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MARCH 1982 • \$2.00

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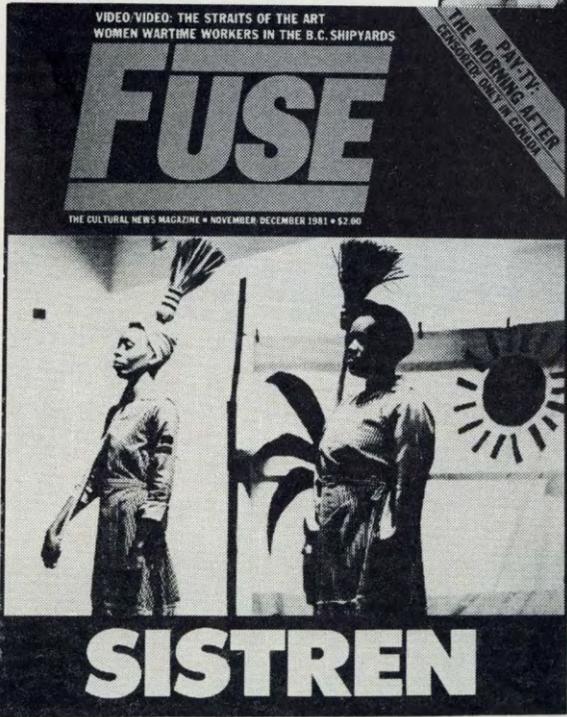
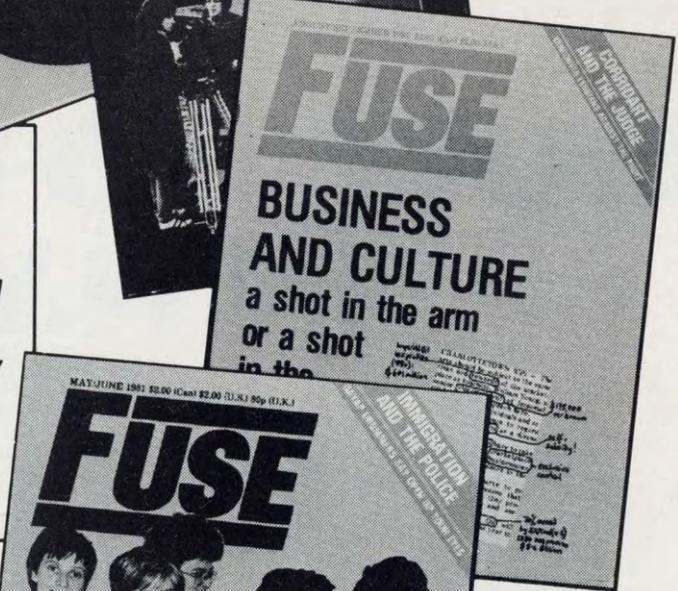
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Cover:  
The use of the Soho News and the Village Voice on the cover is only to suggest a cultural identity for N.Y.C.. It should *not* be construed that there is any connection with these papers and the promotion of racism.

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# 6<sup>TH</sup> YEAR

## 'DUMB' AND 'RETROCHIC' ART: Two sides of the same coin

As we currently appear to be in a pre-war situation (reading the past habits of our managers in the 'developed' world in times of intractable economic crisis) likewise we again seem to be developing our fair share of 'dumb art'.

In Canadian terms, Toronto is aptly the retail centre for this dumb art as can be witnessed in artist-spaces, public galleries, commercial galleries and waterfront show-places. Tired of being penniless and forgotten, Toronto artists have been pressing to influence the style of certain consumer habits and goods without unfortunately pocketing any tangible or exchangeable rewards. Dumb art says nothing about anything to anybody. What it does, with clumsiness and inexactitude, is to reproduce or manner the dominant values of the society in which it is produced. It is not heroic, it is too middle-class to be decadent, it is simply dumb!

In her video review in this issue, Lisa Steele concludes with the following: "At this point in the development of independently produced video works, it does not seem necessary to hide behind a cynical and neutral attitude towards the culture. Criticism need not be hidden or masked in look-alike products which promise analysis and offer only repetition of already-existing values. Having rejected the methodology of the 'counter-culture' need not mean a rejection of the ideals."

There are some axiomatic functions within art that too many artists ignore. These artists who choose not to 'encumber' their work with any specific political analysis go on to assume that their work has no political function. As if ignorance could provide some laundry service.

As many have said often, this being from George Orwell: "all art is political . . . but not all propaganda is art." Given the sheer amount of Orwell's writings and the time in which he wrote (1920-50) he was able to add the following: "It seems to me nonsense, in a period of time like our own, to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects (totalitarian-

ism and socialism). Everyone writes of them in one guise or another. It is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows. And the more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity." The question for 'dumb art' is that if the artist disavows his/her own political identity in their work then whose political identity and values does such work carry?



### White racism

The cover story in this issue is written by Tony Whitfield on the controversial theatre piece **Route 1 & 9** that has been playing in New York. The piece has been attacked for being openly racist and the attackers have been criticized for their 'knee-jerk' reactions. As if, in the world of art, there could be degrees of white racism, some intellectually acceptable, some not. Because the performance was created out of a 'sandbox-laboratory' tradition the unintended monster, intellectually, has received guarded deference. Because it is art, critical apologists for the piece have not been in short supply. Intelligent writers, including John Howell in the **Soho News**, have tried to argue that the racist slurs in **Route 1 & 9** were "ironic".

This is common enough considering to what lengths sane people have undergone to condone Copolla's **Apocalypse Now** or, more recently, Beatty's **Reds**.

### Retrochic

Two years ago, Lucy Lippard wrote a piece titled: **Retrochic: Looking Back in Anger** (**Village Voice**, December 19th, 1979) as a reminder to one and all what damage is inflicted by those who wish to use sexism or racism to replace the oranges and apples of their boring still-lives.

"Retrochic is not a style (though it is often associated with "punk art"). It is a subtle current of reactionary content filtering through various artforms. Its danger lies not so much in its direct effect as in its acceptance in the artwork . . .

Retrochic offers a particularly overt example of how art is seen and manipulated in this society. In the process it becomes the unwitting tool of the very powers it seems to think it is repelling, part and parcel of the national economic backlash against blacks and women, reproductive rights, social welfare and human rights. Neutrality is just what the doctor ordered for the corporate classes controlling art (and the rest of the world). It keeps artists safely ensconced in their small puddle, as non-union workers are kept isolated on their assembly lines. Retrochic art is sufficiently "distanced" (or spaced out) to see sexism, sexism, and facism not as counter. . . out as harmless outlets for a kind of disco destructiveness that feeds the art-world's voracious appetite for anything consumable . . . Retrochic is subversive in the sense that Nixon and the oil companies are subversive."

While artists are busy installing and repairing their technologies, they will continue to forget about the content and the society that is blistering around them. We will get more dumb flaccid art. Some, without thinking, will come to hurt themselves, and more to the point, others (already oppressed) around them. □

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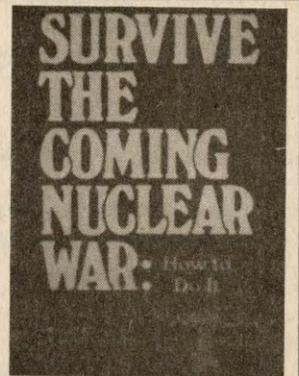
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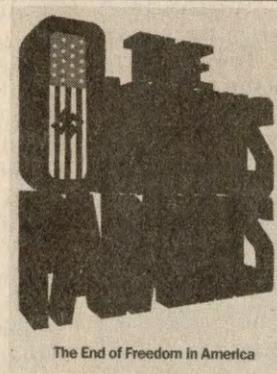
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## "To Serve And Protect"

After four months of "interim" operation C.I.R.P.A. (Citizens' Independent Review of Police Activities) became a formal organization at its inaugural meeting on February 15th at Toronto's City Hall.

Two hundred people including representatives from the Law Union, visible and other minority groups listened while the interim executive lead by Mark Wain (Law Union) gave their report. In the twenty week period from September 15th to February 2nd, 1982 C.I.R.P.A. handled over 500 calls of which 90 serious cases involved police assault (see table).

Three C.I.R.P.A. cases involved the police Hold-Up squad, of which two featured the 'dry submarine' technique of suffocating victims. Twenty other allegations of the use of this technique have been brought forward by a number of criminal lawyers, separate from C.I.R.P.A. "Dry submarining" involves shackling detainees, putting a bag over their heads and beating them supposedly to obtain confessions. Lawyer Dyanne Martin told the meeting that apparently this is one police procedure that has ceased, due to the number of allegations being presented.

C.I.R.P.A. was founded after

Toronto police management failed to seriously investigate citizen complaints of police brutality. The lists of alleged serious violence by the police is alarming in its sadistic extremes. The following are just four examples of violence against women:

- Epileptic woman, thought to be drunk, struck, bruised, threatened called "douche bag".
- woman pushed around, gun held to head of 7-year-old during raid.
- woman grabbed by throat and throttled and told, "Shut your mouth bitch".
- woman knocked to ground, hair pulled, manhandled while husband beaten by police.

Beating people up while they are in handcuffs is common, "man told, 'I'll punch you 3 times for each lie. After that, I'll double it', and finally hit 20 or more times while in cuffs."

52 Division (infamous across Canada since the Baths Raids) scores high in the number of complaints being made by citizens to C.I.R.P.A.. C.I.R.P.A. is planning a leaflet drop in the area covered by 52 Division, hoping that residents will make use of the organization's unique service.

Membership in C.I.R.P.A. is \$10, volunteers are needed for all areas including assistance with their 24 hour hotline. Phone 367-7903 for further information or write C.I.R.P.A., c/o Alderman David White, City Hall, Toronto.

Beaten while in handcuffs	22
Handcuffs used to inflict pain	10
Preoccupation with genitalia	12
Escalation of traffic related incidents	10
Escalation of other minor incidents	8
Mischief (damage, planting drugs, weapons)	15
Visible minorities	11
Gays	14
Women	12
Other assaults (not in any other category)	6
Mishandling of complaints	13
Public mischief, charges and lawsuits against complainants	6

PATRICK McGRATH

## WRITERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### This international gathering sought to combat artists' isolation and political impotence through collective action.

American writers recently massed in New York's Roosevelt Hotel and resolved to form a national union. The unanimity with which they reached that decision surprised many who suspected writers were far too individualistic a breed to allow themselves to be smothered in the ranks of a collective. But as one novelist said, "... we don't need any more writers as solitary heroes; we need a heroic writers' movement!"

The moot possibility of unified political action loomed large before the American Writers Congress chiefly because of a rapidly developing perception of the true nature of the American publishing industry ("some sell shoes and others sell books"), fuelled by panic in cultural circles as Reagan hits his stride. The Writers and Human Rights Congress, held in Toronto at the beginning of October, implicitly confronted the same problem, assuming vaster proportions than at the American gathering. With global terms of reference, writers from over 50 countries came together to deliberate on issues such as imprisonment, exile, revolution and terrorism. The question here was: what sort of collective muscle could be flexed by such a diverse group, assembled from such a wide spectrum of political contexts, on such a broad platform as that of human rights?

Matters were not made easier by the inherent tendency of writers to deal with the world in ways not conducive to the sort of consensual processes from which organized action springs. A great deal that went on did so in anecdotal rather than analytic fashion. Two instances: Zdena Tominova, an exiled Czech now living in London, described the Thursday meetings of dissident writers and intellectuals in a Prague cafe, under the oppressive surveillance of those she called the 'men of dubious elegance'. The writers would pull their chairs close to the table in order to exchange 'samizdat' books — unauthorized publications — and the 'men of dubious elegance' craned their necks to see what was passing from

hand to hand. One of that group was Vaclav Havel. He was sentenced in October, 1979, to 4½ years in prison for preparing and circulating information about people whom he and his group considered to be unjustly persecuted.

### The liberating forces

At another session, the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano talked of his friend, the Argentinian novelist Haroldo Conti. Conti, said Galeano, spent his last years in Buenos Aires tormented by the idea that his literature was politically useless. Others did not share his doubts. In May, 1976, Conti was dragged from his home by a group of armed men and then 'disappeared'. He was later seen in a secret detention centre, so badly tortured that he could not eat, talk or control his bowels. He has not been heard of since. "When lighting the little fires of identity, memory and hope," said Galeano, "work like his is liberating. His words gave shelter to many naked people..."

The telling of such stories

Nadine Gordimer stressed the writer's responsibility to society.



Thomas Victor



Thomas Victor

**Uruguay's Eduardo Galeano**

examples abounded. Josef Brodsky suggested one evening that political creeds were centrifugal, whereas poetry was centripetal. The centre towards which poetry turns, and from which dogma flies, he said, is humanity. Atwood expressed a similar idea when she called oppression a 'failure of the imagination — a failure to imagine the humanity of others.'

