, 'good' women not only didn't act, they didn't even feature as audience. As long as theatre was staged in the private homes of wealthy landlords and urban businessmen, women were allowed to see the performance, though from within a special corner secluded with bamboo slats, where they could see without being seen while their menfolk, dressed as women, acted their parts. But when, in 1873*, in imitation of English 'hall' staging, regular professional public theatre developed among the Bengalis,

it caused 'good' women to lose access even as audience.

A new rich class — their taste developed by their exposure to and acceptance of British culture — were the chief patrons of the professional stage, although the bulk of the attendance was provided by a rising middle class, known as 'Babus' (gentlemen). 'Babus' were white collar workers, involved in servicing/managing British business and the state. The women who frequented the theatre with the 'Babus' were not 'good'. Since much of the white collar sector lived without their families, who remained in their 'country homes', a thriving trade in prostitution had developed. And there was prestige attributed to being able to keep many, or particularly well-known, prostitutes. 'Womanizing' habits of the rich and the Babus gave rise to a plethora of satires and farces, along with other western habits of 'free-living' and 'free love' — reflecting that urban living in colonial India had thrown overboard many habits and customs of a more prohibitive, community-oriented society.

But speaking of the Bibis (gracious ladies), rather than the Babus, Calcutta had become well-stocked with women whose living depended on prostitution. They came from impoverished peasant background (there was not yet any significant working class) and quite often from the genteel life of higher castes. They were there because they had 'fallen'. In a country where marriages were arranged for women as young as 8 or 10 years of age, with husbands often much older, and where among high class Brahmins (Kulins) polygamy was permitted, widows were an all pervasive presence and easy victims of male seduction. Socially unacceptable and rejected by their families, often with no means of support, one thing led to another, and many of these 'fallen' women found themselves in the blind alleys of the prostitute quarters.

Necessity or, perhaps, an attempt to improve fees/class, led many of these women to take up 'entertainment' as part of their routine. This sometimes minimized the number of tricks necessary, as well as fetching clients who

came for the entertainment. An excellent performer might develop a 'patron', her own Babu, who would keep her or even take her to a private house, often to his Garden House (Bagan Bari). It is to be noted that it was at this time, at the height of a social turnover, and in a city filled with the vices of a parasitic petty bourgeoisie, that Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, a noted educationist, launched his campaign for widow remarriage — a disturbing, unheard of practice.

However depressing the life of a prostitute was, it was here that some women developed performing skills to an astonishing degree. The days of education had not yet arrived for women; nor, when they came, did they unfetter 'good' women to take part in the entertainment world's public life. In the world of theatre which men frequented, whose hobby and passion this art was, there was too much respectability/concern for public morality to bring in women right away. But, in time, there emerged in the theatre world a group of educated men who had moved away from this petty bourgeois respectability and overcame aspects of hierarchical habits of caste. They were a sort of social rebel and they, combined with the young rebellious intelligentsia with whom their values often converged, represented a shift in social norms. They had no objection to trying women out for 'female' roles. In this context, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, a young playwright and poet of extraordinary power and strong anti-imperialist politics, played a major role in introducing actresses to the theatre world.

In 1873, the Bengali "national theatre" decided to accept women and put on a play by Michael called *Sarmishtha*, an anti-brahminical, anti-hierarchical play which reinterpreted an episode from the hindu epic *Mahabharata*. Four women were found among the demi-monde circles who displayed extraordinary histrionic ability. The tradition of prostitute/entertainers, by this means, finally shifted to new ground — the private world of entertainment was joined to the public world of theatre.

Gradually, women became a standard feature of this public world and, if they were excellent, received wide acclaim and a degree of respectability. But it still didn't make them 'good' —

i.e. marriageable — women. Ironically, however, they often played 'chaste' wives and virgins, singing praises of the values which victimized them, or the roles of boys, young men, conscience, gods (eg. Krishna) and saints, etc., where great delicacy was required of both person and voice.

The presence of women on the stage in major roles and their high artistic and commercial appeal would argue that these actresses had some power behind the scenes as well. But this was hardly the case. Women who came onto the stage were socially and economically powerless and dependent for the length of their artistic careers. After all, there was a great abundance of 'fallen' women from amongst whom the director/lead actors could choose. Women were only poorly paid actresses, often owned by their patron Babu who, with the director, decided the artistic/economic life of these women.

The case of Binodini, a veritable empress of the stage, is worth some notice. Highly versatile as an actress, and accomplished in music and dance, beautiful in her person, seeking education and artistic fulfillment, Binodini wished to retire from the stage at the age of 23. Her body and mind were put up for sale by her mentor, the great actor/director Girish Chandra Ghosh. He persuaded her in favour of a patron who, in lieu of a cash offer, promised to build a 'hall' for her. Binodini's artistic soul acquiesced to this because, above all, she was an actress, a theatre person; when the hall was being constructed she carried mortar with the labourers, such was her enthusiasm.

Her mentor and fellow actors had promised that the hall would be named after her as "B. Theatre". But when the time of registration came, the hall was called "Star Theatre" and the registration was in the name of four favourite male actors of Girish Ghosh. Binodini, who could have accepted a vast sum of money instead of the theatre, now had neither.

The patron eventually ceased to be interested in her, and her old lover was gone. For a while she continued to perform on this same stage, until she noticed that other women were replacing her in Girish Ghosh's attention and training. Finding another Babu patron, Binodini retired forever from the stage, but the semi-wife status that she enjoyed came to an end when this patron



BINODINI

died — his family, of course, never accorded any proper social status to her.

The life of this woman — who was by all contemporary accounts the most acclaimed actress of her time — as narrated in her autobiography *Amarkatha (My Story)*, is an object lesson on the problem of women in the theatre world. No matter what she did, squeezed in between the devil of male-dominated stage and the deep sea of male dominated society, she had no power to carry on her artistic career or any independent one.

The great actresses, then as now, are not owners or directors of theatre companies. The Binodini's of this world could never legitimize aspirations to be theatre businesswomen in their own right. They seemed, actually, to have retained and often nurtured many of the self-effacing, sacrificing traits of their 'good' counterparts — undoubtedly out of necessity. Not the least of these traits was referred to as the "eternal urge" (to quote one male historian) to build a "nest" and to be accorded "the proper maternal status" — the role of "constant, chaste wife".

Even great actresses such as Binodini seemed to fall into the 'good woman' syndrome. The parts they played on stage, historical-mythological, chaste-heroic mothers, daughters and wives, or seductresses (ultimately cut down by the punishing arm of fate) seem proper adjuncts to these dreams of respectability.

Great as they were in talent, these women never defined their own roles, or played any part that related positively to their lives. Choreographed and coached in acting by male directors, who often wrote the plays and played the male lead, star actresses such as Golap (Rose), Binodini (the pleasing one) and Tara Sundari (Lovely Star), were more like highly sensitive reflectors in which men viewed their own fantasy.

Even now, nearly one hundred years later, Binodini has given rise to a lot of male theatrical fantasies, supposedly sympathetic. But these plays always mourn her violated love life, trust and dreams — never the death of the artist or the loss to the stage, at her withdrawal.

*In 1835 there was a single attempt to employ a few actresses in house-based theatre.

One Woman: An Interview with Sova Sen

SINCE BINODINI'S TIME, THE THEATRE WORLD HAS grown much larger and now, essentially, consists of two quite separate tendencies. First, there are the commercial theatre companies (which are businesses where directors and actors are employees). These are the more direct outgrowth of historical public theatre traditions. This is the business of entertainment.

But there are also 'group' theatres; these are 'amateur' groups where no one is paid, though they produce regular shows in halls with tickets. Group theatres numerically, as well as culturally, outbid the commercial theatre. This is the world of theatre as 'art' and as education. Social and political consciousness raising, as well as formal experimentation, are on the agenda. This theatre owes its existence to the *Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA)* which was created by the Indian Communist Party (1943) in order to link theatre with politics. *IPTA* was eventually fragmented by internal aesthetic and political struggles, which led to the traditions of *Gananatya* (people's theatre) and *Nabanatya* (new theatre) — *Gananatya* leaning very heavily on politics, while *Nabanatya* is more concerned with psychological and formal experimentation. Though rigid distinctions between the two are not always possible, the group theatre movement of today includes both tendencies.

THE ACTING ENVIRONMENT OF group theatre is quite unlike that which preceded it. The actors and actresses come from the middle class and, very often, have some kind of left/progressive political stand. In order to understand the position women hold in this theatre, I spoke with Sova Sen, acclaimed as the most dynamic actress in the group theatre movement. Her acting career began with the first notable performance by the *IPTA* in 1943 and she has remained in the theatre world through thousands of nights of acclaimed performances.

Sova Sen's commitment to political theatre has continued unbroken since 1944, but she is also important for us, because she has struggled both on personal and political ground and emerged triumphant. Her mere presence in the theatre as a woman during the 40's, combined with her divorce and the fact that she was already a mother at the time of her second marriage — all these created very great difficulties for her in a society that continues, even to this day, to be semi-feudal in many ways. Her contribution to Bengali theatre

consists not only of her survival, nor even her impressive acting talent; she has also built and maintained, with her (playwright/director/actor) husband, Utpal Dutta's two major theatre groups: *Little Theatre Group* and *People's Little Theatre* — *PLT* being the largest and most accomplished of Calcutta's theatres.

We began by talking about differences in the social perception of actresses between when she entered the stage and now. She said that although things were somewhat better/easier in the group theatre movement now, they were still hard.

"The major obstacles for women in pursuing their acting careers are some traits in the character of the Bengali middle class males.... They may rate these traits as virtues; we women think they are vices. With those attitudes it will be very difficult for women to come out and associate with the outside world of cinema, theatre — with the cultural world at large. I faced these problems myself, except that I had an advantage. I entered the theatre world with a political idealism — I was

associated with the *IPTA*. So wherever we went, we were respected for that. But I have noticed that other actresses, acting on par with me, without those advantages, could not survive the harassments....

"Ever since childhood I had an ambition that I would overcome the hazards and obstacles put in women's paths. In doing effective work in the outside world, I felt that I would rise above the distrust that men have towards women and prove that women can remain 'good' and yet work outside....

"And about being 'good' or 'bad' — who defines what's 'good' anyway?"

It helps to come from middle class homes, be educated and have a political idealism, but it also seems that the image is 'cleaner' if these actresses are economically independent of theatre. Many work in offices, schools and colleges or are supported by their families and so are not as vulnerable as those actresses who need to make a living. These financially independent actresses are not socially ostracised for doing theatre.

From the 1920's onwards, more and more middle class women joined the public life of education and politics. Independence, gained in 1947, further accelerated women's public involvement. In Bengal, for instance, the independence produced both physical and economic dislocation through the partition and relocation of the population. Bengali women sought many kinds of employment for survival and perfectly 'respectable' women found themselves in many unconventional jobs, acting included. Now, while this naturalized acting to some extent as a decent woman's occupation, a change from which all women reaped benefit, still the women who sought it as an economic career were entering difficult zones. There is still a stigma attached to their presence on the stage.

On the other hand, Sova Sen also drew my attention to the fact that the respectability of group theatre has its own burdens for women. The family's 'normal' expectations from a female member continue unabated. Whereas the older actresses could see this as their major 'job' and devote vast amounts of time to the theatre, the new actresses' choice is taken far less seriously — both by her and by her family. When she is awarded the honour of wifehood, motherhood, etc., she has less legitimate time for

acting — family continues to be her first priority.