**The continuing vigil**

But the problem remained that while anecdote and metaphor could

certainly shock, inspire, and educate, could they make anything more of the congress than a gesture, a 'vigil outside the walls'?

The structure for action that the congress demanded was supplied by Amnesty International. Although Amnesty was not directly in control of the proceedings — its policy of working for the release only of prisoners of conscience who have not used or advocated violence would have limited the scope of the congress — the money and energy generated were funnelled into its organization. This meant an immediate influx of \$20,000, with more to come as spin-offs: a book of writings and authors' statements is to be published next fall; videotapes of selected proceedings will go to market, and work donated by local artists will be sold off. Amnesty also reports a quadrupling of membership enquiries in the weeks since the congress, which convert into groups working in various ways for imprisoned dissenters. And these, apparently, have real effect — more than 50 percent of the cases Amnesty takes up are successfully resolved.

The congress undoubtedly raised the morale of those for whom it was fighting and the consciousness of those

participating. It internationalized the provincial, politicized the uncommitted, and radicalized the liberal. But in terms of focused, prolonged follow-up, it is hard to imagine that it would have had more than short-term repercussions but for the Amnesty organization which stood ready to channel the mood of solidarity and commitment which swelled during the week. Finally the problem of organization for action was solved in the harmonious absorption of the writers' gesture into Amnesty's structure.

Victor Navasky recently wrote that writers are 'democracy's prophets, consciences, 'griots', truthsayers and most fervent practitioners...' But they are also 'out there alone on a smile and a shoestring.' Such aloneness, albeit essential to the act of creation, can render the writer politically impotent. As the Americans realized in the face of massive publishing conglomerates, and as the international authors who gathered in Toronto realized, to make action rather than art requires that the individual's efforts be harnessed to a collectivity. The writer will otherwise remain isolated in an imaginary world.

Patrick McGrath is a free-lance writer living in Toronto who has contributed to **This Magazine** and **Vanguard**.

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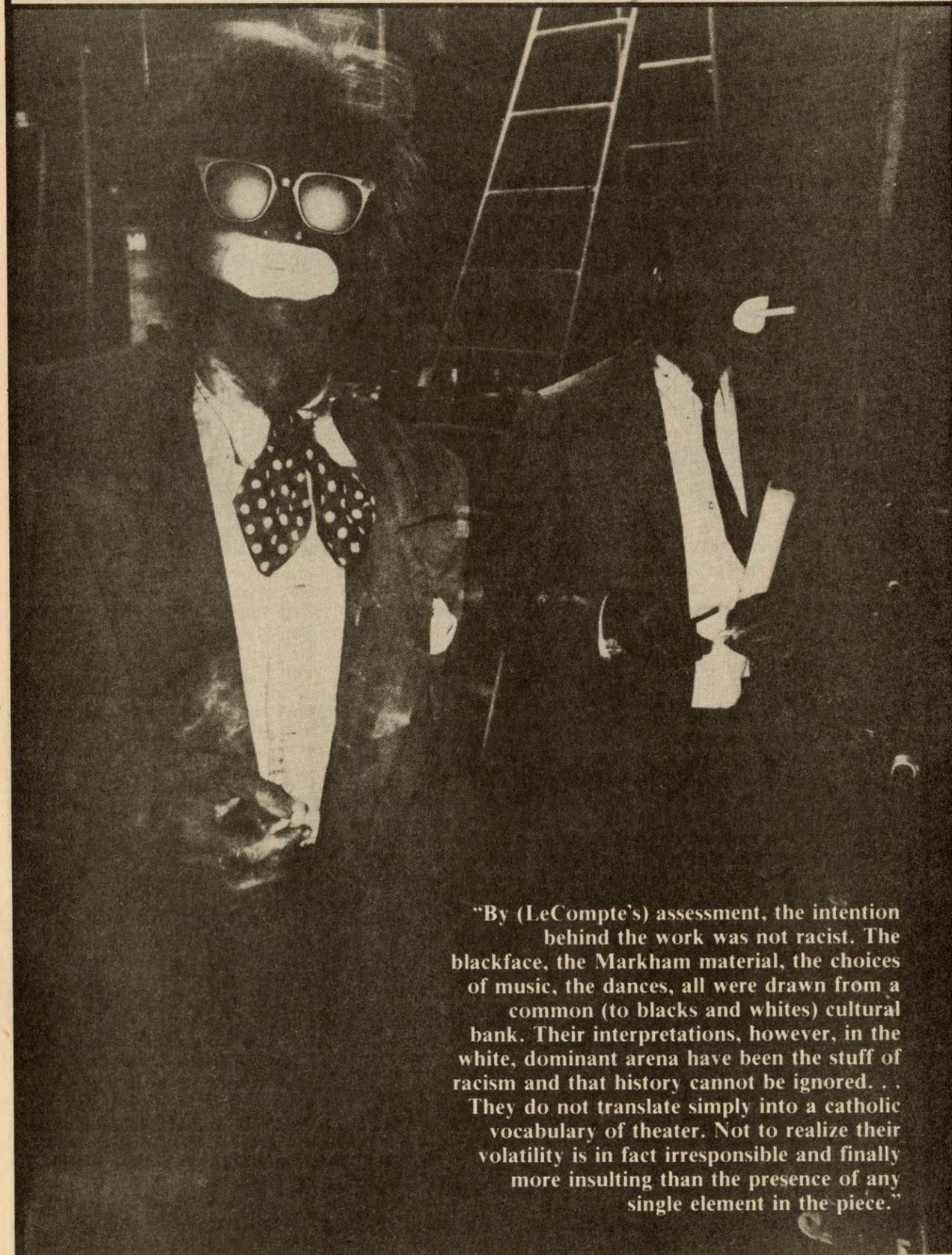
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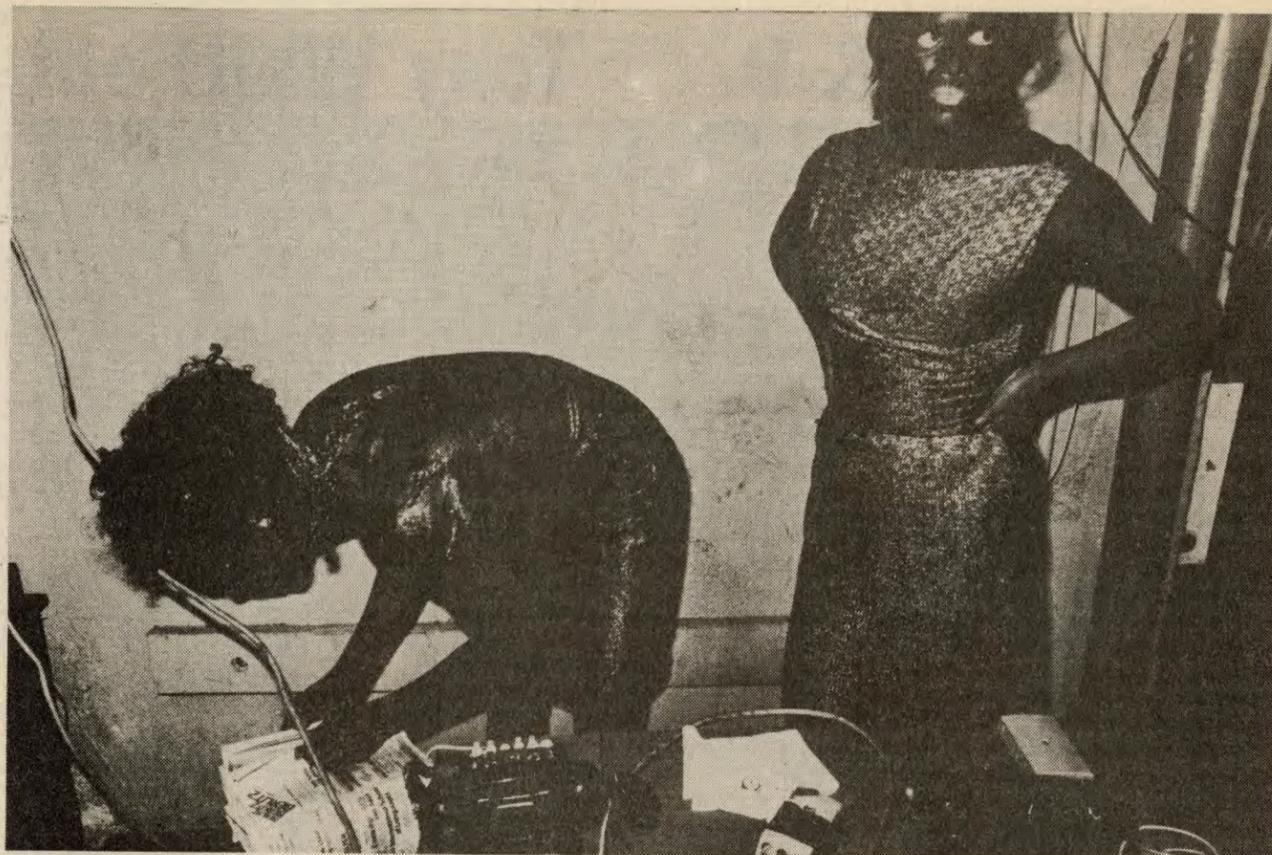
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**ROUTE 1 & 9 Tony Whitfield**



"By (LeCompte's) assessment, the intention behind the work was not racist. The blackface, the Markham material, the choices of music, the dances, all were drawn from a common (to blacks and whites) cultural bank. Their interpretations, however, in the white, dominant arena have been the stuff of racism and that history cannot be ignored. . . They do not translate simply into a catholic vocabulary of theater. Not to realize their volatility is in fact irresponsible and finally more insulting than the presence of any single element in the piece."

photos: Nancy Campbell



Between the objective "coinage" of a society and the representation of a politics formed by its lived reality lies interpretation. Artists who deal in that process of evaluation through culturally identifiable imagery often choose codified modes of articulation, extrinsic to pure esthetics (be they doctrinaire in a psychological, spiritual or philosophical sense) to clarify a particular focus on, or provide a path of entry into the work. The Wooster Group's production of *Route 1 & 9 (the Last Act)* does not take this approach. Its director's (Elizabeth LeCompte) primary assumption appears to be one of rhetorical convergence, or more precisely, anarchy. The result is one of the most dangerous, aggressive pieces of theatre produced by the New York avant-garde in the last decade. Whites in blackface, jokes about shit, a porn film, a voodoo dance, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* presiding, Clifton Fadiman, Pigmeat Markham and Harry Belafonte, in the wings. *Route 1 & 9* has been deemed so dangerous, (if not suicidal) in fact, that the New York State Council on the Arts slashed the Wooster Group's 1981-82 funding by \$15,000 (42.8% of its last award) and has stipulated that none of the remaining grant monies be used in connection with that work. After seeing *Route 1 & 9* three times its emotional impact on me has become one of multiple assault,

a repeatedly undiminished violent experience that in each instance has urgently demanded the abstraction of deeper meanings.

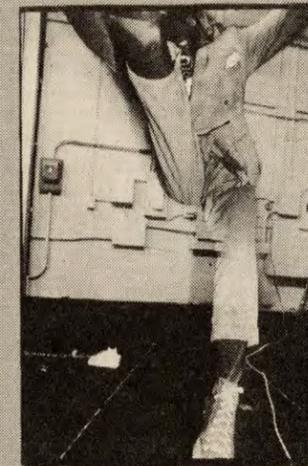
In an attempt to sort out my thoughts and reconcile them with more visceral reactions, I interviewed Elizabeth LeCompte. Her comments in this article were excerpted from our discussion.

*Route 1 & 9* is divided into four distinct sections. Its opening, entitled "The Lesson" is a videotape shown to the audience in a small viewing room. It reconstructs a tape made by Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1965. Ron Vawter plays the role of Clifton Fadiman delivering with graceless stylization a basic high school lecture on the appreciation of "modern" theatre. His example is Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. He outlines the "significant" formalist considerations in considering the play — "the use of music", "theme and variation" and "the use of the condensed line or word". While the tape serves as an odd outline for those who don't know the story of *Our Town*, it is also a blueprint in counterpoint to the rest of *Route 1 & 9*. It presents an acting style, a conception of dramatic language (so weighted it even gives empty echoes to Fadiman's pedestrian lecture) and outmoded ideas of theatrical technique that, in their heightened state, become

a border between "naturalism" and absurdity. Ron Vawter's cardboard and impersonal gestures are set in comedic relief by LeCompte and Willem Dafoe's exasperated editor's cuts. Those cuts emphasize the specifics of video as a medium, directorial manipulation as a component of the tape and that tape as a theatrical decision within the context of *Route 1 & 9* itself.