"There will always be struggles and hassles in the theatre movement, particularly for women. Take for instance finding women for the parts. We ran *Minerva* theatre professionally and all through we were bugged by this problem. There are two ways of getting actresses. Some women come, with some sort of idealism. Others just to take a chance — if you become a member of Utpal Dutta's group you may get a chance in films. We did get some women who had fought all obstacles to get there, but they couldn't carry on for too long. They had to leave because of all kinds of family problems. We got mighty few who could last out."

Since theatre could neither produce nor solve these social problems in itself, Sova Sen located them in the prevailing gender roles in Bengal, which she sees as organized through class structures. At one point, she contrasted the world of property and social respectability of middle class women with the conduct of the working class women:

"Women of the peasantry, of lower classes, don't put up with as much [gender-based] abuse...as our's do. They have an economic equality of sorts with their men.... They earn about equal amounts, working side by side. So if men oppress them — if he hits her — she has the option of hitting back. Because they are not as much at stake in things like property, dowry, respectability...if needs be, they can break up their homes and leave. But our middle class women are torn with doubts and conflicts: what will people think of me if I leave? who will feed me and the children? maybe I'll end up in a worse place, etc....

"You see feudalism still lives in every cell of our society, particularly among men. They are brought up with such protection and service! A boy doesn't even have to get himself a glass of water. Even among the working class. Always a woman comes back from work and starts her household duties. Everyone accepts this — men and women! It's seen as natural. If a husband enters the kitchen, people are shocked. What! You are cooking? That reality is unthinkable. These attitudes, regressive traits within us — if we can't get rid of these, sweep them clean, nothing can help women."

The subordination of women, the

asymmetrical social relations which produce such strictly gender-based expectations — these rise from the everyday life to the stage and recycle back. From the late 19th century to now, the image of the woman, of male/female relations, of family relations, have not changed very much in theatre or film. The degree to which women's roles are positive or progressive depends solely on the state of consciousness of the, inevitably, male playwright/director. In fact, even when seemingly progressive (i.e. not overly sadistic or humiliating), the portrayal of women continues to



Sova Sen

be patriarchal. A heroic mother, a revolutionary companion of a revolutionary man — provided as serious comments on social change — are still constituted by the same stereotypes, sentimentality and feudal traditions of the pulp cinema.

Even when some non-traditional behaviour is acceptable, for instance in *Three Penny Opera* or *The Good Woman Szechaun*, it is because, as Sova Sen put it, "they were western women". But even productions of Brecht, in the hands of some Bengali playwright/directors, are often transformed from political theatre into Bengali social dramas.

Chetana's production of Brecht's *Mother* (based on the novel by Maxim Gorky, of the same name) is a good example of such misinterpretation. The play attempts to shift the connotation of "mother" to one of nurturing in general, therefore making the word applicable to a people as a whole. As such, by the end of the play, the mother becomes a comrade to her son, and they, along with other Russian revolutionaries, become potential

mothers of the revolution. Yet, Chetana intensifies the gender role to its highest degree, producing instead a super-mother — the ultimate Bengali mother of the film/theatre tradition — a woman ready to mother a whole revolution.

Bengali theatre tradition is replete with this myth of all-sacrificing motherhood, while the lover role oscillates between the rhetoric of revolution and the sweet saccharine of "true love". The dialogues, the inflection, the gestures, often make it hard to believe that these plays are produced with the intent of revolutionizing the social unconscious of the Bengali middle class.

"Where", I asked Sova Sen, "do these roles originate from?"

"Partly from life", she replied, "and partly from their fantasies".

"But do middle-class Bengali women ever behave in this way?"

"No, they do put up with a lot, they are forced to; but their struggle is not so visible. After all, how many of them are economically independent? Without that, it's almost impossible to put up a fight... She may say many things, but ultimately returns to that bedroom.... And our playwrights, who are males, are watching us — that most of us will put up with a lot. I think it pleases them because they are men themselves. Men take their wives to plays like *Don't wipe away my vermilion* (i.e. end my marriage). Let the women see this — how patiently they should serve their masters, put up with tortures..."

But Sova Sen's roles are different — some quite repugnant to the sensibility of the conservative middle class. She insists that she has never been 'type' cast.

"I didn't have to face being 'type' cast. Because Utpal was the playwright. He wrote the plays based on his knowledge of me and my acting. He is also the director and an actor; he understands my acting potential better than anyone else, so he shaped the parts according to that.

"This role I had in *Kallol* was great. She is a Maharashtrian lady who defies her son to protect her daughter-in-law who's living with someone else. 'O.K.' she says, 'so you went away to war, then you didn't think about us. You didn't know or care how we lived... now, if your wife is with someone else because she had to live, she can't be blamed for that. What gives you the

right to turn up now and challenge her?' You know she is also an old lady and she joins hands with the revolutionaries...

"Now here's a woman who fights her son, to protect another woman (her daughter-in-law). We have to see this as a very big event in our theatre history."

Sova Sen's portrayals of women, both in dialogue and performance, may retain some of the traditional features (for example, the convention of motherhood); but, she rids the characters of their passivity, emphasizing a toughness, a heroism, and introducing active elements of initiative and dynamism. (There are also, quite often, conscious satires on men's expectations of women.) Probably in a conscious tribute to actresses such as Binodini, Utpal Dutta wrote a play *Tiner Talwar (The Tin Sword)* in which Sova Sen plays the part of an actress for whom the stage is the highest priority. Both she and a younger actress scorn marriage and family life in order to live as actresses, as artists. This play, and a few others, bring together the old and the new in a revolutionary reversal of social attitudes. Our conversation, itself, testified to these changing values, by the respect she showed towards actresses who came from the 'lower walks of life':

"When I first joined the films, I spent quite a lot of time with these actresses. I received such affection, respect from them, got training and help in acting. Some of them wept when they told me that their children could not enroll in the schools. I was amazed. What crime did these women commit?"

She also spoke of the world of Jatra (travelling, non-proscenium, village and town based theatre), in which actresses are paid, but which is different from both group and commercial theatre: "...great actresses and also very well paid. Those who work in the Jatras live in a separate world. How much do they have to do with your so-called 'society'? They wander around 7 or 8 months a year performing...with very little contact with family life. Sometimes they come home — for a night or two — and leave. And among them, both men and women live differently. Some men, who have wives in their village or town, have a different companion within the Jatra

world. The Jatra world has accepted all this...when women have children, the child is looked after by the actress' mother or sister...

"In Calcutta's commercial theatre, things are different. This theatre is seen practically as an extension of a sleazy night life, the world of entertainment. Women within this are looked down upon, are not "artists", nor political activists from the safe precincts of the middle-class life. They are workers; as entertainers, they do as they are told. It is here that the old theme of theatres as brothels continues. Actresses have to work as strippers — a play called *Bar Bodhu (The Prostitute)* ran over a few years on the strength of strip scenes."

With her characteristic astuteness, Sova Sen pointed her finger at the economic vulnerability of the women and gave an example of the generalized corruption of theatre as business.

"You must keep this in mind — who runs these shows? Behind each venture there's a huge fat capitalist. Some are into steel or iron, others into something else — all pots of black money. Playwrights produce what these financiers demand. After all, in our country,

Two Women, More Women: Looking to a Future

IN WHAT THIS VETERAN ACTRESS had to say, speaking from the trenches of cultural and political struggles, it was apparent that there was great personal strength and, in her example, reason for hope. Yet although a 'New Woman' now stands on the stage in Bengal, the theatre itself remains structurally the same as the one *not* named for Binodini.

The fundamental changes which are necessary can happen only if/when women own or run their own theatres, write and direct their own plays, as well as act in them. And even then, unless the authors are committed to actively challenging the social/political and cultural status quo, the fact of their gender will not in itself be enough to transform the institution. Challenges will undoubtedly emerge from a socialist/communist, as well as feminist, perspective. They must examine and expose the interactions of gender and class: how class is engendered and gender class-ified. Such a movement is beginning with strong women actresses

no one can live on writing plays... People don't read plays, they see them...so then they have to lick the boots of these owners, financiers, to make a living."

Sova Sen felt that for any real change, i.e. reorganisation of theatre on a non-gendered and non-commodity basis, there would have to be fundamental struggles on both class and gender lines. To change relations of inequality was a long range struggle to which she, as a communist, was partisan. But in the short run, she agreed with my suggestion that there should be an actresses' association or union that would deal with both the problems of economic insecurity and of sexual harassment, so that "when women want to act they don't fall into the clutches of directors and aren't forced to yield". There should be an economic angle too, "Actresses are begging in old age or are burdens on their families — if they have them, that is. ...Actors, actresses and playwrights ought to unite in their struggle, try to solve this problem of making a living, collectively. That might work. Some people are trying to."

and a couple of women directors who are now emerging.

Madhushri Dutta, a woman graduate of the National School of Drama, has formed a collective of about 20 people — both men and women. Their group, *Anarya* (The non-Aryans) has translated and mounted an ambitious production recently of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*. And Usha Ganguli has produced a play in Hindi called *Maha Bhoj (The Banquet)*, for a Bengali and Hindi speaking audience. *Maha Bhoj*, a political satire with great dynamism and a cast of about 35 people, received a critics award for best play of the year; and Usha is currently planning a production with a mainly female cast.

Such women, we may hope, mark the beginnings of a movement towards the erasure from Bengali theatre of the "necessity" of advertising plays by the reassuring coda, "One Woman, Two Women, Without Women..."

Himani Bannerji

FALL 1985

Confessions of a Theatre Critic

Robert Wallace

AN ARTS FESTIVAL — BE IT OF dance, film or theatre — poses a problem for the critic whether he or she writes for the daily press or an academic journal. Because a festival presents a maximum number of productions in a minimum period of time, it compounds the difficulties of writing criticism for a deadline and a limited amount of space, and it exacerbates the deficiencies of criticism itself.

Like news coverage, arts criticism is self-perpetuating. Although a variety of events vie for notice, only those deemed significant are reported and discussed. Like news reporters, critics rely on word-of-mouth to determine what is or is not important. Unable to see everything, they invariably use each other's stories to construct their ideas and generate print. What's new, what's hot, what's relevant or "has potential" — these are the constructions of criticism. Far from being arbitrary, they are the construction of people in positions of social privilege and power.

During an arts festival, critics are

more than usually dependent on publicity. The press releases, photographs and programmes issued by a festival's press office increase in influence when time is short and tickets scarce. Inevitably, a festival's publicity department shapes reactions as much as it provides information. Critics are told what to see and when to see it; and they are told *how* to approach a production — if only because a press kit usually contains other critic's reviews.

This situation was impressed upon me when I attended the *Festival de théâtre des Amériques* in Montréal from May 22 to June 4th this year. And it has caused me to consider that the relationship between theatre production and theatre criticism that usually is discussed as adversarial is, in fact, cooperative. The festival introduced me to an exciting array of theatre from across the Americas. But more importantly, it forced me to examine the uses to which criticism is put in a festival environment, and to reassess comfortable notions I held about myself as a critic.