### The language of melodrama

After "The Lesson" the audience is asked to move into the Performing Garage's theatre space where the most prominent features are four video monitors suspended from tracks over the stage and an incomplete house framed out in metal studding. This section ("The Party") begins with an audio taped dialogue between two men. They discuss getting into a new line of work — selling panelling to "cool people," "indifferent people" in New Jersey (which is where the highway, Route 1 & 9, begins). On the monitors, there is a romantic scene between *Our Town*'s young lovers, George (Willem Dafoe) and Emily (Marisa Hansell). LeCompte chose to shoot this scene in a series of closeups, eliminating gesture and loading the language with melodrama. The result



"I hate the idea of mainstream, man, it scares me . . . I don't wanna butter my bread being Middle America's favorite funny little black boy."

(Michael Shore, "Eddie Murphy ignites black comedy," *Soho News*, Jan. 27, 1982)  
Eddie Murphy

"For all this magnetism and all this poetry and these direct means of seduction would be nothing if they were not designed to put the mind physically on the track of something, if the true theater could not give us the sense of a creation of which we possess only one face, but whose completion exists on other levels."

Antonin Artaud, from "The Theater of Cruelty" (first Manifesto)

" . . . I caught Murphy doing that pimp thing, Velvet Jones. I did *not* find it funny, man. It offended me. I don't care if he tries to rationalize it away saying the guy's *selling* a pimp book or something — that's bullshit, man. The identification with negative stereotypes is still there, and it shouldn't be. It's just *unthinking*, man, in this day and age, to even fool around with stereotypes like the pimp or drug pusher. The question is, does this guy have any social consciousness?"

(Michael Shore, "Blacklash," *Soho News*, Jan. 27, 1982)  
Franklin Ajaye of Eddie Murphy

"The consensus of opinion throughout the Council process was that the Group's production of *Route 1 & 9* contained in its blackface sequences harsh and caricatured portrayals of a racial minority. Among the examples cited was the production's use of live telephone calls: white actors in blackface call local fried chicken outlets and while using a broad mimic of Black dialect attempt to place orders for delivery at the theatre. (The people who receive these calls are outside of the theatrical context and their responses are heard by the audience in the theatre.) We also discussed the general context of the blackface sequences, the possibility of a gap between the Group's intent and the reality of the production on stage, the range of interpretations, and how these interpretative elements fall within the Council's analytical concerns for artistic quality and public service. We explained that because of its negative assessment of *Route 1 & 9* in terms of these issues, the Council found it inappropriate to support the production with NYSCA funds that are raised as taxes from the community at large in New York State."

Rob Marx, Director of the Theatre Program for N.Y. State Council of the Arts, to Mary Hays, Executive Director of the N.Y. State Council of the Arts.

"Some of my work(s) are more overtly political than other(s). Because of the way we work, because we take things directly from the culture that (are) not filtered. As soon as you begin to gather things from the culture you can't avoid being political because you are dealing in the coinage of politics, of everyday politics. As long as we work in that way, gathering things from outside, rather than psychologically, from inside, that will be one of the overtones of all our pieces."

Elizabeth LeCompte

" . . . instead of relying on texts that are regarded as definitive and as sacred we must first of all put an end to the subjugation of the theatre to the text, and rediscover the notion of a unique language half way between gesture and thought."

Antonin Artaud, from "The Theater of Cruelty" (first Manifesto)

is high soap opera.

Against Wilder's turn of the century New England sentimentality, centre stage, Dafoe and Vawter attempt to complete the frame house, stage right Kate Valk and Peyton are on the telephone. All four are in blackface, dressed in black, the men wear glasses opaqued with black. Here the difficulty begins. White people in black-face?! in 1981!

## Touching the nerve of white racism

Deaf and blind, Dafoe and Vawter grope across the stage, bumping into things and one another, install a wall upside down, use sign language in vain. Valk calls Peyton to tell her to wear her gold dress (which turns out to be black) and that she is going to have a "blind date." Together the women telephone ice cream and fried chicken outlets and try to arrange deliveries. The calls are real. The women use black dialect and the unsuspecting person at the other end (usually somewhere in Harlem)'s responses are amplified to the theatre audience. This section of "The Party" is never quite the same in content. The actors are involved in a goal oriented (complete the house, get the chicken) improvisation shaped by the blackface (/blindness.) What remains the same, however, is the audience's reaction. A palpable tension begins to mount. While LeCompte's performers are pros and their use of vaudeville and slapstick timing is flawless, there are very few people laughing. The combination of blackface, improv that draws on the stereotypes of black party girl and inept Stepin Fetchit-like workmen, *Our Town* and telephone calls to the real world touches one of the rawest nerves in the American body politic: white racism. And LeCompte continues to press.

The image on the monitors changes to color bars, literally subtitled as such, and the performers re-enact a Pigeat Markham routine from 1965. Dafoe and Vawter take off their glasses and, with Valk and Peyton, pull the action to the edge of the audience. They carry on, they dance, scream, pat padded breasts and asses to "Itty Bitty Pretty One" and "Shotgun," stop the music and run through Markham's jokes about sex and shit with one major perceptual hitch. That what one sees is informed by what one knows. That while the Markham routine was originally performed for blacks, it entered the media via Merv Griffin-type talk show

venues unaccompanied by general historical analysis under the guise of a form of affirmative action. That the material in fact extended the stereotypes of blacks and remained a curiosity for middle America. That unemployment soared in 1981 and blacks remain structurally unemployed. That the Reagan regime has granted tax exemption to segregated schools. That federal agents blocked an armed invasion by the Klu Klux Klan of the tiny, mostly black, island of Dominica last spring. That those who survive in the art world are predominantly white and upper middle class. That it is next to impossible to take the image of white people with padded asses, in blackface as less than direct insult to blacks. If it is not meant as such then where is the social consciousness of this work?

## The fear in humour

LeCompte has structured "The Party" in a way that makes it very difficult to be certain of her intentions. The extraordinary pitch of the scene's energy is unrelenting and the release of the material's original humor is virtually nullified. It is as though she has affirmed Freud's early theory of wit by laying bare the subconscious fears at its root. In so doing, the blackface begins to take on an even more disturbing, if metaphorically clichéd, characteristic: it proclaims itself as a mask of the outcast, acting out white middle class taboos. The blacks' interactions are hedonistic, primary and intensely sexual. Against this, remember, LeCompte has set the saccharin scene in which Wilder's George tells Emily that he has been watching her from afar, afraid to even make his presence known.

In the next scene, "The Last Act", LeCompte further elaborates that view of schism between a stultified, traditional white culture and primal (black) impulses. A stagehand cranks the monitors down from the ceiling. On the screen, in close-up, one sees the cast weeping through *Our Town's* cemetery scene in which Emily returns from the grave to relive a pleasant day in her adolescence. After "The Party" the slowness of Wilder's densely impacted, but common, language acts as a palliative. Clichés about death and the inability to live it fully become a point of relief in their familiarity. On the dimly lit stage the same actors (in blackface) enact another party scene inside the now complete house. They set a table with candles, crystal, flowers and other props of civility. The

activity becomes more and more raucous as Nat King Cole singing "Rambling Rose" intertwines with the tension-laden sound-track from *Our Town*. Objects begin to fly, glass breaks, records scratch and the actors (men and women) change into long full skirts or aprons. The scene finally climaxes. Emily returns to the land of the dead and on stage all break into a wild, ecstatic voodoo dance. Half of the blackface makeup has been scrubbed off and fangs added; skirts flail, white legs and genitals flash to Harry Belafonte's calypso. Horrific exorcism against a dirge. Then blackout. LeCompte has created a shocking denial of death by encompassing polar extremes of mourning. Her dead, on stage, have awakened in condemnation of Wilder's system of moral values.

## Sex without orgasm

In the last scene (*Route 1 & 9*) the four overhead monitors show scenes of driving. One sees New York recede in the background. At one point the car stops and picks up two hitchhikers (William Dafoe and an unidentified woman). The driving continues. On the stage two '60s vintage televisions are showing a heterosexual porn film. The man, again, is recognizable as Dafoe. The footage is grainy, silent, beautiful. Occasionally the sex is intercut with scenes of a middle-class family at dinner, presumably downstairs. The sex goes on; faces are never seen. The blackout.

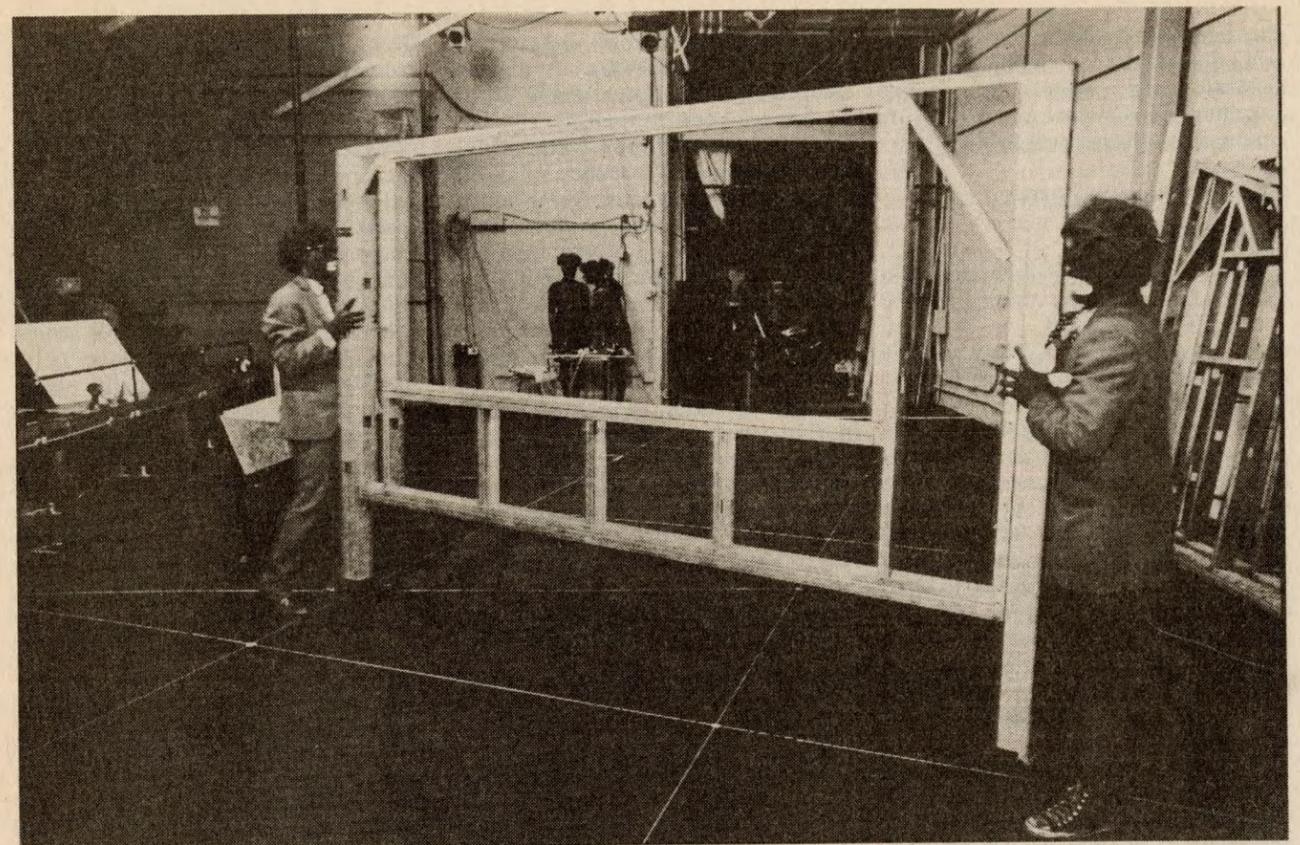
As a coda the last section worked as a measure of the effect of the preceding scenes. The porn film breaks the form of the genre. There are no orgasms; the film simply ends as a production person walks toward the camera. In combination with the monotony of the highway this section offered no real release from what had come before, only a sense of numbness. Oddly, its explicit depiction of sex sits in contrast to the raw passion of the earlier sections and exposes the implicit sexuality inherent in their individual and joint structures.

## LeCompte interviewed

In an effort to sort out my thoughts and reconcile them with the visceral disturbance of my reactions, I spoke with LeCompte.

**Tony Whitfield:** Could you give me a brief outline of the history of the Wooster Group?

**Elizabeth LeCompte:** This (the Performing Garage, the home of the



"Deaf and blind . . . installing a wall upside down, (they) use sign language in vain."

Wooster Group) used to be the space of the Performance Group, which was directed by Richard Schechner. Sometime around 1975-76, four of us began working separately from the Performance Group. And we did a series of pieces called the trilogy. The first one was *Sakonett Point*. In 1977 we did *Rumstick Road* and in 1978 we made *Nayatt School*. We were still members of the Performance Group, but also working separately. And then the Performance Group dissolved in 1979 and Richard left the Garage to turn to writing and teaching. We continued but dropped the name Performance Group because it was so associated with Richard's work and continued as the Wooster Group, which was our corporate name from the beginning. **T.W.:** Tell me a little bit about the works that lead up to *Route 1 & 9* and how this piece fits in relation to the earlier works . . . Why is it *the Last Act*?