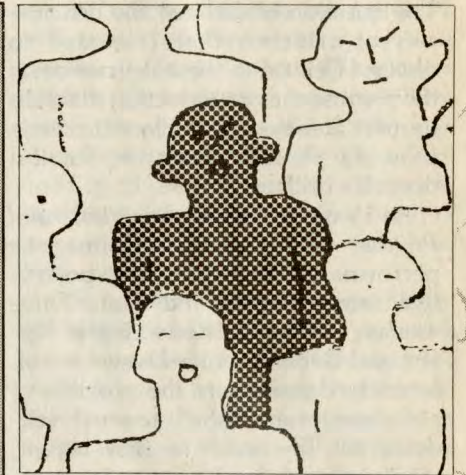
*THEATRE CRITICISM IS INEX-*tricably bound to the marketplace. Though theatre critics and theatre publicists usually affect an attitude of mutual distrust, they work in a spirit of collusion. Through their efforts, show business and the publishing industry maintain control over our most conservative art form. Mediating public opinion according to their own tastes, both publicists and critics (or, to be more precise, reviewers) perpetuate the institutions of the theatre and the press. Without constructing or acknowledging a critical framework for their opinions, they usually work with total disregard for their social and political influence.

Driving to Montreal from Toronto

FALL 1985

to cover the festival for *Canadian Theatre Review*, of which I am editor, and *Fuse*, I pondered my position. Because I am part of the same economic and social system as any Canadian critic, I am vulnerable to the same influences. Yet because I choose not to write for the daily or weekly press, I am free of their institutional control of my work. As editor of *CTR*, I pick my own assignments and write them as I wish. While at *Fuse* I must submit my articles to an editor, the worst that can result is rejection. As both publications pay only \$100 an article, I don't depend on them for my income. And while both are subsidized by government grants, the arms-length policy of funding agencies allows for the

FUSE



editorial freedom that tolerates critical dissent — at least, up 'till now....

But the major difference between my position and that of the daily reviewer is one of time. I have more time both to write my articles and to consider my position as a critic. This had led me to question the influences that shape my critical criteria and to investigate criticism as an institution in its own right.

In my current approach to criticism, I am as much concerned with social models that guide and control its construction as with esthetic questions and problems of evaluation. Value judgments are not only the products of private taste but of social ideologies as well. Criticism, like the art it considers, is specific to a time and place; those who practice it reveal the assumptions by which certain social groups exercise control over others.

Critical Controls: A Case Study

Prior to leaving for Montreal, I had been considering some of these ideas for an article I was planning about *Avoidance and Peculiar*, a production by a New York performance group

called Time and Space Limited which had been presented at Toronto's Theatre Centre in May; or, more correctly, I was planning an article on criticism, using *Avoidance and Peculiar* as my departure point. My concern with the impoverished state of theatre criticism in Canada had increased when I read a review of the piece by Ray Conlogue's review forced me to consider the arbitrary nature of all criticism. How could I tackle the problem without simply presenting a contrary view? The question underlined the deficiencies of criticism that I wanted to discuss. Central to these deficiencies is the premise that a production that fails to meet a critic's (undisclosed) criteria is boring; or, for that matter, that if it does, it's brilliant.

As I experienced it, *Avoidance and Peculiar* was a non-linear, imagistic performance incorporating poetry, live music, dance and film. Three women — Claudia Bruce, Ingrid Refert and Deborah Auer-Brown — collectively demonstrate the progress of an anonymous "she" toward self-definition. In order to find herself, "she" must claim her own language outside the discourse of conventional (male) culture or, as Linda Mussman puts it in her script, outside "the structure that interrupted a kind of thinking/...A kind of talking everyone said". Dividing the lines of the poem/script so as to share emphasis and focus, the performers (including pianist Semih Firincioglu) extend into aural and physical space the idea that "Exceptions and rules were called for. We didn't want/ To know everything. We didn't want to sort the cards./ It is in these shifts and splits that choice and/ Resemblance is made...."

For the critic who requires that theatre follow conventional structures, a performance that deliberately subverts narrative sequence and disrupts linguistic order will obviously cause difficulty. While Conlogue acknowledged in his reviews that an anonymous 'she' undergoes changes, "he criticized these changes as "astonishingly vague". "There does not seem to be a specific moment or issue in any of them..." he wrote, subsequently describing his sense of dislocation and confusion with the piece. Finally, he attributed his own feelings to the production, concluding that it had an "alienated and joyless quality." Conlogue's review lends credibility

to the idea that criticism says as much about the critic as the subject he criticizes. Towards the end of *Avoidance and Peculiar*, the changes to which Conlogue refers are exuberantly proclaimed by the performers who announce

She could see and hear
She could repeat
She could name and place
She could recite the lines
She could remain the edge
resolve the claims
restore the distance
reflect the scene.

For me, the repetition of the active verbs at this point indicates that "she" has progressed in a manner far from what Conlogue terms "depressive". What I found depicted here was a woman's growth to independence. Conlogue's evaluation of this as "claustrophobic" says more to me about his psychological and political profile than it does about the production. His criticism of the piece is, in other words, a "reading" particular to him, as is mine. Or, more appropriately, both are "mis-readings".

The idea that all criticism presents a misreading of a text is still relatively new. Developed by American literary critic, Harold Bloom, in the 1970s in books such as *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford University Press: 1975), it is central to the theoretical writing of Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, Paul de Man and others associated with the critical theory called "deconstruction". The term provides a useful challenge to the premise that a text can be correctly interpreted and criticized, a premise implicit in most of the criticism we read. The power of the theatre critic issues from this premise; and it resides in the public's assumption that the critic's status as a specialist informs his "correct" reading of a play. To dismantle the power of the critic, we must first attack the authority of criticism that presents itself in absolutist terms. It is not Ray Conlogue's ideas that give him power; it is the institution of criticism that he represents with his univocal readings.

Ironically, the insidious effects of critical authority are often most evident in artists' legitimatization of it. Had Conlogue's review been positive, for example, it might have been used by Time and Space in their publicity. A flyer for *Avoidance and Peculiar* includes flattering quotations from

critics at the *New York Times*, *Newsday* and *Art Forum*, one of whom instructs that Mussman's "pieces eschew conventional narrative, yet are rich in dramatic tension". This use of reviewers' comments is so common to theatre publicity that an advertisement or poster lacking an evaluative quotation makes a show seem suspect. Besides acknowledging the theatre's perception of the critic's power, this indicates the theatre's co-option of the critic's influence; and it demonstrates the process by which the theatre actively works to perpetuate the institution of criticism. But most importantly, it illustrates how artists and critics are symbiotically connected in the apparatus that advanced capitalism has developed to disseminate culture.

This connection, obviously, is not new; nor are analyses of its cause and effect. In the early 1930's, the German playwright and theorist, Bertholt Brecht argued:

The social role of today's bourgeois criticism is that of announcing entertainment. The theatres sell evening entertainment and the critics send the public to the theatres.... We have already indicated why the critics represent the interests of the theatres more than those of the public. The answer is brief: because the theatres are organized, regulative economic enterprises which can thus exert influence and offer social privileges.

While he was critical of the practice of criticism, Brecht still believed it could serve a useful purpose. Just as he supported theatrical production that strove to teach and change public opinion, he upheld theatre criticism that sought to address aesthetic problems from a social perspective. He advocated a sociology of criticism, suggesting that the critic's task is to consider artistic structure in terms of its social and political function. The purpose of criticism, he maintained, is to introduce the public to its own best interests.

The Purpose of (use for) Criticism

Although it now has altered attitudes towards literature and literary theory in Europe, the idea of criticism as a critique of ideology is still as new in North America as the theory of deconstruction. Certainly the notion has yet to filter down to the daily press where the thought that criticism might be other than "objective" is treated as a

radical threat to individual freedom. So, while the myth of critical objectivity undergoes attack in a few university literature courses, it continues to be flaunted by both theatres and the press in advertisements and reviews.

As I arrived in Montreal and noticed the festival's posters decorating the streets, I had no reason to expect that the situation would be different. Strung across the busiest section of rue St. Denis, a banner advertising the festival reminded me that publicity had been being churned out for months. And with 25 shows in three languages presented by over 400 artists from Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, the United States, Québec and Canada, they obviously had a viable product to sell. Entering the press office, I took heart that my itinerary would be determined by the editors of *Jeu* (the Québécoise theatre journal) who had organized a critics' panel on which I would speak. At least I wouldn't have to listen to a publicist's hype in order to pick what to see.

As it turned out, I didn't have to listen to a publicist at all. For inside the press office was Marie-Hélène Falcon, co-director of the festival with Jacques Vezina, who had arrived to invite me to join the festival's seven-person jury. After expressing surprise at the fact that there was to be a jury (it was a last-minute decision that had yet to be announced), I accepted Marie-Hélène's invitation. I was flattered; she was charming. She explained that in order to fairly award prizes, I must, of course, see everything; I reasoned that inasmuch as I was seeing most productions, I might as well see them all. I asked her who was on the jury and she explained that it included theatre practitioners as well as critics. And what were we expected to award, I asked; "It's up to you," she smiled. We would discuss the possibilities later when I met my fellow jury-members. But, in the meantime, I had a show to get to; and another, three hours later. I'd better hurry.

Rushing to my first production, I relaxed with the thought that I would now attend the festival independent of others' influence. Now that I had to see everything, neither the decisions of the *Jeu* collective nor the opinions of friends, colleagues and the press office could determine my choices. Because I would receive free tickets, I told myself, theatre ceased to be a com-

modity for me; I no longer needed consumer guides.

It was only later that I realized what I'd done. I had joined the critical establishment — a panel of judges who would evaluate productions and award prizes that legitimize not only notions of excellence but of competition as well. My critical criteria, along with those of six others, would be elevated above everyone else's to become the festival's official arbiters of taste. My status as a critic would no doubt rise within the critical community for I was upholding the status of criticism as a specialist activity. The institution of criticism was fully honoured by this festival, I concluded; and I was part of it, more so than if I wrote for the daily press.

I was too busy from then on to give much thought to my predicament. Besides attending as many as four productions a day, participating in two conferences, and speaking on the critics' panel, I had numerous midnight sessions with fellow jury members, the last one concluding at six in the morning on the day we presented our awards.

The Rewards of Awards

Our awards. Even as I type these words, they remain strange to me, as strange as the idea of my adjudicating honours. Yet I realize that, in effect, I award honours all the time — in the marks I place on my students' papers, in the letters of recommendation I write to arts councils, in my decisions to discuss a group like Time and Space Limited and not others. And I realize that my awards not only reveal ideological assumptions but facilitate economic rewards. This seriously undermines the liberal notion that the critic can function independently in the public sphere. The public sphere is not autonomous; when I agree to cooperate with its institutions, I forfeit control.

Although the festival jury did not present financial awards to its choices, we rewarded the festival by contributing to its institutionalization. What we did with our power vis a vis specific performances is less important to me than the fact that we accepted it when it was offered us. Given the conservative attitudes of those in charge of cultural funding, it is understandable

that the festival organizers chose to stamp the event with a seal of critical approval that would help win financial support. The participation of a jury of international critics who uphold the ideal of absolute standards protects the financial investment of the festival's sponsors who require assurance that their product is of recognizable quality and prestige. And it assures the public that the festival is a legitimately "artistic" undertaking that deserves their support. While the jury avoided categorical edicts of success and failure, it still preserved the hierarchy of taste necessary for the commodification of theatre. Quite simply, we supplied the publicists with "good press". Through our efforts, the festival, already a commodity in the daily press, was packaged and "closed" as a discrete unit of consumption ready to be sold and reopened at a future date.