**E.L.:** Very early on in *Sakonett Point* we started with certain kinds of architectural, spatial, and psychological themes that we found ourselves developing further or differently with each successive piece so that by the third piece, there was a very identifiable vocabulary of images and characters that emerged. I think the reason I am able to say that this piece is the last

piece of that whole system is that they are all based around the same thematic material and the same architectural structure which is the evolving and changing house. The psychological material started out in *Sakonett Point* and *Rumstick Road* with very specific autobiographical material from Spalding Gray; Spalding would bring in this autobiographical material and then we would develop material around it, off of it, or incorporating our own lives into it. By the time we reached *Nayatt School*, we were talking much more abstractly about working with images that were not necessarily based on Spalding's life anymore. This last piece, *Route 1 & 9*, is the farthest extension that I can take the material. Visually, it is the furthest extension of any of the material we have been working with, which has been a combination of madness, women's madness, repression, upper-middle class white New England society and values and moral structure. *Route 1 & 9* is the last place I want to go with that material.

**T.W.:** How did you go about constructing *Route 1 & 9*?

**E.L.:** The same way we went about putting together all of the other pieces. I like to work from several points at the same time and not try to bring them together until each point is very

far developed into its own line. So, for *Route 1 & 9* we started from black comedy routines, Pigeat Markham, Amos and Andy, and white comedy, Laurel and Hardy and the Marx Brothers. We began from that point and worked very separately with that kind of humor, that particular idiom. Then the other point was *Our Town*. We very often pick a text, some text that every high school student does. In *Nayatt School* we worked with a T.S. Eliot text, in *Point Judith* (1979) we worked with *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and in this once we decided to work with *Our Town*. It's hard to say how we decide these things. It's just, they come up. We take anything that's at hand. It's not an important decision, we just take whatever is the most obvious to work with. And then the third point was the porn film. So we worked on these three things without trying to integrate them thematically in any way. We made the porn film first, worked on *Our Town* in separate rehearsals, and then worked on the Pigeat Markham material in totally separate rehearsals. And then toward the end, the last four months we started to bring all the images together in the same space. When I say that, I mean that we bring them together only physically; we put them next to each other and then we begin to see where

the lines are, what connects them, what doesn't connect them, where they separate and where they come together. That's how the pieces are made, from those juxtapositions.

### "No real system developed . . ."

**T.W:** What were the major issues in making the decisions about the final form of *Route 1 & 9*?

**E.L:** It was just me sitting outside saying this works or it doesn't work. Other than that, I don't know why. I have no real system developed. It's just what feels right or what doesn't feel right in this piece as opposed to the other pieces. I've tried not to weave the material thematically, but to really find ways of juxtaposing it very sharply, almost like cuts, instead of interweavings and meshes. So this piece, unlike some of the others, takes meaning more from elements that are next to each other and reverberations back and forward than it does from that mix.

**T.W:** Who did you see as the audience for *Route 1 & 9*?

**E.L:** Our same audience. We have a following of people who are between 25 and 50, college-educated, white, upper-middle class New Yorkers.

**T.W:** What were you hoping the piece would elicit in terms of reactions from that audience?

**E.L:** It's hard for me to think in that way when I'm working on a piece. It destroys some of the inevitable pleasure, even if (the reaction) is horrible, there is some pleasure for me in learning about that. I try not to think about audience, not as a discipline, so that my pleasure is greater. But I must admit that this was a bigger reaction than any of the other pieces with the possible exception of *Nayatt School*. I was prepared but being prepared doesn't make it easier.

**T.W:** In terms of the history of performance, where do you see your particular interests fitting in?

**E.L:** It's hard for me to say. I feel like I'm just at the beginning. I've made five pieces, but I made them rather quickly, in six years. I've been influenced by just about everybody's work. I still come from the Living Theatre, being brought up in the 'sixties. I loved their work, I mean I didn't like their political work, I loved their structural work. I loved *Frankenstein*. I went to see the Open Theater but I was never deeply moved by something like the pure energy of the Living Theater. I don't think there is any question that I am a direct descendent from that line.

**T.W:** But there is the political aspect of that line. It elicits that kind of reaction. Historically it is politically tied. Where do you see yourself then?

**E.L:** You know, I don't. I don't think *Frankenstein* was overtly political in the way *Antigone* was. Some of my work is more overtly political than other . . . because of the way we work, because we take things directly from the culture, unfiltered. As soon as you begin to gather things from the culture, you can't avoid being political because you are dealing in the coinage of politics. As long as we work in that way, gathering things from outside, rather than psychologically from inside, that will be one of the overtones of all of our pieces. It has been different in the other pieces. In *Nayatt School* and *Point Judith* it was more a feminist statement. In this piece the emphasis is slightly shifted.

### "An outsider in a romantic sense . . ."

**T.W:** Where is the emphasis now?

**E.L:** More on the white middle class and the polarization of my community, but I can't even consider it my community anymore.

**T.W:** Why can't you consider this your community?

**E.L:** Well, I don't think I've ever considered it my community. I've always been an outsider. I've always felt that I've been a voyeur in some way, watching things from the outside . . . I'm very isolated from it although at the same time I'm very much in the center of it.

**T.W:** Given your working method, which seems to be very open-ended, your audience, and the history you have drawn on readily in performance, do you see yourself using that position as a voyeur . . . ?

**E.L:** Or a victim of it? I suppose I'm learning to use it now. When I say I'm learning, I mean I've always felt a struggle, like everyone, that I would eventually find my place in a social community; but as the years passed and I realized that I was not finding my place, for survival I've had to say that I don't have a place that I can identify with and that has been a healthy part of our work. And that's why it is still so vital for all of us . . . My image of myself is as an outsider in a romantic sense, not in a fighting sense. I'd rather see myself as a visionary.

### Blackface

**T.W:** If there is one aspect that mediates all of the material it is time.

There is a period of at least 15 years between the original entrance (of the Pigmear Markham routine) into the culture and *Route 1 & 9*. That period of time brings with it all sorts of assessments of the material. I think that the blackface exemplifies the weight of the material. How were you thinking about that element?

**E.L:** Boy, that is the most complex thing in the world because for me that was finally the shock, just how potent that still is. I can't even say that it's blackface, because it's not the blackface that's potent, it's everything in so many ways. I don't know. I come on it from so many angles. I don't even know what's true any more. I don't even know what I worked from any more. I don't even remember my initial reactions.

**T.W:** The piece has been called racist. Did you see it as a piece about racism?

**E.L:** No. I never did. I mean, I wouldn't be so presumptuous.

**T.W:** How do you use that material without realizing that probably the question of whether or not it is racist is going to arise?

**E.L:** Mainly, I think . . . I don't know how I feel about this, but I have to be honest . . . I thought that it would be understood that this was a wild, white view of black, not even of people, a white view of black comedy — you know, that far removed. I was able to remove myself so much that I didn't even see it as about black people, but about a black comedy form, or about black and white comedy forms, those extremes, black and white comedy forms. It's been said that blackface was mainly a white comedy form but it was incorporated by the blacks too. Pigmear wore blackface for a good part of his career. So it was both. I think — probably this is where people can say irresponsible about me — I did not ever imagine that people would come in and say it was a representation of black people. Never, ever. When that happened I was very surprised.

**T.W:** There remains a difference between a piece that's about racism, about race, and a piece that is racist.

### "I don't work from a point of view."

**E.L:** I'm too close. I can't really tell. I think the piece, like all of our pieces, is an amalgam of a lot of images of America. It includes race and a lot of other things as well as race. This piece happens to center more on that than other things because I've become very aware of that in the city. I can see the piece on one level as about racism. I

did not make it from that point of view, but I made it from no point of view. I don't work from a point of view.

**T.W:** For me, the most difficult part of the piece was not the blackface, but a certain vision of the world, which is where I think the porn sequence comes in.

**E.L:** The porn film for me is very, very beautiful. I love to watch it. I love the bodies. I love it. That's my personal reaction, I'm not saying that that's what it should be. It is a primal thing that is usually covered or else it is used very specifically for one purpose, to make you have a climax. Here it is not used for that. It's used as a kind of meditation on the action itself next to a meditation on death (the cemetery scene). For me it is a very joyous wonderful thing. I find the whole vision of the piece is filled with great joy and great sadness and the two coming together have something to say about my life. There's a lot of anger. I'm an angry person. I'm angry about a lot of things, but I don't think that anger is an ugly thing. I always try to transcend, I try to make it into something joyous and full and strong and do not try to hide it. I think that most people don't agree with me, they find anger very ugly and they find the piece as a result extremely ugly. For me I find that the most difficult thing. Each night I realize that most people find me ugly, because when I see the

things that I see I don't see what they see. That is probably why this is the last piece. Always in the pieces before I've been able to mediate my anger and my joy which always come together. With the release of anger comes the release of repression, that is a kind of joy. I've always been able to mediate that anger and joy through Spalding Gray, who is an extremely charming, affable person. This piece strips that away. Without his persona in front, which I always used as a mask, it's too strong for most people. It doesn't communicate to a large enough audience to be able to go on working.

If anything, LeCompte's comments begin to illuminate the points at which *Route 1 & 9*'s difficulties become irreconcilable. By her assessment, the intention behind the work was not racist. The blackface, the Markham material, the choices of music, the dances, all were drawn from a common (to blacks and whites) cultural bank. Their interpretations, however, in the white, dominant arena have been the stuff of racism and that history cannot be ignored. Those elements gain new levels of significance as they become part of the fabric of the entire work. Their very use, however, invokes socio/political realities that demand more than voyeuristic involvement on the part of the audience. They do not translate simply into a catholic vocabulary of



\*LeCompte also contends that Gussow's review prompted the recession of all rights to the use of *Our Town* by the Wilder estate. Despite having used other texts without permission in previous works, LeCompte decided to go through the official channels and acquire the reading rights for *Our Town*. The company paid the prescribed royalties and all went smoothly at the time of *Route 1 & 9*'s in-progress showing in the spring. After its November opening, however, the Wooster Group received thumbs-down notices from Samuel French, Wilder's publisher, and then from the author's estate. The Wooster Group chose not to respond to these refusals, risking losses and hoping that the art world isolation would prevent their paths from crossing that of their erstwhile adversaries. To date, nothing has happened but the world is, in reality, smaller than one might want to believe (as should have been the lesson learned at every stage of controversy raised by *Route 1 & 9*).

theatre. Not to realize their volatility is in fact irresponsible and finally more insulting than the presence of any single element in the piece. If the "joyousness" of *Route 1 & 9* was lost to the majority of its viewers, as it was to me, it indicates a, perhaps, unbridgeable distance between subjective assessments by performers of work that has been created through deliberate adherence to intuition-dependent processes and its appearance to those outside that process of creation. What is recognizable of the joyous and therapeutic aspects of *Route 1 & 9* seems to have become subordinate to a gestalt system that melds racism, death and questions of spiritual survival. As such, this work claims its ground somewhere outside a realm of constructs where the functions of racism remain discretely identifiable. Whether one accepts that essential attitudinal separation between audience and art work in this case, is another question.

### Reliance on intuition

By all indications, it appears that the New York State Council on the Arts did not. Late in December, after *Route 1 & 9* had ended its first month long run, this funding body passed down its verdict. The Wooster Group's award had been slashed severely after public accusation of racism and subsequent proclamations of artistic inferiority by the Council's review panel. The decision (arrived at by representatives chosen from mainstream, avant-garde, and community oriented theater venues throughout New York State) was not unanimous. The combination of tax dollars and charges of racism, nevertheless, were enough to justify an act of censorship on the part of the Council (an act that the Council admits is "not unprecedented.") To assure that no Council funds would be used for future productions of *Route 1 & 9* the Wooster Group grant was reduced to a level considerably below its received request of two years prior, effectively crippling the company and, ironically forcing a second six week survival run of the, by that point, infamous piece. The council decision is under

appeal. A reversal seems unlikely, however, given the fact that such an action would be the responsibility of the original panel, into whose hands the case now reverts. Throughout, the Council has refused to comment on either its judgement or the review process. Under the law, its position is in fact clear. **Route 1 & 9** throws directly into question the Council's commitment to affirmative action. Whatever ambiguities may exist as to whether or not the work is racist by intention pale next to one simple logical extension: if a government agency supports the continuation of racial stereotypes, it must then support cultural phenomena such as lynchings and cross burnings.

### A furor in the press

The potency of the role of the press in the case of **Route 1 & 9** has been undeniable. Early negative reviews such as Nell Gussow's in the **New York Times**\* served two ends. Accusations of racism transformed what otherwise might have remained an anomaly of the avant-garde's social isolation into a cause célèbre. It effectively changed LeCompte's usual audience from one of sympathetic allegiance to a broader, liberal-to-left compendium of very vocal commentators. Their responses both spurred the wrath of the Council and forced the Wooster group into various positions of self defence. Among them were two panel discussions at the Performing Garage which were held to garner support 1) for the work itself and 2) for the company after the cuts had been announced.

Little of practical consequence arose from these discussions. What surfaced, however, was the complexity of reaction throughout **Route 1 & 9** had spawned. The work was described in terms which ranged from "a thoughtless racial slur," to "a daring radical political statement." Usually prefaced by personal identification edged with either liberal apologia or direct invectives, the opinions voiced emphasized that this work had been seen from two widely differing perspectives: It was either viewed as a white acknowledgement of the moral/spiritual effects of white racism or it was viewed with revulsion, as a perpetuation of white racism through the embracing of its language both visual and verbal. **Route 1 & 9** has, clearly become a trial by fire for one's relationship to racism. Little affirmation of what LeCompte had described as the work's "visionary redemptive quality" was evidenced. The catch-all

nature of her methodology had blunted all discussion of the work into issues of psycho/social disturbance or correctness of political behaviour. In essence the social circumstance surrounding the work had so controlled its viewing that no audience could readily approach it on simply the atomistic terms from which it was made.

### Lost in the shuffle of international affairs

Although LeCompte's acrid view of America is extraordinarily powerful, to my way of thinking, it suffers from a fatal flaw of unconscionability in its refusal to acknowledge certain levels on which it functions as a critical response to the realities of racism. It claims too often only to be a mirror of that condition. Nevertheless, at the end of its second run **Route 1 & 9** was chosen to be one of the three examples of "significant American avant-garde theatre" in the bi-centennial celebration of cultural exchange between the U.S. and Holland at the Dutch Micky Theatre. As usual it seems that something's got lost in the shuffle of international affairs. Those who suffer from its basest forms of repression have become pawns, integral components in the entertainment of an aesthetic privileged class. Vice-president Bush sits at the head of the party table. In essence, his name on the letterhead that will be at the Wooster group's disposal for the rest of the year acts as a figurative, if not practical, negation of the Council's decision. This is not a surprising turn of events given the brief history of the Reagan administration or the socio/economic workings of the international art machine. It is in this context that effects of art on people take a back seat to the gentry of an objectified high-art tradition. It is in this context that LeCompte assumes she should be given a place in the line of Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski, the Living Theatre . . . It is in this context also, that the tradition of Wilder and his contributions to the language of an indigenous "moralistic" American theatre are diminished in the seducible eyes of aesthetic power brokers.

Power, however, neither comes into being nor does it have meaning in a vacuum. Only there, however, would it be enough to sustain the political justifications of **Route 1 & 9**. Although LeCompte insists that it is not the context in which it should be judged, the work presents itself first in that

mask. Behind it there lies the romantic vision of both life and the art making process. It filters itself through the creative methodology defined by alienation (a real condition of American life) which has ceased to make judgements beyond that of puzzle-solving. Every debacle surrounding **Route 1 & 9** is a function of that approach. When asked if she thought the Council's decision was a reflection on her working method, LeCompte commented, "... There will be repression of this way of working, in general. Of course it comes down on me first since I am 'the lowest man on the totem pole'. It's that fear of the power of working in this way. I'm like a witch, because in some way I'm not taking responsibility. I'm conjuring images of the dead and I don't know what they'll do. They may come back and kill people." Perhaps. But the ultimate danger is in not recognizing that you are in fact the victim of your own death images. □

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## cineaste

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## PUBLIC ART L.A. PAD used Thanksgiving week to say "no thanks" to the new right's agenda of cutbacks and repression.



Midnight Graphics' billboard, "Combat Billboredom" in West Hollywood was part of PAD's week-long art event.

It wasn't until November of 1980 that the left in the U.S. could begin to see the magnitude of this most recent wave of conservative backlash. Now that we're a little over a year into the swell (permit a weathered metaphor) and still nowhere near the crest, some artists are attempting to ride out the storm (scrambling for the remnants of the National Endowments for the Arts, clinging to academic posts or hustling for corporate support) while others are organizing to strengthen and channel the inevitable undercurrents of dissidence. Among the latter are the artists/activists of Los Angeles Political Art Documentation/Distribution (LAPAD), a newly formed group who recently coordinated a week long public art event opposing the repressive agenda of the new right. **Thanks, but No Thanks** was conceived by artist Mary Linn Hughes as an opportunity to both reflect on the gluttony of the traditional Thanksgiving holiday and to protest the belt-tightening feigned by the Reagan administration and forced on the majority of us.

**Thanks, but No Thanks**, (which reached a variety of audiences with performance, photography, leafletting, a billboard, radio programs and video and film screenings by over 24 individuals and groups) serves as a

useful model of art supporting political struggles. Not unlike coalition politics, the public art event allows artists to pool resources and audiences while permitting something of a diversity of concerns. Previous public art events — for example, Suzanne Lacy's pioneering **Three Weeks in May** (see **Heresies #9**) and New York PAD's **Death and Taxes** (see the newsletter of PAD, **1st Issue #2**) — demonstrated the effectiveness of large scale public art events focused on specific issues (sexual violence and military spending, respectively.) **Thanks, but No Thanks** differed slightly from these earlier events, encouraging artists to address a variety of issues from nuclear disarmament to reproductive rights. The result was a week of oppositional culture which spoke to audiences at sites all over the Los Angeles area.

### Reaching L.A.'s automotive audience

Several events reached out to a general, and occasionally confused, public. "Combat Billboredom", a West Hollywood billboard produced by Midnight Graphics depicted a holiday cornucopia of armaments captioned "No Thanks." At the opening celebration costumed human

fruits and vegetables paraded beneath the billboard, bemoaning their eviction from the horn of plenty and motioning to street traffic to look up at the billboard. Another street event which took advantage of L.A.'s automotive audience was Kathy Arnold's "Freeway Giveaways", a poster and postcard distributed at several offramps of the Hollywood freeway. Her apple-shaped poster describing the devastating effects of nuclear fallout on agriculture was handed out at intersections where produce vendors peddle bargain bags of California oranges. Reactions ranged from hostility and suspicion among the Porsche class to interest and enthusiasm from economy car drivers; the latter were particularly eager to mail out Arnold's postcard of U.S. bombers which was captioned "No Thanks" and preaddressed to Reagan at his Washington residence.

While a billboard, leaflets and postcards reach a general public, an exhibition of documentary photographs by Steve Cagan at the LAPAD gallery (housed in the Socialist Community School) spoke to a selected audience — the community of the left in L.A. who frequent the space for panels, forums and classes. Cagan's photos and oral histories, which usually appear in a journalistic context, docu-

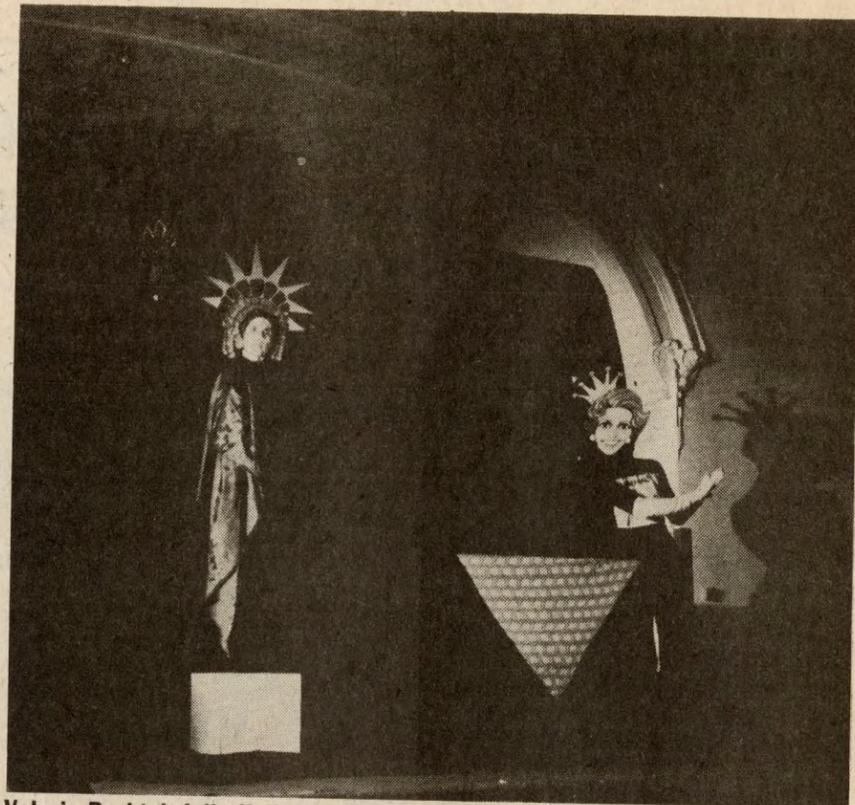
ment the lives and work places of people affected by factory shutdowns. Accompanying Cagan's photos and stories were text and advertisements compiled by curators Bonnie Lambert and Marshall Mayer which analysed and illustrated the managerial motivation for plant relocations, while offering strategies for workers faced with a factory closure (where traditional union tactics such as strikes and slowdowns only accelerate managerial moves to relocate.) An exemplary set of photos and stories posed an immediate solution to the corporate capriciousness of plant relocations: in Youngstown, Ohio, community members and workers organized to buy their rubber hose factory rather than permit the social and economic havoc of an abrupt shutdown.

Although the extensive written analysis included with Cagan's photographs was essential to sidestep that traditional documentary pitfall — "Let's pity the poor unemployed" — the quantity of typed text on a gallery wall presented a challenge even to compulsive readers. Close to twenty pages of typed and posted text can be intimidating no matter how compelling the stories or insightful the analysis. When audience accessibility is an issue (and with politically motivated informational art, it generally is) other media options — slide shows, handouts, booklets — might be considered in lieu of, or in addition to, a posted text.

### On white-collar crime

Sherry Millner's film **Crime Around the Collar** offers an alternative solution to the difficulties of disseminating information and analysis without forsaking invention and irony. Screened appropriately enough in the cellblock of the old Venice jail (which now houses the Social and Public Art Resource Center), Millner's "fictional documentary" on white-collar crime entertains and educates while indicting not only the individual white-collar criminal, but the criminality of capitalism itself.

Abandoning the deadening techniques of traditional documentary film, Millner gives us images and information about the tilted scales of American justice. We see a laundry day problem: the white-collar criminal who just can't get rid of that ground-in crime around the collar, not even with the latest detergents — "Hush Up" and "Slap on the Wrist." We hear a set of four classroom math problems illustrating the class based disparity in



Valerie Bechtol, Julie Keller performing "Lenox and Justice for All."

sentencing. A computer embezzler slices pennies from hundreds of accounts; how much does clear from the accounts when sentenced to pay a nominal fine? How will the black maid pay her monthly bills totalling more than her income? Answer: She gets caught shoplifting and is sent to jail where she has no more money problems. And we witness an interrogation: an invented white collar criminal, a mannikin in businessman's attire, is grilled under hot lights about his part in corporate crimes. Stories of G.E. price fixing, Beech Aircraft's defective fuel system that resulted in over twenty crash deaths, the Lockheed bribery scandal and the notorious Ford Pinto gas tank problem point to the criminal nature of an economy in which profits are pre-eminent. Millner's investigation of white collar crime points to the contradictions in American justice in a cinematic form which refuses to either anesthetize or pander to her audience.

### The politics of food

Like Millner's film, which presents new information in an inventive form, an evening of performance art provided the audience with facts, figures, analysis and entertainment. By limiting each performance to ten minutes, organizers Nancy Buchanan, Laurel Klick and Vicki Schallert

produced an evening with something for everyone. Topics ranged from consumerism to nuclear proliferation, while media included everything from polished sound montages to ritual food exchanges. With such an array of work, detailed descriptions are difficult and generalizations are nearly impossible, but a few highlights were among performances which took up the Thanksgiving food theme and addressed the politics of world food distributions, presenting the always appalling facts of the international agricultural cartel. (Example: Del Monte owns 57,000 acres in Guatemala, but plants only 9000. In the 1930s Vietnam was the largest exporter of rice, while most of its population went hungry.) The Waitresses, a group of feminist performers who've been working in Los Angeles for the past few years, illustrated such facts in two simultaneous monologues by a French restaurant hostess and a soup kitchen worker. A perfectly madeup and coiffed hostess in black fishnet stockings and a red sequined apron described the delicate flavor of the soup du jour while a soup kitchen cook with her soot covered face and red rag apron tried to explain why there was no soup at all for the day. In the background, a blindfolded waitress representing justice tilted her paper plate scales while a camouflage clad

military waitress paraded to marching music in the foreground.