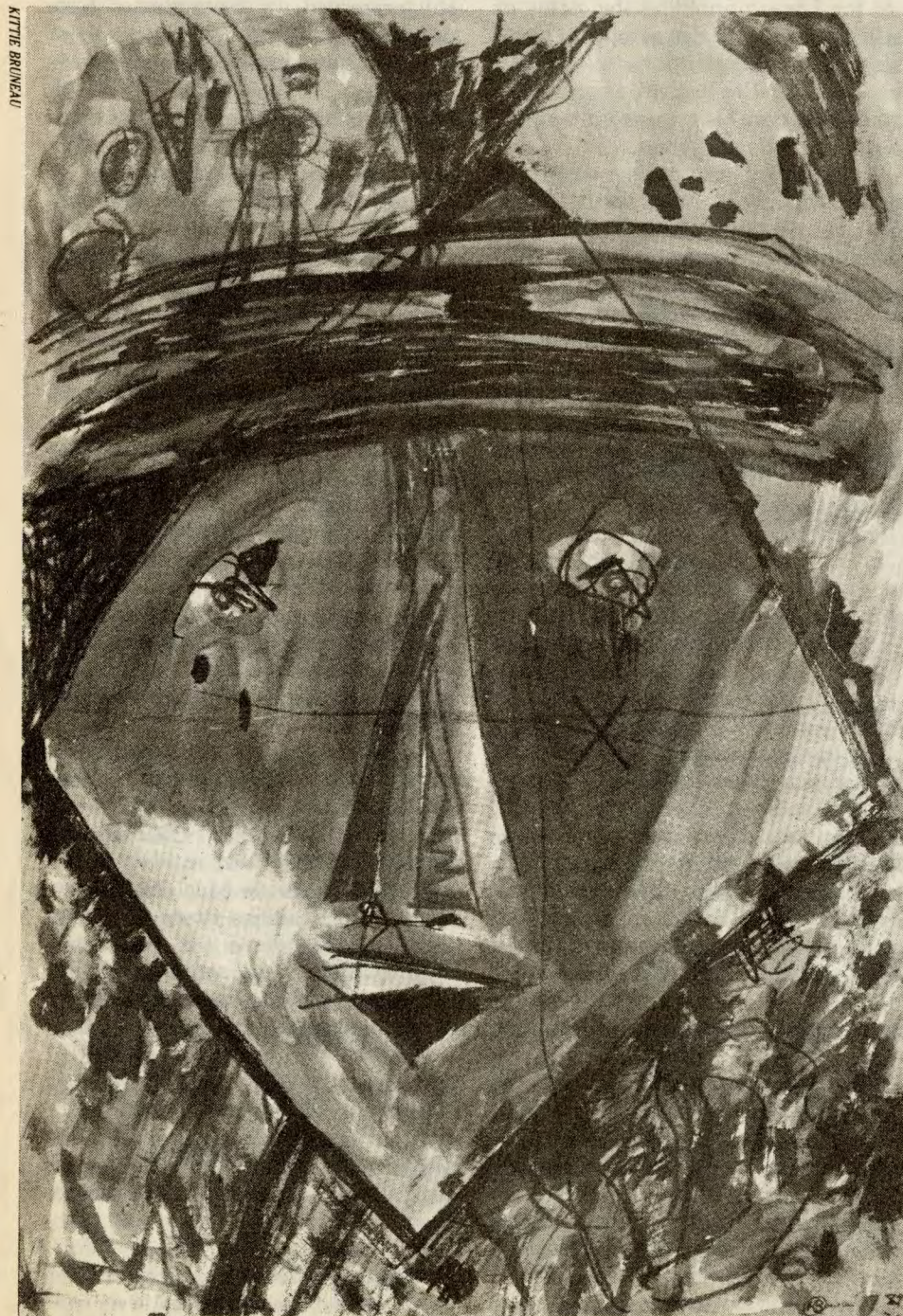
The fact that I already have achieved the status to be of use in this process is what surprised me. That I enjoyed the work is less of a surprise given that the members of the jury were a delight to work with — as were all the festival staff — managing to maintain enthusiasm and goodwill even as they became more and more tired. We each had our misreadings to offer, such that we had difficulty reaching consensus on all but two of the seven awards we made. But as we argued and compared our reactions to the productions — no easy feat in three languages — I gained respect for my colleagues if not for the process in which we were participating.

I used the opportunity of speaking on the critics' panel halfway through the festival to attempt to define my own approach to theatre criticism, and saved my notes to begin this article. I considered Paul de Man's suggestion that all misreadings are not equally valid, and wondered if a "good" misreading might be, in fact, what the jury was attempting to formulate. "By a good misreading," de Man cautioned, "I mean a text that produces another text which can itself be shown to be an interesting misreading." Could our misreadings stimulate an article that would elicit new and useful misreadings? Could I write such an article for *Fuse*?

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Transforming Women's Theatre

Susan Feldman



le Festival de théâtre des Amériques catalogue cover

KITTE BRUNEAU

AFTER A GROUP OF TALENTED, progressive, feminist theatre artists from Latin America, the Caribbean, Canada and the U.S. have talked to each other and to an enthusiastic audience for two days, it's not a simple task to describe what happened in a way that captures the experience.

The gathering was a conference entitled "1985: The Next Stage, Women Transforming the Theatre", A Conference of Women in the Theatre of the Americas, which took place in Montreal in May as part of *le Festival de théâtre des Amériques*. In her opening remarks, Conference Director Rina Fraticelli called for a "passionate exchange of ideas and opinions", which to no-one's surprise, she got. She commented that she had been through the "numbers game" to find the answers to the problems of women working in theatre. (Her study, "The Status of Women in the Canadian Theatre", *FUSE*, September 1982) was an incisive gender analysis showing who works where in theatres across Canada, if at all. She now wanted to take the questioning further, looking beyond numbers and percentages, towards issues such as form and content, language and feminism in the work being produced by women.

The conference consisted of four different panels, each one filled with impressive and dynamic women theatre practitioners. The headings were: "Women in North American Theatre", "Women in Latin American Theatre", "The Theatre According To Women", and "Inventing The Future — Women Transforming the Theatre". The panels were loosely structured around a theme or question posed by the panel moderator, but the ideas and issues that emerged from the deliberations crossed panel lines, creating discourse that went all over the map of feminist theory and practice.

CONTEXT — POLITICAL & ECONOMIC INFLUENCES AT WORK

THE TWO PANELS OF THE FIRST day made evident perhaps the most striking and obvious of the cultural contrasts which emerged during the conference — the enormous differences which existed between the women from North and South America; differences grounded in social, political and economic realities.

During the first panel the North American women were most concerned with issues such as quality in women's work and finding the individual women's voice in the theatre. While this panel dealt with issues of individual women working in the theatre, the Latina panelists in the afternoon focused on the common or collective issues and problems for women working in theatre in their countries.

Argentinian actor/writer Graciela Serra talked about the difficulties she had in presenting her play about the struggle of a peasant woman to find her own voice in a country where the words 'struggle' and 'survival' mean finding enough to eat each week for the family. When Chilean exile, designer and teacher Amaya Clunes Gutierrez said, "In Latin America there are not feminist or women's theatre as such, but work is produced about women's issues. To see women's theatre, go to a demonstration in Chile or Argentina — it's the real theatre that goes on in the street", it became clear to us North Americans that, as theatre workers, the concerns of these women were very different from ours.

There were a few moments when the cultural differences moved dangerously close to the area of cultural stereotype. On one of the second-day panels two New Yorkers became embroiled in a heated discussion about the importance of a *New York Times* theatre critic, an episode which reminded me of that famous *New Yorker Magazine* cover, showing New York as the centre of the landscape with the rest of America receding into the horizon.

But if the discussion occasionally veered off on a myopic course, it always returned to the thoughtful and caring dialogue that characterized the event.

New York playwright and artistic director Karen Malpede talked about

her dilemma in discovering through her work what it means to come from a country that has displaced so many others, and about her attempts to address this issue by creating work that is free of violence. And New York essayist and dramaturge Collette Brookes decried the American cult of the individual, noting that the "drama



Facundina — the tragedy of the last members of the CHIRIQUANO tribe

of the individual" is the most prevalent theatrical form in the English speaking world. She talked about trying to develop a theatre where real community occurs and where the life of an average person is celebrated.

Chilean critic Maria De La Luz Hurtado had an insightful political analysis of the role of women in her country in relation to the current regime. She outlined the two main symbols presented by the authorities — discipline or order in society, and the currently imposed model of economic privatization. She described both as "masculine" symbols, which have sparked an opposition that is "feminine" in response, with women as the leaders of the opposition. She said, "Theatre in Chile is fulfilling the role of showing and reflecting upon the current situation there, and the role of women has been central to this task".

But perhaps the most striking moment of this part of the discussion occurred when Honour Ford-Smith, artistic director of the *Sistren Collective* in Jamaica talked about the work their company did and the dilemmas

they were facing. She began with an analysis of the position of women in Jamaica, whom she said were, in some ways, in a worse position today than during the period of slavery. "During slavery," she said, "women's economic needs were taken care of, today more than 50% of women are unemployed, and for those with jobs the average weekly wage is \$10".

Sistren began working in the context of oral history and historic culture. Over the years they have developed a process of working in communities

that includes elements of research, education, performance and action. She pointed to the dilemma which the lack of Jamaican financial support for their work had caused. They have to rely on touring abroad to finance their work at home and the touring itself diverts their time and energy from their "real work".

As an example of this "real work" as a theatre collective, Ford-Smith described their recent work with a group of women on a sugar estate. The women had a serious problem: there was no water available for personal use on their estate, and they didn't know how to go about getting it. *Sistren's* process was to work with the women to first identify the problem and then find a method of achieving their goal. The women went through theatre workshops to 'learn' how to ask the town councillors for water, and through this collective process found the skills and the confidence to successfully do this.

The powerful story overwhelmingly reinforced the value and potential of women working in theatre.

courtesy of le Festival de théâtre des Amériques

LANGUAGE — YOUR GENDER IS SHOWING



Theatre Experimental des Femmes

LANGUAGE ITSELF WAS AN ISSUE, central to the creation of a women's theatre, which kept cropping up throughout the conference, whether in the narrowest sense of words and definitions or in the more formal sense of a theatrical language (structure, im-

ages, forms, etc.) The topic was underscored by the fact that the conference was being conducted in three languages (English, French and Spanish), complete with United Nations-style headsets to receive an instant and often very rough translation of the speakers' words. Words were constantly being misunderstood, and definitions of words such as feminism, women's theatre, political, and experimental, were being confused.

Maria Irene Fornéz, a playwright and director of INTAR, Hispanic American Arts Centre in New York, said she was most interested in the particular insight that women bring to the theatre, and talked about a writers' workshop that she runs to inspire creativity. "We must allow women to find their own voices", she said, "not use anyone else's". Alisa Solomon, a theatre critic for the *Village Voice* and a dramaturge working with the feminist performance company *Split Britches*, defined her major concern as the lack of a specifically feminist critical dialogue within the women's theatre movement. In theatre, feminist theory has fallen behind that of other disciplines, such as film or visual art, and for a healthy women's theatre to

exist, she believed a positive form of critique must develop alongside.

New York playwright Joan Shenkar introduced herself as a "passionate feminist", but found the language/gender issue difficult for herself to define, as a writer who works in experimental forms. She finds elements of both male and female language forms within her, that are hers to draw on as a writer.