In a similar agit-prop style, Valerie Bechtol and Julie Wallace Keller performed a dialogue between two queens: one a good old queen, the Statue of Liberty and the other a new evil queen, Nancy Reagan. As the evil queen gloated over the fact that 26 hands must labor over each piece of her new Lenox china the good queen lamented the cutback in federal subsidies of public school lunches. The two queens argue until they reach an impasse and a strobe lit nuclear bombardment permanently concludes their discussion, making a graphic if not entirely logical connection between social service cutbacks and military budget increases.

Just before the intermission a participatory performance by the Feminist Art Workers began when a brigade of women entered wielding three foot long forks. Each woman fed the woman next to her and then the group scattered to feed sweet cakes on the lengthy forks to audience members. Postcards were passed out giving the moral of the action in a story: hell is a place where everyone tries in vain to feed themselves with three foot long forks and in heaven no one goes hungry because everyone feeds each other.

### Human Life Amendment

Mother Art's performance, "Not Even If It's You" dealt with a non-nutritional issue of the body — the Human Life Amendment (HLA) which threatens to end abortion rights for all U.S. women and to limit many birth control methods. In a graphic image that summarizes the significance of the HLA a full-bellied silhouette of a pregnant woman is stenciled "government property". Two performers carry in a stretcher bearing the victim of a back alley abortion whose story is recounted on audiotape. Slides provided statistics on the ramifications of the HLA and images of the coat hangers and knitting needles that would be an everyday horror under the HLA. A two-person chorus concluded the piece with a litany: "No legal abortions, not even in cases of rape... No legal abortions, not even if it's your mother... No legal abortions, not even if it's you."

Unlike the billboard and leaflets of **Thanks, but No Thanks** the performances played to a sympathetic audience of fellow artists, activists and community members. Within this context the performances worked less as persuasion than as confirmations of

solidarity, actions affirming a unity of opinion. No one in the overflow crowd would argue with the inequity of Nancy Reagan's china expenditures in the face of school children's lunch portion reductions. But I'm sure there would be intense disagreement if the performance had suggested a French Revolution solution to this let-them-eat-cake attitude. Rather than attempting to motivate action or change opinions, the performances capsulized rather than catharsized the collective outrage that energizes any political struggle.

While the events of **Thanks, but No Thanks** reached a significant range of audiences — from the openly hostile to the sympathetic and supportive — an art event, no matter what its scale, cannot substitute for the fundamental work of community organizing. A socially concerned art work can disseminate information, provide oppositional images and presumably change attitudes and opinions, but the difficult work of organizing a broad based oppositional movement has historically been the task of activists rather than artists. The work of LAPAD, NYPAD and the past ten years of feminist art making has demonstrated that while making art and organizing may be somewhat different activities, they need not be mutually exclusive. Among the most promising outcomes of **Thanks, but No Thanks** were the liaisons made between artists and activist organizations. "Freeway Giveaways" directed readers to the Californians for Bilateral Nuclear Disarmament, billboard space was donated to Midnight Graphics by the Women's Strike for Peace, workers concerned about possible plant closures were directed to two labor groups working on this problem and a performance by Cindy Kahn and Larry Abrahms included a speaker from the Native American Movement. Such connections offer the possibility of artists working even more effectively outside the high art ghetto. **Thanks, but No Thanks** demonstrated the multi-faceted potential of the public art event: its capacity to organize artists, facilitate alliances with activist organizations and reach a wide spectrum of audiences. The result can be a proliferation of the oppositional culture that informs and supports a progressive social movement. □

Micki McGee lives and works in San Diego, California.

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## ABORIGINAL ART

### Ritual and ceremonial life of Australia's aborigines have been eroded but a strong transitional culture thrives.

We thank Andree Paradis and *Vie des arts* for permission to print this essay which they originally had commissioned.

Perhaps nowhere other than in Canada are we more intensely aware of the artistic product of aboriginal peoples; the Inuit experience in the visual arts has long since transcended any sort of limited or specialist domain, and has now become identified both internally and externally with a national image, with a specific Canadian identity and presence. Any real understanding of the phenomenon of Inuit art must, nevertheless, take into account the structure of contradictions that lie at the roots of "transitional" art, that result from both the fact of acculturation and the collision of tribal culture with the corporative state, with what has been defined as "welfare colonialism".<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the wealth of Inuit carvings and graphics has emerged logically within the structures of a planned reaction to a distinct economic nexus: the collapse of the fur-trade and the arctic famines of the nineteen-fifties. But, the economic and aesthetic base of Inuit art developed and consolidated itself under the massive governmental programme of the nineteen-sixties which aimed towards transforming the whole nature of arctic social and economic life as the primary structures of an outdated colonialism gave way to the secondary, and presently existing, colonialism of the corporate state as defined by the socio-economics of multi-national resource extraction.

In many ways, an analogous situation to the Canadian one is presently taking place in Australia. Certainly the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council would seem to have studied the models of the Canadian support structures — and they are building up a distributive and market network that is similar in many ways to the one that emerged in this

country. Of course, the Australian development is very much younger, the Aboriginal Arts board was not founded until 1973, and the support-system still remains almost totally underwritten by the public money of the Australia Council. In this country, on the other hand, the original public funding, together with the distributive structure, has now been, for many years, replaced by the international edifice of the corporate art-market.

Despite parallels, there is, however, one sharp and absolutely fundamental distinction between the Canadian and the Australian phenomena of aboriginal art that should be cleared at the outset, and that is one that lies at the very basis of the tribal experience of material culture. It is extremely difficult, in terms of contemporary Inuit artistic culture, to know to what degree work being produced today actually stems from tribal models.

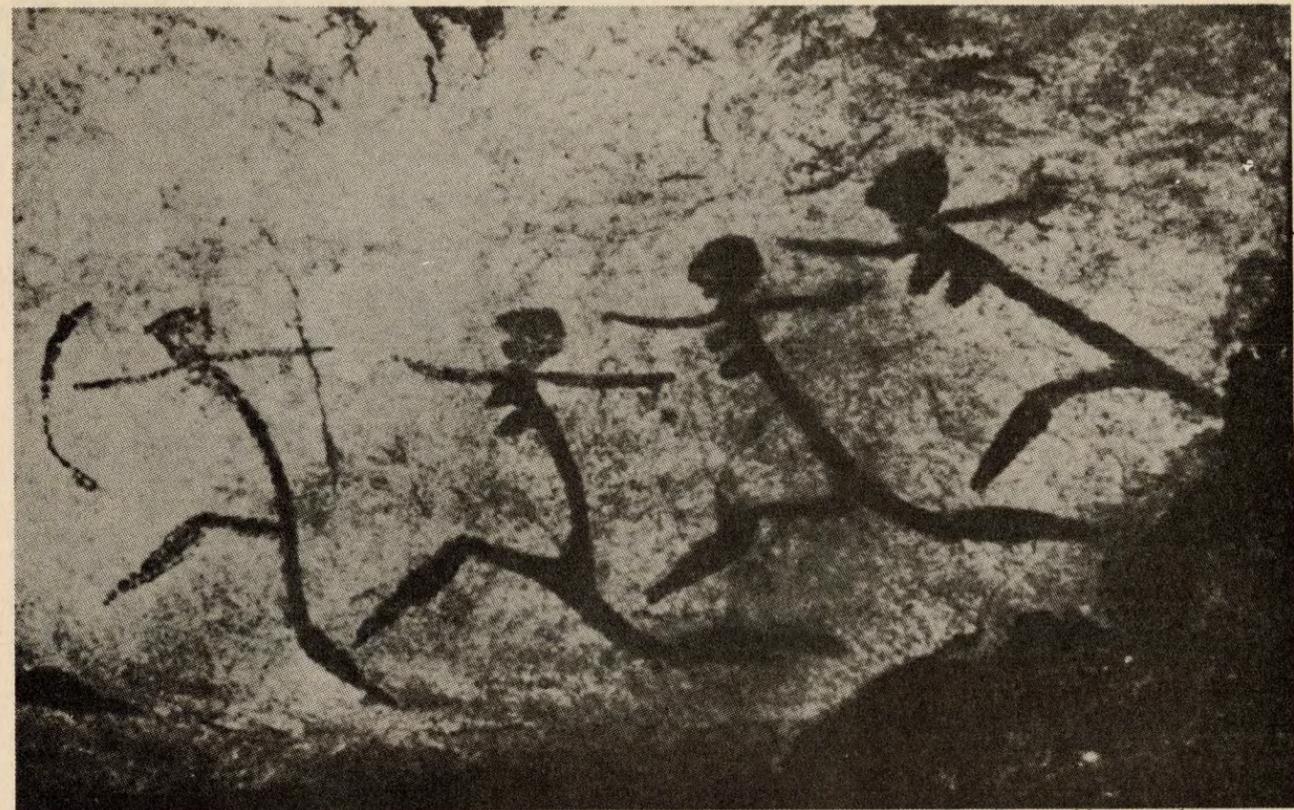
#### Euro-American view of "primitive art"

Without question, a great deal of the imagery extends out from traditional folklore and suppressed shamanistic imagery, but this would seem to represent almost totally the recent visual concretisation of an oral tradition. Apart from shamanistic and totemic objects (by definition, restricted, secret and hidden), together with occasional small carvings designed as toys or teaching devices, there was, in actuality, no pre-contact tradition of material culture of the type we usually define as "tribal art", in that it developed, ever since James Houston's fertilisation of 1949 at Cape Dorset, in the light and understanding of a Euro-American awareness of "primitive art", in an inevitable, though tenuous, relationship with the avant-garde traditions of surrealism, myth and primitivism.

Australian aboriginal art, of course, also became launched on the world's

art-market under the climate of a visual taste dominated by Euro-American notions of the primitive, the existential and the collective unconscious. It is notable that bark-paintings began to appear on the world market during the later nineteen-forties (and, a couple of years later, Picasso was even to write to a tribal artist living in a remote settlement in Eastern Arnhem Land remarking that he "... wished that he could paint like the Australian tribesman"); this is, naturally, quite logical, since patterns of taste and, by extension, the economic structures of the art-market, are undoubtedly defined by the dynamic of the dominant cultural and social structures.

The characteristic that separates Australian Aboriginal art from Inuit, however, lies in a wealth of traditional visual imagery and material culture that extends back in an unbroken line into the extremely remote past. Dr. George Chaloupka, the specialist in rock paintings attached to the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, is persuaded that many of the rock paintings in Arnhem Land are extremely old, certainly many sites have been shown to have been continuously occupied over the enormous period of 20,000 years. I, myself, had the extraordinary experience, when walking round Obiri Rock — a site extremely rich in paintings — to be suddenly confronted by a clear and distinct image of a thylacine, the marsupial Tasmanian Tiger, which most zoologists are convinced became extinct on the mainland some many thousands of years ago. This image has survived in its clarity because the imperatives of ritual demanded a constant repainting of ancient paintings. Today, however, with the erosion of ceremonial life, most of the rock paintings are fast fading in the damp monsoonal climate.



In the past the imperatives of ritual demanded a constant repainting of ancient paintings. This figure of four running women is found at a rock-shelter site near Oenpelli in Arnhem Land.

#### The erosion of ritual

Contemporary Aboriginal artistic production is centered in the remaining scattered pockets of residual tribal life located in two areas: the tropic bush of Arnhem Land and its off-lying islands, and the arid Central Desert. The very core of all this activity, however, is shot through with contradictions. On the one hand, the production of artistic culture is a significant factor in the revitalisation of Aboriginal life conditioned to a great extent by an emerging, and recent, white-liberal rejection of the worst excesses of an earlier racism. On the other hand, the economic imperatives, the "welfare" engagement of cultural support, must inevitably erode the fundamental ritual and ceremonial significance of the imagery, and, thus, eventually erode the social dimensions of that ritual in the community.

The sharpness of these contradictions, of course, could be emphasised by stating the fact that it would only be a romantic (and, fundamentally, racist) anthropologist who would wish to expect to see tribal life frozen in its "natural", that is to say, pre-contact level. But the art-market is another matter; consumer and economic imperatives demand, in their inner

logic, just such an arrest of cultural mobility, demand a "frozen" product, an object of property — "primitive art" — one that can be located, identified and valued within the closed Euro-American spectrum of cultural value.