Pol Pelletier, Quebec actor-writer, director and co-founder of *Théâtre expérimental des femmes*, felt that one of the most important breakthroughs of the past ten years has been the creation of a new physical representation on stage of 'the woman'. While the traditional image of 'the woman' is still very codified in the media, the fact of being able to change the 'look' of woman in theatre from "beautiful" to "unattractive" has been profoundly revolutionary.

Canadian playwright Margaret Hollingsworth felt that in Canadian theatre women's voices are silenced. "There is no acknowledgement by the male power structure that there may be another form in theatre — a female form". She said she strongly agreed with filmmaker Marguerite Von Trotta's statement that in Women's art there is very little separation between the large and small events, the personal and political, the emotion and reason.

QUALITY POLITICALLY CORRECT MARGINAL MAINSTREAM A MODERN PARADIGM

ONE OF THE MORE DRAMATIC moments of the conference occurred during the "Women in North American Theatre" panel discussion at the opening session. The panelists had been talking about women working as individuals in different aspects of theatre as feminists and, when the questions from the audience began, the first up to the microphone was Martha Boesing, a playwright and founding artistic director of *At The Foot of the Mountain Collective* in Minneapolis, who was to be on a later panel. She spoke about how much she had enjoyed the morning talks and how much she agreed with all that had been said but, she took a deep breath and said, "we're not acknowledging the existence of feminist collective theatre in this discussion". She asked the panelists to respond with their feelings about why

it hadn't been raised.

Alisa Solomon of the *Village Voice*, stared at her for a moment and replied, "Quite frankly, this is a difficult question for me. I support the principle of this work, and go to a lot of it. But I often choose not to write about the shows because," she took a deep breath, "they're really not doing very good work".

Martha Boesing looked her straight in the eye and said, "I agree with you," (there was a collective sigh of relief in the room), "but we can't deny that it happens; good theatre is built on the back of bad theatre and we have to acknowledge it."

The question of theatre that is politically correct vs. artistic rigour, or the choices of working in marginal companies or mainstream theatre were continually posed by members of the

third panel, "The Theatre According to Women". Most of the panelists had worked or were presently working as part of women's theatre collectives.

Martha Boesing presented her analysis that the question of marginal vs. mainstream theatre is not an either/or position but a continuum. She felt positioning them as oppositions implied arrogance at either extreme and that this issue was created and fuelled by the divide and conquer attitude instilled in women by the patriarchy.

Lise Viallancourt, playwright/actor and co-director of *Théâtre expérimental des femmes*, agreed with Boesing's analysis of the power of the patriarchal structure and feared it was being overlooked — "people are talking about being in a post-feminist age before there has ever been a post-patriarchal age". She said that feminists working in

theatre had remained underground too long and must be more visible, working in all facets of theatre.

Cynthia Grant, artistic director of *Nightwood Theatre* in Toronto felt a personal pull in two directions; she is attracted to working in experimental forms, as well as in community or more political theatre. She thought an answer

informed by our awareness as women; we must become more political". She also suggested that we recognize the lesbian experience as an essential element of our feminist 'continuum'. "We should all take a lesbian stand in the world, regardless of whom we sleep with."

The conference concluded with four

the participants, who had started out with real differences, developed a growing mutual respect. For many of us it was our first experience of being part of an international community and witnessing a much wider context for our work and concerns as women working in theatre.

Helen Krich Chinoy, an author and



Panel 1 — Women in North American Theatre

to creating a new women's theatre might lie in working on an experimental form or structure, but incorporating accessible content and images.

Margaret Hollingsworth pointed to a specific conflict that, for her as a playwright writing about women's lives — which she often sees as neither very positive nor feminist — she feels impelled to create an upbeat ending or positive statement.

The fragments of this discussion were successfully pieced together when Martha Boesing said, "The dilemma here is that we must develop new standards of excellence for our work but not let women who work in women's theatre companies stay in the dark. We have to see the emergence of these companies as very significant and not make them invisible."

She suggested that the empowerment of women working in theatre comes from their work being rooted in their own experience. "Work must be

resolved:

- 1) That the conference definitely happen again
- 2) An expression of support and solidarity with the women of Latin America and the Caribbean in their struggle toward the creation of a new theatre in a new society, and a statement of collective opposition to the military and economic pressures that mitigate against the achievement of these goals
- 3) and 4) opposition to and condemnation of the recent cutbacks to the Canada Council and the U.S. National Endowment For the Arts.

In two short days, a real dialogue had begun between women of different languages and cultures, and the doors had been opened on topics hitherto unexplored in a formal way within the North American feminist theatre community. For the first time many theatre practitioners had become visible to each other, and throughout the event

theatre historian working at Smith College, was the first panelist to speak at the conference, but her remarks could have served equally as the summation. "The bonus of the last decade, for me, has been to be able to ask serious questions about women in theatre. All kinds of important work has been done in this field — in history, research, theory, new plays, etc. What's now important to formulate is what the new questions should be. Do women want the same things as men? Is greatness in its present form desirable? Or can we define something new for ourselves? Our values and experiences are transforming the way people look at theatre, and we are creating a new notion of greatness for women in theatre".

SUSAN FELDMAN IS A FEMINIST, PRESIDENT OF THE TORONTO THEATRE ALLIANCE, AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PERFORMING ARTS DEVELOPMENT FUND OF TORONTO.

Decentred Fictions

New Directors/New Films Festival, N.Y.C.

BERENICE REYNAUD

I HAVE NOTICED A CERTAIN weariness in recent film reviews and criticism. Movies are not what they used to be, film festivals tend to become more and more conformist, and the financial crisis faced by the "industry" reduces the chances for an adventurous project to find backers and producers.

The "crisis" is, in good Keynesian terms, based on a reduction of the demand. In France, for example, based on information found in the Festival de Créteil catalogue, the number of feature films produced annually has not changed in 38 years (about 150), and production costs have risen, while the number of spectators has decreased by half. Filmmaking is, in general, an activity in deficit.

In the U.S., an article published a couple of years ago in the business section of *The New York Times* announced that video games grossed more money than the film industry in that country. And while this relative comparison is no longer true, it is due to a decreasing interest in video games, not to the improvement of the situation in films. As former *Cahiers du Cinéma* editor Serge Daney wrote recently in *Libération*, even though France had managed to postpone the effects of the crisis by opening a network of movie theatres with five or six little screening rooms each (in Paris alone, there are 300 movie theatres, while there are only 100 in New York City), it would be impossible to ward it off any longer.

Indeed, I have not been entirely satisfied by any commercial movie produced by a major western studio in the last few years. And so it seems that the main hope of "regeneration" seems to be coming from the "fringes": women directors (as demonstrated by

two recent events in which I participated: The Seventh International Women's Film Festival in Créteil, France, and the First International Festival of Women's Film and Video in Montreal, Québec), and from filmmakers outside of the commercially dominant American/European studios. As far as the latter category was concerned, there was a splendid array of films at the last New Directors New Films Festival that took place last April in the Museum of Modern Arts' large auditorium.

Homecoming

(Hong Kong/People's Republic of China co-production)
Directed by Yim Ho

HONG KONG BORN KIM HO'S fourth film is, interestingly enough, a co-production of the Hong Kong/People's Republic of China, meaning that it was done outside the commercial maze of the Hong Kong film studios. The central character of the film, Coral, a young woman in her mid-thirties, a designer of children's books with her own publishing company, returns to spend some time in the village of her childhood in Mainland China. Coral's life in Hong Kong seems truly westernized: she wears make-up and fashionable, sporty clothes, runs her own life, picks up her boy-friends, is afraid of commitment and has had several abortions. ("Is it because they were girls?" asks, puzzled, her girlhood friend.) In other words, she is successful, selfish, insecure and screwed up. In the village she is greeted by two former schoolmates: Pearl and Tsong, now married with a little girl, and leading the life of poor peasants. Good, solid, traditional subject for an "intimist" film.

The formal construction of *Homecoming*, however, challenges the conventions of the genre, and builds an "antimelodrama". Yim Ho plays constantly with the opposition between foreground and background, either visually or thematically. Visually, the background is the beautiful, haunting Chinese landscape, treated here as a classical etching, with its blue mist in the rising sun, its rich hues, the peasant houses with a pagoda roof emerging like in a fairy tale in the middle of a huge swamp. Classically, again, and by contrast with the sensationalist aspect of current Hong Kong productions (not only the *Kung Fu* and adventure movies, but also the "Hong Kong New Wave" as exemplified by the movies of Anne Hui), there are very few close-ups in *Homecoming*, and no dramatic camera movement, but *there is always something moving in the frame*. This movement is often centrifugal, and totally external to the action (the rat jumping on the road at the arrival of the boat, the snake unfolding in the house), generating Tati-like gags — one expects a resolution, expects that these various little actions will be integrated in the main plot, and it usually does not happen. These background motions are often those of animals (in the case of the school visit to the resort town, American tourists play the same function); they are part of the canvas, of the scenery, onto which are projected the images of this finely drawn Chinese *kammerspiel*.

The animals and secondary characters are also used to decenter the plot, to throw it slightly off-balance (a metaphor for the relation of Coral to her rural environment, but also for the relation of the Chinese peasants in general, engulfed as they are in this

powerful, monotonous, melancholy landscape, to their current history and the shock of industrialization). For example, in the middle of a serious, heart-to-heart quarrel between husband and wife, the attention shifts to another potential tragedy: the disappearance of the family pig — a different light is shed on Pearl's and Coral's problems (in a rural community it is more serious to lose one's pig than to

relationship. Its peak is reached when Coral buys Tsong a pair of rubber boots to make it easier for him to walk in the swamp, and when he purposefully avoids a shallow pond not to soil them (the sexual metaphor is like the rest of the film: subtle and humorous).

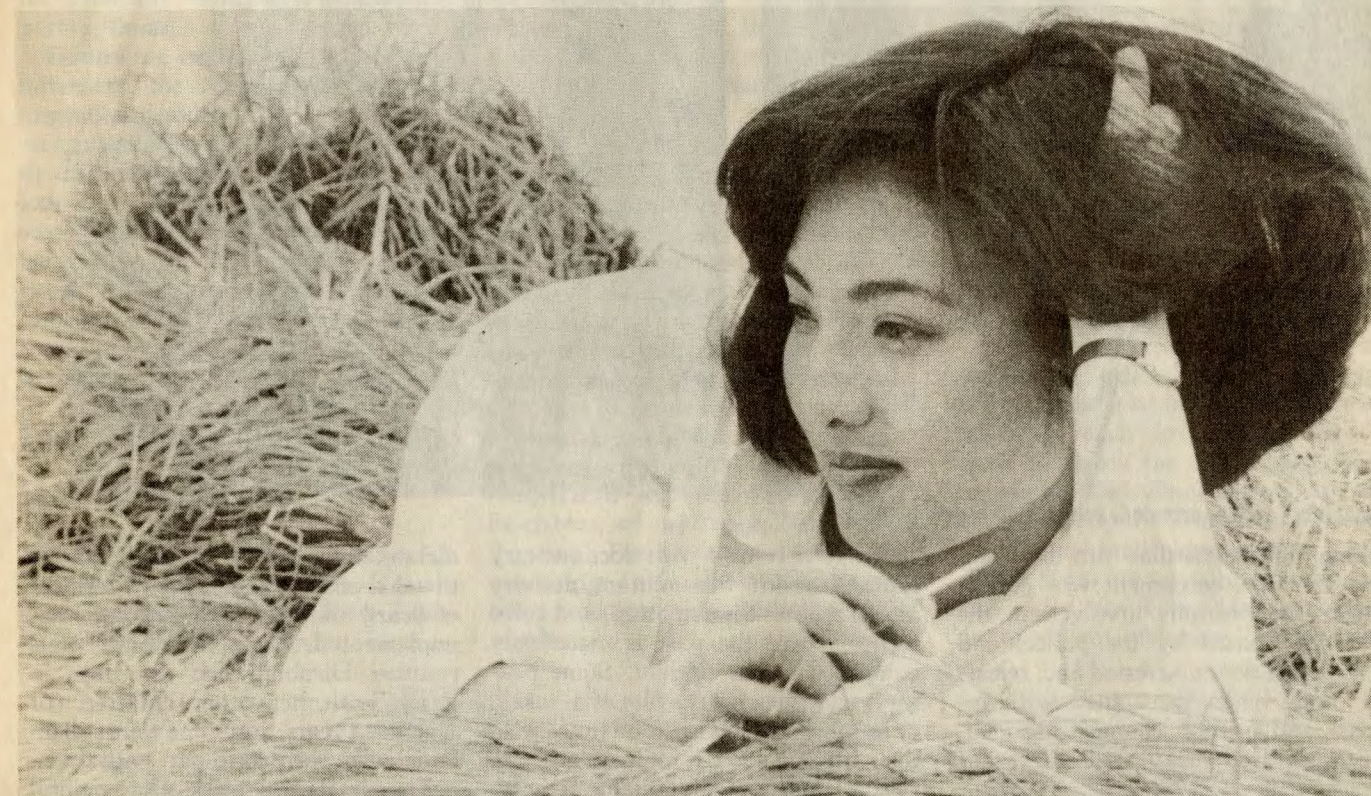
Eventually, an image will emerge from this complex etching: that of a true exchange, a deep, albeit difficult, friendship between two women —

deals with no less than women's place in contemporary China.

Twenty Years Later

(Brazil)
Directed by Eduardo Coutinho

THIS FILM BY EDUARDO COUTINHO, too, is one whose plot has been radically decentered, this time by the brutal intervention of history. It is also



Coral returns to her rural childhood village

suspect one's husband of being attracted to a Hong Kong businesswoman). Also, the ominous and ironical presence of the elderly, long-bearded, zen-practicing twins who have just come back from Australia, serves as a reminder that there is not *one* homecoming, but *two*.

The movie keeps distracting the viewer's attention in different little subplots (Coral's mourning her grandmother, Coral's bitter quarrel with her sister on the phone, Coral's financial difficulties, the story of the little boy selling tangerines, Coral's relationship with Pearl, and with Tsong, Pearl and Tsong's marital crisis, etc...)

A standard western movie would have focused on the sexual tension between Coral and Tsong, and they would probably have ended up sleeping together, while Yim Ho gives only a tangential importance to this rela-

maybe the real, quasi-hidden subject of the film. In the last image, all menfolk have become part of an uncertain background: Tsong, Coral's boy-friends, the bearded twins... *Homecoming* hints that the most important thing in the heroine's life, what she has to work on, is her relationship to women, not to men. The "home" where she tries to come back is her own difficult femininity.

In a changing China, in her peculiar position half-way between capitalistic Hong Kong and rural People's Republic, Coral's sexual identity is caught between conflicting images and representations: her own persona as a "liberated" businesswoman, the nostalgic memory of her Grandmother, the off-screen presence of a "kept" and "irresponsible" sister, and Pearl's life as a rural schoolteacher. In its quiet, light-handed, and tender way, *Homecoming*

a film generating its own critique; a hard film to watch, it was probably an equally hard film to make.

In 1962, a peasant militant leader, Joao Pedro Teixeira, after undergoing a great deal of police harassment, was assassinated by two thugs, paid by the landowners he was fighting. His widow, Elizabeth, the mother of ten children, became actively involved in a militant campaign demanding justice for Teixeira, since his murderers had not been punished.

Eduardo Coutinho then met her, and she accepted to play her own part in a fictional reconstruction of her husband's death. Peasants from another state were cast as the heroes and villains of the story, and the shooting started. It was interrupted in 1964 by the military coup; the filmmakers were accused of indulging in subversive activities, smuggling weapons, and br-



Elizabeth Teixeira, arrested, released to a new identity

ing Cuban guerillas into the country; the film equipment was confiscated, the peasants involved in the shooting chased by the police, and Elizabeth Teixeira, arrested and released, and, when threatened with rearrest and torture, changed her identity and fled, leaving behind her children.

In 1981, the liberalization of the Brazilian regime made it possible for Coutinho to resume work on the film. The black and white negative, which had been sent to the lab, had escaped confiscation, but it was found to be a succession of first, second and third takes, with important scenes missing. Coutinho and his team, however, showed these rushes to the peasants who had taken part in the initial shooting seventeen years earlier, and recorded their reactions — their natural, simple joy of seeing themselves and their neighbours, albeit younger, "in a movie".

The first part of *Twenty Years Later* alternates the original black and white footage of a typical "leftist fiction" film (high angle shots to show the "positive hero" entering history, clear distinction between socialist heroes and capitalistic villains, engrossing scenes of social tension, supportive role of the

"positive heroine") with documentary footage about the militant activity after Teixeira's assassination, and color scenes where the past is mercilessly compared to the present. Some peasants were viewing the film as a "joke", or as "a way to have a good time" with their friends; some took it seriously as part of their own militant activity; some deny their involvement in it (ironically, the peasant who was to play Teixeira is now the most "yellow" of all); some had their lives radically altered by it.

The second part of the film is the story of a multiple search: Coutinho's deceiving search for the traces left by this aborted film in people's lives, his successful search for Elizabeth Teixeira, the painful search for her family and children and, finally, the open-ended search for what happened to the real Joao Teixeira, who had been buried behind the features of the fictional "positive hero" of the 1962 film.

Elizabeth Teixeira is discovered hiding under an assumed name, with one of her sons, in a remote little village at the far end of Brazil, where she does other people's laundry and teaches elementary school. She recognizes Coutinho but is hesitant to speak in front of the camera. Her son tries to

dictate to her what to say: conventional thanks to the current President of Brazil and the liberalization he has implemented. Then, the family plots resume; Elizabeth had not been in touch with her other children for seventeen years, and some were still infants when she had to part with them.

The situation is made more painful by Elizabeth's relationship with her own parents: landowners themselves, they had strongly objected to their daughter's marriage to a penniless militant peasant. They might not be totally innocent of any involvement in their son-in-law's murder. They raised their grandchildren in total estrangement from their parents. Discovered one after the other by the filmmaking crew, the Teixeira offspring display various reactions. Some have kept alive the memory of their father and mother and rejoice at the idea of seeing her again. Some (most of them) simply don't care. Some are still angry at her for having "abandoned" them.

In the course of the film, Elizabeth will be reunited with only one or two of her children. For the others, it is too late. She has not been a mother to them, and never will be.

Elizabeth is courageously smiling, asserting her never-ending love for

Joao, her belief in the value of his struggle. The most politically involved peasants smile too: they speak of long years in jail, of torture, but they finally survived. A young man remembers proudly that years after the shooting he kept hidden from the police a book left by somebody from the crew; this book, which he subsequently read, came to signify for him all the cultural and political freedom he was deprived of: ironically enough, it was Malaparte's *Kaput*.

Behind the smiles, the courage, the bitterness, the resentment, the half-forgotten memories, the scattered and reconstructed lives, remains a gap that the film is powerless to fill: who was Joao Pedro Teixeira, and why does any story about him seem to be doomed to uncertainty? A visual metaphor for the entire film: apart from the official snapshot of his badly mutilated body, there are no pictures of "the man listed to die".

Funny, Dirty Little War

(Argentina)
Directed by Hector Olivera

DECENTERING TECHNIQUES ARE also at work in another South American movie, *Funny Dirty Little War*, by the Argentinian Hector

Olivera, and they become evident when, towards the end of the film, a compendium of some of the "strong" scenes are given to the viewer: attack on the Town Hall, shooting in the street, summary executions, explosions, tortures, fire, a city invaded by thugs, etc...; one has suddenly a glimpse of what the movie would have become in the hands of another filmmaker (let's say Costa Gravas, for example): a classical, moving, spectacular left-wing epic. But on the contrary, this film's entire structure is pervaded by a very dry, black, destructive humour.

The film starts in a particularly low-key, off-hand way, and looks like a satirical comedy about the social life in the provinces of Argentina towards the end of the Peronist regime (1974), a story of the petty rivalry between two local politicians. While the main store of the town advertises for its next sale with loudspeakers on a car topped by a cartoon-like dragon (the same car will be used later for more sinister purposes), the mayor of this small town, Guglielmi, accuses the delegate, Fuentes, of being a "left-wing Peronist". Fuentes has just delivered a new fridge in Guglielmi's house, and the accusation seems to come out of nowhere.

Fearing arrest, Fuentes occupies the Town Hall with a hunting rifle, his assistant Suprino, a policeman who has been promised a promotion, and an old city clerk and the local drunk, there by mere chance. (During the twenty four hours or so of the film — satire of South American military mores — the little cop's loyalty will be secured by his being made a corporal, then a sergeant, then a major, until he believes he has become one.)

Fuentes' main supporters on the outside are the rather spoiled brats of the "Peronist youth", and the man hired by the town to spray the fields with anti-pest chemicals (he will become an important strategic element when he decides to spray the assailants with guano from his plane).

Little by little, this initially ridiculous situation grows out of control. Guglielmi and the Chief of Police — tired of waiting for orders from a government official who is always eating, drinking or taking a nap when they try to reach him on the phone — decide to attack the Town Hall, but they are repelled. Shots are exchanged here and there, the drunk has a lot of fun, the tone is still humorous.

Then thugs are brought in from the nearby city, the Town Hall is nearly destroyed, the old clerk killed, but



Suprino and Fuentes take cover in the Town Hall

Fuentes and his party refuse to give up. The nearby fruit store is looted by the assailants, the Peronist youth organize demonstrations in support of Fuentes and eventually kidnap the Chief of Police. In retaliation, Guglielmi has Fuentes' wife arrested.

A good example of the anticlimactic way in which the story unfolds is given in the confrontation between the Chief of Police and his keeper. In spite of his mask, the young man is recognized by his prisoner: "I used to make you jump on my knees when you were a little boy." In the ensuing conversation, we learn that the "Peronist youth" has given an ultimatum to Guglielmi: either he lets Fuentes go free by a certain time, or they'll shoot the Chief of Police. The latter, making a show of his self-confidence, convinces the rather insecure young man to untie his

arms and to let him smoke. We expect him to try a dirty trick, and, since our sympathy is with Fuentes, we don't want it, we hope that the prisoner will remain a pawn to be exchanged against the delegate's safety. Nothing spectacular happens; when the appointed time rings at the church bell, the young man silently and undramatically shoots the Chief of Police. We never know what happened to Mrs. Fuentes.

The escalation of violence continues. Neighbours and old friends indulge in acts of violence against one another; simple people, depending on vague political affiliations become torturers/executioners, or useless and rather cowardly trouble-makers (the Peronist youth), or victims and, in spite of themselves, heroes (Fuentes, Suprino, the aviator).