The Aboriginals from the Central Desert remain, so far, economically and socially remote from the changes that are taking place elsewhere. Nevertheless, as we shall note below, it is in this area that the clearest transitional forms, ones that relate to a considerable degree to Euro-American artistic taste, are presently taking place. In Arnhem Land, artistic production is somewhat more scattered and fragmentary, paralleling as it does, a revival of tribal life, a reaffirmation of Aboriginal identity, and a fragmentation of the old restrictive missions and racist government institutionalised settlements into the "outstation" movement, a concerted attempt to return to bush and ceremonial life. This revival, however, is taking place at the very moment that there is a massive incursion of corporative mining interests into the area which must inevitably destroy in the long run the fragile and vulnerable culture. It is difficult indeed to imagine how long the new-found Aboriginal pride in traditional life can survive the

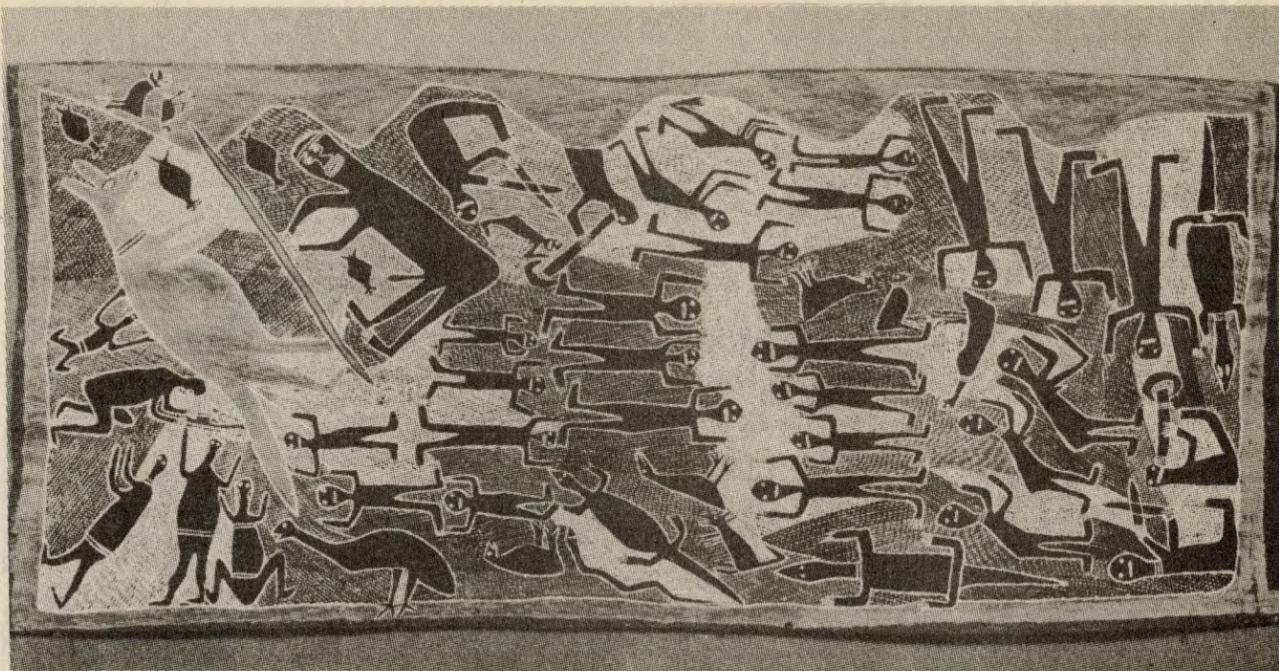
confrontation with the exigencies of the corporate state.

#### Bark-painting

It is, of course, from Arnhem Land that the uniquely familiar image of Aboriginal contemporary art, that of the bark-painting, comes. Quite clearly, the bark-painting, as we now understand it, is a transitional form of art, having developed in the inter-relationship between tribal culture and the engagement with that culture of early anthropologists. It is known that Sir Baldwin Spencer, the first anthropologist to visit Arnhem Land in 1912, commissioned and collected bark-paintings at a place called Oenpelli, that later was to become famous for its artistic production. At that time Oenpelli was a dairy cattle and buffalo hunting station run by Paddy Cahill, the first white settler in the area. Cahill seems to have been a remarkable man, given the widespread white-racist view of aboriginal culture of the time, in his understanding and sympathy for the people and his knowledge of their culture and language.

Certainly Cahill made a large collection of bark-paintings (they are together with the Spencer collection in the National Museum of Victoria in Melbourne), but we do not know to

1. The phrase is Robert Paine's. See his "The Path to Welfare Colonialism", in Robert Paine, Editor, *The White Arctic*, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977.



Ray Morrison

**Mungarawoi Creation-time Ceremony (Bark painting).** This is a Dreaming painting of a ceremony which took place at the artist's birthplace. The red kangaroo is fighting an ancestral hero for possession of a sacred object. Eventually they decided that they would share the sacred object equally.

what degree he did this before Spencer, and to what degree, if at all, he was buying existing barks, or commissioning copies of the imagery of ceremonial rock paintings in the locality. Certainly, we know that A.J. Dyer the Church Missionary Society missionary who succeeded Cahill, and a brief government attempt to manage the Oenpelli settlement, was in the habit of commissioning bark-painting copies of the rock imagery. The bark-paintings of the Cahill collection are powerful, but crude; they are very different from the more condensed forms that possess an aesthetic sense of inner logic that appears to condition the distinct commercial product that appears after the nineteen-forties.

It has been suggested that bark-painting may well have developed with the decoration of the interior surfaces of the wet-season bark huts; but that implies, to me anyway, the notion of a process of aesthetic projection that may well be culturally alien. There is evidence of the existence, at a much earlier date, elsewhere in Australia of ceremonial imagery on bark forming banner-like devices. As early as 1807, the artist who accompanied the French explorers Peyron and Freyanet<sup>2</sup> showed sheets of decorated bark in his sketch of a Tasmanian

2. Daniel Thomas, "Art of Arnhem Land", in *Aboriginal Art of Australia*, Edited by Robert Edwards, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1978, page 37.

burial place — and other early accounts of the island colony also mentioned painting on bark. Fifty years and more later there were reports that barks were still to be seen both in Victoria and New South Wales. Indeed, two Victorian bark-paintings have survived from the 1860s (one is in the British Museum) that come from the Lake Tyrell area in the north western part of the State. They are painted in the style of the rock art of the Grampian mountains, but they are clearly post-contact in their form with images of men with rifles and squatters' homesteads.<sup>3</sup>

### X-ray representation of animals and spirits

The characteristic today of Aboriginal bark-paintings is that unusual x-ray type representation of totemic animals and spirit figures derived from the ceremonial rock paintings. In the great rock galleries of Arnhem Land there are two distinct styles from different historical epochs, and we observe them often one painted over the other. The x-ray form is the more recent, with a history that may well stretch back three or four thousand years. Beyond that is what is known as the Mimi style, a dynamic, energetic linear representation of expressive stick-like

3. D. Mulvaney, *The Prehistory of Australia*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1975, page 252. One of these barks is illustrated as plate 74.

figures shown hunting and fighting. Clearly, on these rock surfaces, two distinct and separate cultures are superimposed. To the present Aboriginal culture, however, the Mimi presence remains real, a comprehensible spirit world that must be adjusted to in one way or another.

With the Aboriginal people, there is, in terms of the production of contemporary bark-paintings, just as there was in ceremonial life, no concept of the artist possessing a distinct social role, (we shall see, though, that this notion does develop on Bathurst and Melville islands to the north of Arnhem Land); rather, the obligations and freedoms to execute specific paintings are defined by the level of the individual's initiation, and by his clan and ceremonial status. Initiation, however, is not a simple process of adolescent entry into full tribal awareness, but a life-long process of the constant absorption of ritual complexity, myth and clan history. Even with the bark-painting, despite its essentially economic contemporary imperatives, the individual artist is restricted to a totemic and spiritual material to which he, himself, possesses access.

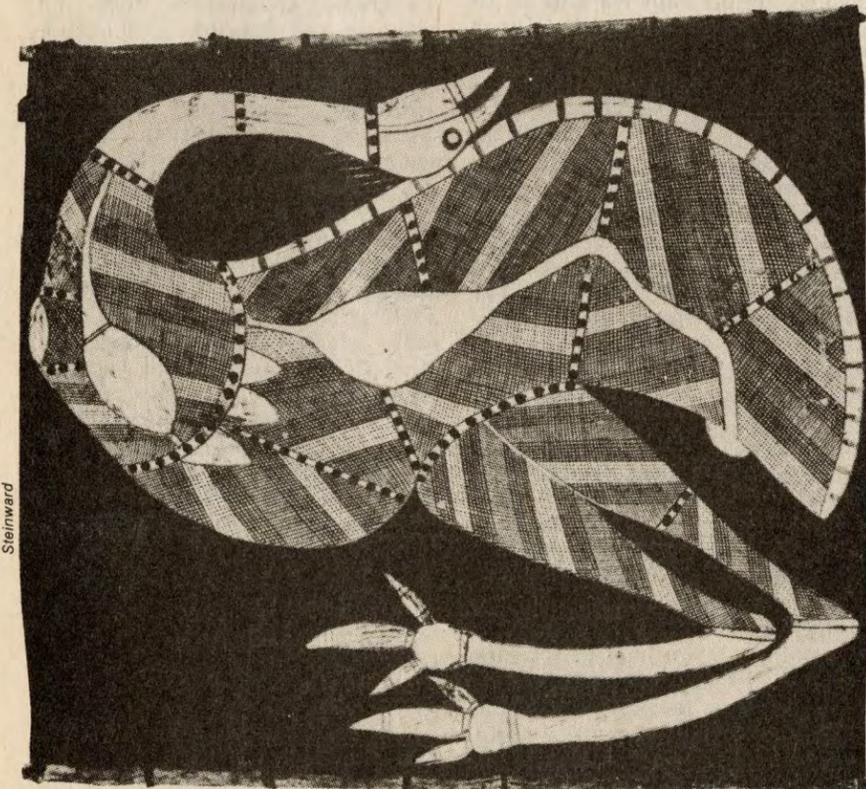
### Dreamtime

The Aboriginal Dreamtime, that legendary cosmological space when the world was first created and

structured, yet, which at the same time is not locked in a totalised past but exists outside of time and is penetrable to the individual initiate, defines, of course, the form and limits of an artist's personal Dreaming. And this is not simply restricted to a question of imagery that an Aboriginal artist might use, but, at a deeper level, defines his very existence and identity. Across Arnhem Land, one can observe clear differences in style in different locations. The most dramatic image of the defined and isolated x-ray representation of totemic animals and spirit figures comes from the West-Center area, notably from Oenpelli and Maningrida and their outstations. While, to the East, around Yirkalla, a more overall, dense, crowded and narrative style has developed. Offshore, a distinct and different style has emerged; on Groote Eylandt, the barks define simple figures and abstract designs that have developed from ceremonial body painting. A similar form of abstract imagery has also become typical of Bathurst and Melville Islands.

The large islands, separated from the mainland by some 25 miles of seas too severe for frail aboriginal canoes, have produced a distinct culture, the Tiwi, resulting from the interaction over many years of contact with

Indonesian Macassar trepang fisherman who have been making annual visits to the islands from the 16th Century until well into the period of white contact. For the Tiwi, bark-painting is not an important factor at all, indeed, it has probably emerged only very recently under a planned arts and crafts programme. The major factor of material culture for the Tiwi people has been the Pukamani ceremony, an elaborate burial ritual at which, on the death of an important individual, carved and decorated burial poles are commissioned and erected. Here we have the obvious notion of an individual as a distinct "professional" artisan-producer, for a big ceremony will result in the commissioning of many poles from many different carvers, some of whom will travel considerable distances for their work. Bathurst Island now is a Catholic settlement, one of the oldest missions, and the ceremonies and the rituals have been long since banned. The last illegal Pukamani took place more than thirty years ago, and I was privileged to be taken by an old man who was present to see the eroding poles deep in the bush. On Melville Island, away from the settlement and the Church's influence, there has been, however, a recent revival of the ceremonial.



Steinward

**Benuk, the bush turkey, bark painting in the X-ray style by Y. Marruwarr.**

At Maningrida, the main settlement of the West Center of Arnhem Land, there is an arts and crafts center that collects and distributes the bark-paintings and other handicrafts from the more remote settlements and outstations. The center at Bathurst, however, is of a different type altogether; it is one designed to operate within a distinct welfare-orientated economic structure, and it seems to have had a clear effect on the local artistic production. This, of course, is logically dependant on the very nature of the administrative structure of a Catholic Mission Settlement, which incidentally, has only since the more liberal regulations enforced in 1974 by the short-lived Whitlam Labour Government begun to emerge from an extremely oppressive and institutionalised structure.

### The Pukamani poles

The clearest indicator of the complexity of transitional forms is the nature of the Pukamani poles, defined by Christian imagery, clustered around the church and the schools, not to mention the interior decoration of the church itself. It is on the plane of artistic production for external consumption, however, that the most dramatic evidence may be noted. The traditional Pukamani pole was usually abstract, decorated with elaborate and significant designs related both to totemic ancestors and to schematic representations of Dreamtime events. Occasionally, however, they were topped by carvings in the round of animals and figures.

At an earlier stage of commercial artistic production, only a few years ago, many such figures were carved separate from the poles, isolated and free-standing, and they possessed great power and persuasiveness. Unfortunately, at the time of my visit, last year, there seemed to be clear evidence of the fragility of that brief moment of transitional culture, since the carvings being done at that time were crude and vulgar, not comparable at all with the work that I had previously seen in the galleries and collections of urban Australia.