Olivera's tale serves to exemplify the

chilly mechanism of "ordinary fascism" and the blind, unwitting complicity of the lower middle class, caught in a web of power and decision-making in which its participation is but illusory. By the end, the pompous Guglielmi, made responsible for "this mess" by an angry government official is eventually run over by the latter's car while the drunk and the "major", happy to be still alive, but diffident forever of any kind of "political involvement" are the only ones able to keep laughing.

What Have I Done to Deserve This?

(Spain)

Directed by Pedro Almodovar

UNTIL RECENTLY, SPAIN HAS occupied a marginal position amidst



courtesy of NEW DIRECTORS/NEW FILMS

Carmen Maura as Gloria in the outskirts of Madrid

industrialized nations and its film industry, in spite of the efforts of Juan Bardem in the fifties and the films of Carlos Saura, is practically non-existent.

Pedro Almodovar's *What Have I Done To Deserve This* starts as a parody of Saura's latest exercises (such as *Blood Wedding* or *Carmen*): in a large pannelled room some young men are learning karate; each of them thrusts a long wooden stick in front of him while uttering loud, "masculine" screams and rolling his eyes in a becoming macho way. Changing the camera angle, the filmmaker immediately destroys this dramatic atmosphere, introducing his main character, along with her situation in life (her marginality): on the right side of the screen hidden from the young warriors by a partition, a middle-aged, tired-looking cleaning lady, her broom in her hands, imitates fiercely the movements taught in the karate class.

Gloria's introduction within the fiction is made, and she will continue to insinuate herself in it by perpetually being where she should not be. She has a good reason for this — as a cleaning lady she is always in people's homes when they don't expect her, don't want her, or don't need her and this, unfortunately, in spite of herself. Even her sexuality is presented as marginal/accidental. After the karate class, the young men take showers and Gloria, finding herself in front of an open door, gets a glimpse of a muscled naked body. Taken aback by an unusual situation (*he* is the object of the gaze), the young macho reacts the only way he can think of to reassert his rights as a man: he grabs Gloria under the shower and starts making love to her. One will reflect later on the question of Gloria's pleasure, since the young man will reappear in the fiction as the *impotent* customer of her glamorous next-door neighbour (who hustles, so she says, to pay her trip to America), and finally as the inspector in charge of the inquest into Gloria's husband's murder.

The main problem with Gloria's life is that while she is obviously not at home in the karate school, nor under the shower with the policeman, nor in the house of the people who hire her, she is not at home in her family apartment either. But who really does have a home in post-industrial Spain? Gloria and her screwball family are part of a population that has sprung

like mushrooms in the garbage cans of the outskirts of Madrid where dispossessed peasants, the semi-marginal working class (Gloria's husband is a cab driver and a little bit of a con artist on the side) are canned together in big, ugly apartment buildings with walls too thin for privacy.

What Have I Done... is a surprisingly pungent and modern, extremely funny, refreshingly feminist, completely immoral, non-sensical and surrealist at times, dark comedy on the disintegration of family life in Spain — and since this is a Catholic and ex-theocratic country, the disintegration of society itself.

During the entire movie Gloria, made unattractive by her tussled hair and the cheap, ugly clothes she wears, seems completely exhausted — hopping frantically from one job to the other, popping tranquillizers, and tossed here and there by the various demands of her impossible family. Still, she finds the time to (reluctantly) help her next-door neighbour to turn an exhibitionist trick, and to look after the little girl upstairs who seems to have strange psychic powers.

Her husband, an unimaginative macho, is conned by a failed writer (whose brother is the sex therapist consulted by the inspector) into a quick money-making scheme involving the forgery of Hitler's memoirs (or those of somebody who knew him), while dreaming of resuming an affair with a blonde, suicidal German lady (who also has something to do with the forgery project) for whom he worked as a driver-cum-lover before his marriage.

The Grandmother is a selfish, silly and funny old lady, whose main activity is making cakes and collecting mineral water (for which she charges her family) until she discovers a new centre of interest in raising a lizard with one of her grand-sons, who deals coke and exchanges it sometimes against the sexual favours of the next-door neighbour. While the neighbour would prefer to sleep with his younger brother, who is "very cute", "for nothing", the younger brother would rather spend the evening in bed with one of his schoolmate's father. This young man, when taken to the dentist by Gloria who worries about how she will be able to pay the bill, is "bought" by the dentist and promised a VCR. With the money, Gloria buys herself a hair curler, though she never finds time

to use it, while her husband is so absorbed in his own little schemes that he does not realize that one of his sons is missing.

Finally, the "Walkyrie" is expected at the airport, and the cab driver orders Gloria to iron a white shirt for him so that he'd look his best. This time, somehow, it is too much and, using the karate techniques learnt behind the partition wall, made more efficient by the frustration accumulated during years of married life, Gloria kills him with a bone which she subsequently throws into the soup. During the turmoil caused by the arrival of the police in the apartment building — they will, however, never find the culprit — the lizard is stepped on and meets a bloody death. This event is treated with no less emphasis than the murder itself, and it certainly affects the grandmother more.

The rest of the movie shows how Gloria tries to deal with her guilty conscience, left alone in the ugliness of the apartment (the rest of the family has gone back to the village they came from), and trying to confess to the inspector who refuses to get involved (he is too afraid of being connected to the hooker next door). She will be "saved" by the children: the little girl upstairs whose mother hates her for obscure reasons will use her magic powers to help Gloria redecorate her apartment; the younger son decides to leave the dentist because "VCR is boring after a while, and [he] is too young to tie [him]self up to somebody". "You need a man, Mama", he says, confidently. The nuclear family is reconstituted.

In spite of its delirious aspect, *What Have I Done To Deserve This* is probably the most significant film to have come out of Spain in the last few years. This review is too short to mention them, but the film is filled with humorous notations, in-jokes, cultural parodies, political allusions. Almodovar — a writer, journalist, punk-rocker and filmmaker — has made movies (in super-8, 16 and 35mm) since 1974, and I hope to see more of his work in distribution in North America, and to have the chance to see more of Carmen Maura, who gives a moving, funny and credible performance in the difficult role of Gloria.

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

Defining World Feminism

If this is Global, Where the hell are we?

LINDA CARTY & DIONNE BRAND

THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT ANTHOLOGY

SISTERHOOD

IS

GLOBAL



EDITED BY

ROBIN MORGAN

Sisterhood is Global:

The International Women's Movement Anthology

Edited by Robin Morgan
New York Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984

WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD are oppressed in various ways by men, through an all-encompassing patriarchal system. Therefore, women should unite with other women as a force to fight this oppression since, by virtue of our same sex, we are all sisters. This is the basic, and perhaps only consistent, premise of *Sisterhood is Global*. As a foundation for the presentation of women's struggles in a global context, the premise is a severely limited one and provides little in the way of contextualisation.

The book has many weaknesses which find their roots in this premise's limitations as an explanation of the problems/struggles which women in the world face today. These weaknesses are all the more troubling because there is a need for work which will address the issues of women's oppression on a global scale.

There is for many of us a hunger for information about our sisters in the Third World — a world made largely invisible by the mainstream press. Many of us engaged in research work on women are very familiar with the difficulties involved in obtaining statistical information. Women often remain invisible in statistical categorizations, even in countries proud of their record-keeping; and in most corners of the globe, useful information is difficult to unearth. Therefore, the compilation of a wide range of vital information about women's lives on a global scale is, in itself, quite a feat. And *Sisterhood is Global* includes

statistical data in the prefaces to each country's profile. For this reason alone, the book will undoubtedly be taken up by many women, as a useful statistical resource.

But, the data which is presented reproduces many problems (both by its organisation and by its unstated assumptions/values) and ignores others which could be put on the agenda were it not being set, once again, by a first-world white feminist. Morgan replaces one set of invisibilities by yet another set. In her eagerness for this sisterhood, she buries race, class and imperialism as organising principles (in addition to gender) in the lives of most women in the world. The counting off of women in government in Zimbabwe is not sufficient to explain the centuries of white domination in that country, nor the compartmentalization of women (and men) in an economy based on that domination. The statistics gathered, obscure indigenous economic structures with an overlay of first world urban industrial models. Rural trading, bartering, subsistence economy are not adequately taken into account in her category, "Women's Occupational Indicators".

Obviously, women need to create statistical research tools for examining their lives, but Morgan has not aided that fundamentally by the tacking on of "gynography", "herstory" and "mythography", to the already inadequate research categories which were never intended to address women's lives in the first place.

Robin Morgan, the editor, claims that the connecting point of all the contributors to this "international feminist anthology" is their "mutual commitment to worldwide freedom for female human beings". What she fails to provide, however, (and the lack stands as the book's fundamental weakness) is any shared viewpoint or common strategies as to how this women's freedom ought to be won. In other words, Morgan fails to develop a coherent political analysis, or context, in which to read the miscellaneous contributions. She fails to acknowledge that if one has pretensions to the development of a useful or relevant global feminism, a consistent engagement on issues of race, class and imperialism, for example, will be required. Morgan's failure to develop a political context, in this sense, leaves the book replete with contradictions.

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In her introduction, "Planetary Feminism: the Politics of the 21st century", she offers her analysis of "womanpower", wherein she claims that women organising as women is, in itself, a positive force (irrespective of the context). She points to some of the countries where women have served as heads of state or as representatives of international organisations as an indication of positive changes for women. Most of us cannot afford to see any woman in a powerful position, regardless of reactionary political perspective or insensitivity to women's issues, as positive female images.

Such a proposition is rather distressing when we look at what has happened to women in the United Kingdom and Dominica, since Margaret Thatcher and Eugenia Charles became heads of state. In these countries, there have been higher levels of unemployment (experienced most acutely by women), family-planning assistance has been harder to come by, and the general welfare of women and children — in fact, of all working class people — has deteriorated dramatically, just to name a few of the ways in which these women have intensified the oppression of women. Worse yet, when Charles decided to become Ronald Reagan's mouthpiece in the Caribbean during the U.S. invasion of Grenada (October 1983), what she supported was the destruction of the dreams and hopes of many Grenadian women who, for the first time in their country's history, were beginning to control their destiny. This woman remains an embarrassment to all politically conscious and progressive women in the Caribbean. Most have never considered her a sister!

Later in her analysis, Morgan does point to the difficulties experienced by the women's movement in Britain despite the country having a woman Prime Minister. Had sisterhood been possible purely on the basis of gender, the fact that the Prime Minister is right wing would have been insignificant.

To say that Morgan has missed the point completely regarding women's oppression in the developing world, is not an exaggeration. There is little recognition in the book of the objective conditions of daily survival which are the foci of their struggles. It is a historical necessity that women in these societies fight colonialism and imperialism which not only oppress

them as women, but can also oppress them as members of a race and always as part of a class. To deny or ignore the necessity of the national liberation struggles is to deny the importance of history — its role in the lives of Third World women and the importance of the role of these women in the construction of history.

Morgan actually writes that class is a "categorization invented by patriarchy to divide and conquer" and that "to fight back in solidarity...as a real political force, requires that women transcend the patriarchal barriers of class and race and, furthermore, transcend even the solutions the Big Brothers propose to problems they themselves created".

Could it be that the author believes the structural problems created by colonialism/imperialism can be so easily ignored? That the inherent contradictions of gender and class relations can be so minimized? Does she really believe that the working class or peasant women in the Third World have any illusions about the differences between themselves and the bourgeois women of the developed world? Can Morgan not be aware of the class and race differences present also in advanced capitalist societies, even her own, which have divided so many women?

In this regard, we suppose that her choice of a Native woman to write the contribution for the U.S. is symbolic. But its very symbolism is a giveaway to Morgan's palliative feminism. Perhaps four pieces, representing Native, Black, white and Hispanic women of the U.S., would have reflected more closely the reality (and contradictions) of the U.S. women's movement. But in the attempt to homogenize U.S. feminism, Morgan's choice becomes effectively tokenistic, emblematic and finally reductive. It is the differences between these communities, and the failure of the women's movement to acknowledge and deal with them, which have created the perpetual distrust of the movement by working class women and, particularly, by women of colour.

Perhaps Morgan is well aware of all of the above-mentioned problems and is seeking an alternate route to that dream of women's solidarity. But if in the name of "visionary global feminism" she can only project her white middle class feminism over the larger surface of the globe, she will have to be

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content with imagining solidarity while others struggle to build it.

Undoubtedly, her perspective continues to be shared by many in the women's movement "which has unquestioningly been premised on a celebration of 'sisterhood' with its implicit assumption that women qua women have a necessary basis for unity and solidarity" (V. Amos & P. Parmar, *Feminist Review* No. 17). It is no wonder, therefore, that her analysis ignores the essence of the contributions from Nicaragua and Zimbabwe, for example, where women emphasize the importance of their national liberation struggles to their own liberation. Had this book had a basis in political practice and a defined notion of class/gender struggles, these countries could have occupied a primary position in the analysis.

Her clearly anti-communist bias is significant in her choice of La Lilen-ciada (a Cuban *exile*) to speak for the women of Cuba. It would have been more worthwhile to the interests of sisterhood to have the women of Cuba represented by a woman who had remained in the struggle and could tell us about the contradictions for women in that society from the point of view of someone still committed to the revolution. Rather, we are given a virulent anti-communism veiled in sisterhood, with a gossipy tidbit about the suicide of Haydée Santamaria (a formidable revolutionary) on the 21st anniversary of the revolution, because of marital problems. Well, really! How many American women have committed suicide on the 4th of July, because of marital problems? It seems, these days, almost effortless to ask "what are the contradictions between Marxist-Leninism and feminism?", while the contradictions between feminism and capitalism are supposedly so well understood. Well, they are not.

History has shown us, as Mies and Reddock point out in their book, *National Liberation and Women's Liberation*, that "struggles for national liberation provide an opportunity for women to break out of various forms of oppression and bondage and to challenge the sexual division of labour." While it is true that women often lose some of the hard-won gains during post-revolutionary periods, and we must continue

to challenge and struggle against this, there is little doubt that their overall condition remains vastly improved compared to the pre-revolutionary era.

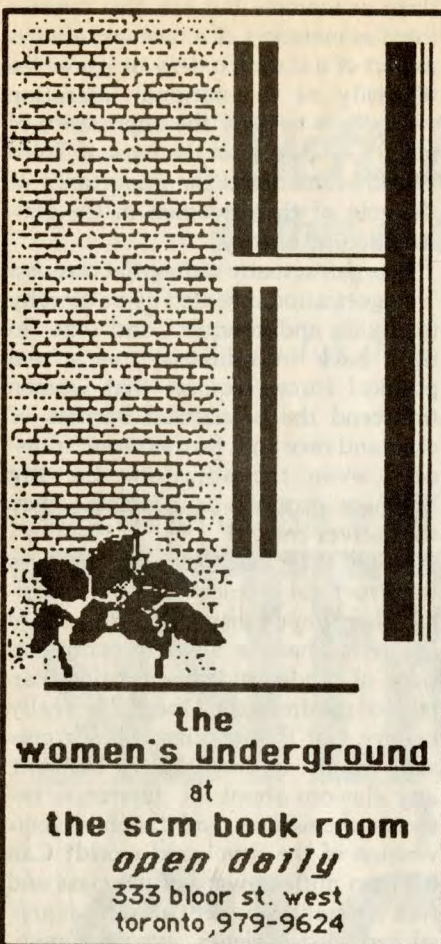
To claim gender as primary in any Third World struggle is to divide one majority, who share many material conditions, while substituting another majority whose interests in the maintenance/destruction of the status quo are ultimately at odds — i.e. Mrs. Botha does not share the interests of the black women of South Africa. To imagine that these alliances are possible (let alone the answer) is to diminish most legitimate Third World struggles that have been undertaken to date. Not every fight is for women to fight alone, but as the contributor from Nigeria explains:

The enemy is the total system, which is a jumble of neo-colonial and feudalistic, even slave-holding, structures and social attitudes. As women's liberation is but an aspect of the need to liberate the total society from dehumanization, it is the social system which must change.

Any comparative study of women's liberation must, of necessity, begin with a historical analysis of the conditions of women. This, of course, would include class relations, imperialism and class/gender contradictions. To do otherwise inevitably results in a distorted picture. *Sisterhood is Global* has deemed these as irrelevant to the project of women's liberation and has, therefore, negated a fundamental element of women's history.

Sisterhood is Global is, in the end, yet another expression of the white, middle-class, American feminist perspective of what ought to constitute global female solidarity. Morgan's directive to transcend class and race and colonization is spoken with the righteous conviction of one who refuses to acknowledge their own privilege.

Linda Carty is a graduate student at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and Dionne Brand is a poet and writer; both women live in Toronto.



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Roads to Fascism

American Networks of Influence Today

ROGER MCTAIR

Friendly Fascism:

The New Face of Power in America

By Bertram Gross
Black Rose Books, Montreal. \$14.95

FRIENDLY FASCISM IS A VERY American book. It is big, 410 pages. It is passionate. It is idealistic. It is contradictory. It is exhaustive — full of American politics, incidents and examples. It is studded with quotations, diagrams, references and lists.

The author is an academic, a well-read academic. He is probably one of those sceptical, ideas-loving non-doctrinaire socialists who delight in confronting political and social ideas head-on without applying some ready-made recipe to them.

I don't know how old Bertram Gross is, but his writing has the flavour of American democratic socialist thought of the late 1930's. *Friendly Fascism's* writing style is of that tradition — a tradition that was essentially destroyed by McCarthyism and its supporters.

Gross throws so many snippets of information at us in this book that he leaves the reader breathless. *Friendly Fascism* is historical and journalistic. It is thoughtful and polemical. It is passionate and reasoned. It is cultural criticism, political criticism and economic criticism. It is a look at the collusion of Big Business and Big Government to manage a society in the interests of the rich and powerful and for corporate establishments.

Gross presents this as rule from the top, a structure towards which he is totally opposed. He sets out to show that today's threats to democracy do not come from dictatorships and storm troopers, but from within a sophisticated establishment that manipulates the "democratic system" to its own ends. The Friendly Fascists will be the



Cover illustration by J.W. Stewart

Ultra-Rich, the Corporate Establishment and other networks of influence who can direct the highest national and international institutions through their lobbies, agencies, policy planning groups and commissions.

Gross reviews the methods of traditional fascism: the brutality, repression, public spectacles and imperialism. He shows how the roots of classic fascism lay in the colonialism and world economic order of the twenties and thirties. He then analyses how, in Europe and the developed world, the New Corporate Society of the post-war era has discarded the methods of classic fascism, but manages nevertheless to maintain firm control over governments, politicians and the political agenda across the boundaries of the "Free World".

The component parts of the New Corporate Society, the monied establishments and transnational companies that seek to quietly guide our lives, have much more power than individual nation states. They are interlocked within the "Free World" empire through institutions and channels of influence that range from branch plants, through economic and military aid, to control of developmental foundations. Against this "Free World" complex, the independence of small states, of democratic institutions and of the thinking or action of individuals do not stand much of a chance.

Gross' view is not a new one, but familiarity does not make the thesis less persuasive or true.

The post-war Free World Imperium that he identifies as an outgrowth of the pre-war fascisms was, in fact, a response to the collapse of the colonial and business culture of the 1930's. The end of European dominance in the world, the devastation of the second World War, the emergence of newly dependent countries, the surge around the world of various liberation movements and the fear of new Great Depressions called for a response that would allow for more general prosperity. How was this achieved? With American money and direction and with the cooperation from European and Japanese elites. This new alliance worked to reconcile the traditional contradictions among capitalist nations, found a strategy to fight communism and socialism in a unified manner while attempting to moderate the swings of the capitalist business

cycle that had caused the great depression.

First of all, the "imperium"...is not limited to preindustrial countries. It also includes the other major countries of industrial capitalism: Canada, Japan, the countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance...In turn, instead of being excluded from America's preindustrial protectorates, the largest corporations in most of these countries share with American corporations the raw material, commodity, labor and capital markets of the third world.

Then, too, U.S. imperial control is exercised not by American governors and colonists, but by less direct methods (sometimes described as "neocolonialism").



Certain strategies serve this "imperium". Most important is the constant articulation of the world into two hostile camps: You are either a supporter of the "Free World" or a supporter of the "Communist World". There is no room for subtlety or independent thinking. It is an insidious and simplistic argument but it works. Even Third World politicians spout "Free World" rhetoric as if they shared in the material benefits that the industrialized nations reap from this infrastructure of high technology, modes of communication and means of coercion by which the world is arranged and managed.

The industrialised nations have found, at the same time, the ways and means to reinforce transnational integration and to maintain competition without going to war. Within their boundaries docile unions and quiet

cent populations accept the ideology of the national and transnational corporate state. They accept the cold war attitudes without question and accept the costs of militarisation.

In this context, the question which Gross poses is: Are we ripe for Friendly Fascism?

Ordinary people have little power and little control over their lives. They have hardly any means of influencing the political decisions that affect them. They are too busy surviving to do more than vote when they are called upon to do so. Third World populations have even less power to express themselves. Their governments are often inept and corrupt, their police forces brutal, their policies unimaginative and short term.

Gross writes that we are not yet in danger of Friendly Fascism in North America. Democratic opportunities are still high. Threats to personal privacy exist but Civil Rights and Civil Liberties are still alive. Even under anti-labour administrations unions can still survive. He concludes that the possibilities for true democracy are still present in America. That the American tradition of personal freedom and the sheer size and wealth of America would probably forestall a slide to Fascism, friendly or otherwise.

In Third World countries however, fascist government exists without "Free World" press scrutiny, and with the aid of American money, arms and often advice.

In those countries there is no recourse to Human and Civil Rights Commissions. But since they are part of the struggle against "World Communism" and allies in the struggle against the "Godless Communists", anything done within their own borders is acceptable. After all they are killing a) their own people, and b) probably Communists and Pinko sympathisers anyway.

Canadians should ask themselves what happens in Canada if our neighbour to the south slides towards a friendly Fascism — will we as well? Or will we respond by strengthening the polite democracy we have now? Or will we assume that the government and its partners in business have our best interests at heart, trusting them to take care of our interests?

Roger McTair is a writer and filmmaker living in Toronto.

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FORUM on Art & Community: Thursday Sept. 12th 8PM

SPEAKERS: Lillian Allen, Michael Banger, Karl Beveridge, Robin Endres, Charles Smith.

CATALOG/DOCUMENT: available November/December 1985.

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