The main efforts of the Bathurst programme would seem to have devolved from an art to a convinced handicraft level with the elaboration of a silk-screen fabric printing-shop designed to supply a small dress and textile factory managed by the nuns of the community. A further somewhat bizarre programme of pottery

production has also been introduced, but this programme is one that, to my mind, demonstrates an example of deliberate Euro-centric cultural colonialism. It seems that Michael Cardew, an English potter, trained himself in the traditions of Bernard Leach's unique amalgam of Japanese *raiku* and English peasant forms, was sent by both government and church authorities to Bathurst Island to train and establish a pottery production programme. The result now is the odd appearance in Aboriginal craft shops and exhibitions of a completely debased form of St. Ives-type jugs, cups, plates and saucers, a simple and aesthetically unsatisfactory commercial product claiming the sanction of "aboriginal production". One wonders what might have happened with a more imaginative craft advisor who had suggested the production of *ceramic sculpture*, rather than craft pottery, variations on the existing traditions of ironwood carving in the round.

### Tribal life of the Central Desert

The third, and doubtless at the present moment, the most active and interesting center of Aboriginal transition art, is that of the Central Desert. Without question, it is in this area that the most intact tribal and ceremonial life remains. Indeed, it is only in the very recent past that certain bands have engaged into contact. The geographical remoteness, and the, so far, non-appearance of the multinational resource extraction industries, underwritten by strict travel limitations aimed at excluding tourists, may well protect this situation for some small time.

The material culture of ceremonial life in these regions was not structured, for obvious geological reasons, into a tradition of rock painting, but centered around elaborate ritual sand-paintings. The ceremonial forms have only recently come to the notice of anthropologists, and quickly afterwards to the attention of one Geoff Bardon, an artist, who launched himself on a sort of Houston-type role in 1971. The elaborate designs using coloured sands, ochres, twigs, seeds, feathers, human hair, comprise abstracted imagery covering large areas of ground. The iconography takes the form of schematic maps, indications of land with tracks and locations that record specific Dreamtime events. Because of the integrity of tribal life remaining most

complete in the Central Desert, these ceremonials have, of course, remained veiled to the non-initiate, especially to the white man.

Geoff Bardon, however, with a more sophisticated response than that of government and mission-appointed arts and crafts officers, saw both the wider artistic and the different economic potential for the transposition of this form into the international art-market. He quickly persuaded individual Aboriginals in the remote central settlements, specifically in Papunya and Yuendumu, to translate this imagery onto large masonite boards and canvasses with acrylic paint. With a careful desecralising of the imagery through changes and omissions of content and suitable ritual, large, complex, overall, brilliant and "abstract" paintings began to appear on the Sydney art-market. The interesting thing about the paintings is that they do not appeal to the Euro-American notions of "the primitive", as do, for instance, the best Tiwi carvings (and, of course, as do to a more obvious and extreme degree, New Guinea carving); rather, they appear to lock into the traditions and the aesthetics of both late-minimal and post-modernist art. It is not surprising that this form has had a great success, and elegant Sydney galleries now quickly ship off Papunya-Tula art to European and United States museums.

### Ceremonial maps

The centrality of the notion of imagery as ceremonial map is quite widespread across Australia, and must have been important in the areas in which Aboriginal culture has long since been totally destroyed. Even in a region of marginal settlement, in the Kimberly cattle-station country, some 1500 miles from the Central Desert, I had the unique experience of being shown some ritual paintings of an open and non-sacred nature that were structured in the form of such maps. This Dreaming, located at a reserve called Turkey Creek, was particularly interesting in that it demonstrated how a still-living ritual tradition was responding to contemporary events, for the ceremonial and the pictorial maps painted on medium-sized scraps of board, detail how the archetypal Rainbow Snake ravaged through the country causing floods and destruction because of some violation of ritual and taboo. The main character in the ceremonial dance is a young woman who was drowned in

her car in a nearby river (the sister of the Dreamer of this ceremonial) in the floods that spread out from the violent typhoon that ravaged the city of Darwin.

I was shown these artifacts, stored in a tin trunk, including the Rainbow Snake itself, some twelve feet long and made of stuffed and knitted cloth, by both the Dreamer and the "artist" that he had commissioned to make the paintings. Some days later, driving in a truck with a group of Aboriginal people, various geological features and rocky outcrops were pointed out to me that had been clearly indicated on the ritual panels.

Papunya painting, to my mind, is unique, or at least extremely special, in terms of its status as an authentic transitional art form that links traditional culture with the artistic culture of the dominant society. There exists, of course, as I have already indicated, a structure of contradictions that one would expect to eventually erode the integrity of ceremonial and ritual life. But "art" is not unique to this, it comprises merely another factor (certainly a liberal and not a repressive one) in the ongoing process of colonisation that is embedded into the Australian state.

Cultural colonialism does not massacre and imprison and institutionalise a subservient people, but, more gently, it absorbs the values of a peripheral culture into the larger system of the dominant one. Ranged against this, however, are other factors that are central to the present revival of Aboriginal life and culture on a public level which is part of a wide black movement of developing identity and demands for land and political power. Quite clearly, for a people who have been long considered officially sub-human, to be suddenly doing something that elicits broad respect, that gains the admiration, not merely of a spectrum of the white liberal middle-class, but also gains the respect and imprimatur of that classes' cultural institutions, the Museums and the artistic support-structure, is evidence itself of a renaissance in Aboriginal identity whose thrust will no longer tolerate the racist assumptions that yet remain buried in the white Australian mind. □

The above essay was the last piece that Kenneth Coutts-Smith wrote before his untimely death in September 1981.

## ART IN THE WORKPLACE Australia's Council of Trade Unions is encouraging artists and working people to interact with seminars and projects.

The Victoria Trades Hall in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, is a large, imposing building whose grey granite dominates a strategic corner not far from the city centre. It houses offices for many of the city's craft unions, and for the state's Trades and Labour Council Arts Officer. Around the corner, the Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA) runs technical classes, seminars, and a library. In these two buildings, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) held a two day seminar (it lacked the legal status of a conference) in October of this year entitled "Art and Working Life", which was the first attempt to bring together the growing number of community artists, art officials and trade union officials active in trade union cultural activities.

Our first encounter upon entering the front door of the Trades Hall was a sign pointing to the building's Art Gallery, a few feet down the hall on the main floor. This might have startled even more a new visitor from Canada, unaccustomed to such conspicuous involvement with the arts within the ongoing structure of labour, had we not been forewarned of this by the anticipated event. The gallery held two shows organized for this occasion: a display of prize-winning samples of woodwork, engineering and design by students from a nearby technical school shared the two rooms with a collection of recent posters organized under the title "Art of the Industrial Artisan: International Poster Exhibition". Contributions from the Redback Graffiti group were among those illustrating the work of seminar participants.

Evidence that the Australian union movement is beginning to promote activities that move beyond traditional concerns for economic and organizational defense was verified by the conference's Chairperson, Ken Stone, a Trades Council officer, in his opening remarks. Speaking to a gathering of 175 people from across Australia, Stone emphasized the ACTU's rejection of traditional limits and concerns. The belief that personal

expression, communication, and creativity should no longer be "the exclusive prerogative of a privileged elite" had led to the conclusion that it was the responsibility of the trade union movement to introduce these to the workplace and to the lives of working people. The purpose of the conference was to encourage and continue the interaction and cross-fertilization between artists and workers which has experienced a new revival in the last half of the '70s.

### Art in a community setting

The audience's obvious agreement with these aspirations marked both the basis and the limits of the agreement of their own concerns. Over the two days one could begin to gather a sense of the diverse priorities of the various groups represented, as people discussed their experiences and principles in speeches, workshops, plenary discussion, and extensive negotiation over the recommendations passed at the conclusion of the seminar to be presented to the ACTU executive. To communicate the sense of the event to Canadian readers, it's important to describe the participants themselves and the concerns they brought to this gathering.

Making up, at least in numbers, for the small number of ordinary workers was a large proportion of community arts officers, whose prominence in the Australian cultural scene is also illustrated by the existence of a separate board in the Australia Council (otherwise structured much like the Canada Council, which we heard more than once mentioned as a positive model for arts funding!) for funding of community arts projects. Community arts officers are sponsored by the Community Arts Board (C.A.B.) to organize art projects in a community setting, either in the form of art *works* or in the form of organizational work with alternative or community cultural institutions. The C.A.B. prepared a "discussion paper" on art and working

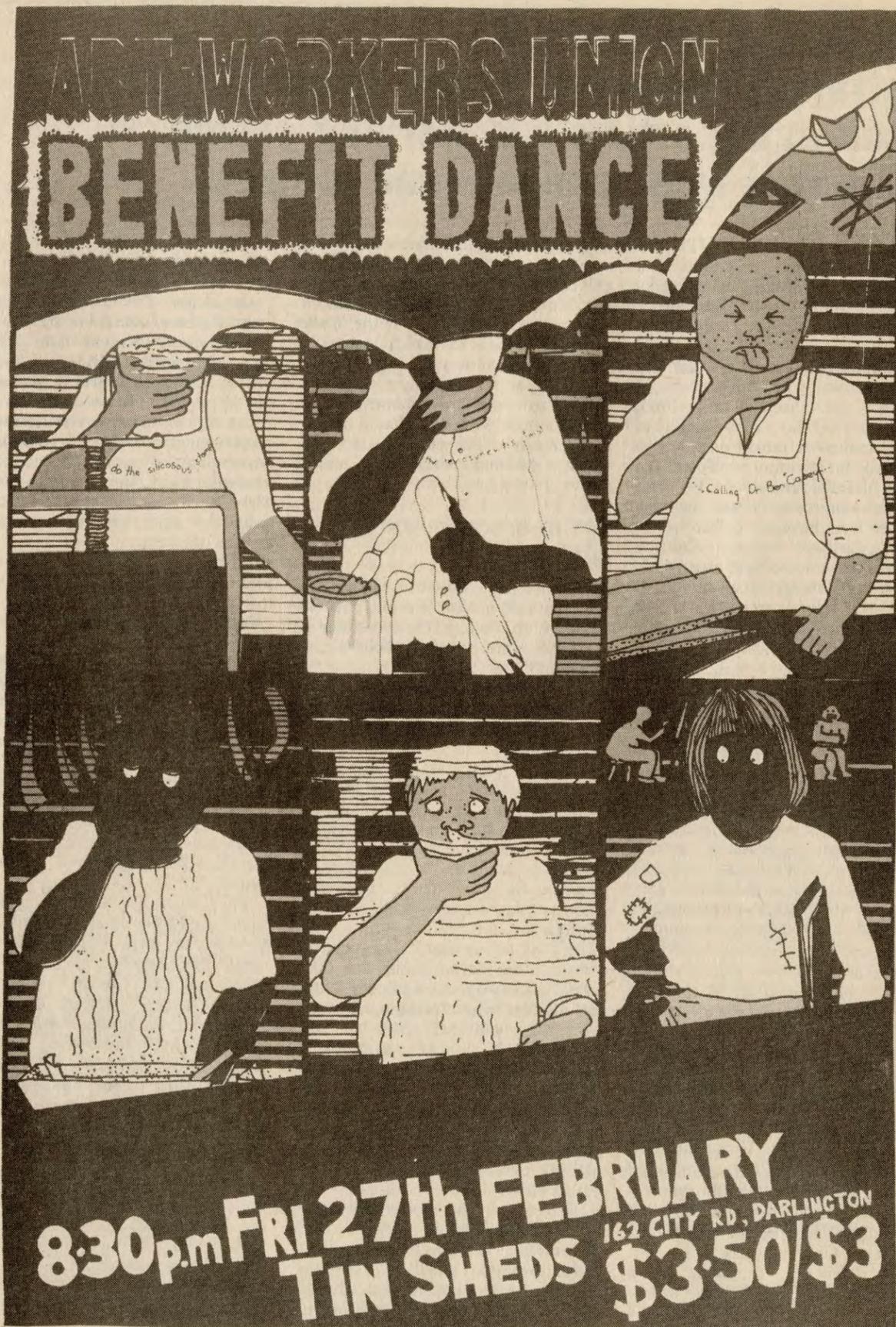
life for this seminar, which at first glance reads like a manifesto for democratic workers' culture. It distinguishes "democratic culture" (conceived and controlled by workers, and relevant to their experiences) from the "democratization of culture" (which aims to transform heretofore underprivileged workers into consumers of high art), stating its clear commitment to the former option with clear relations to work, immigration, unemployment, women, and so forth. The C.A.B. continues with reference to another issue clearly on some minds at the conference:

- Implicit in many programs offering the arts to a wider audience is the assumption that an active and creative leisure can make up for a monotonous, unhealthy and dangerous job. However, many workers cannot find compensation for the problems of the working day in this way, and this should not be an aim of the arts and working life program.
- The right to work and the need for a better safer working environment, meaningful work and industrial democracy are some of the crucial *pre-conditions* for a successful arts and working life program . . . (emphasis added).

The C.A.B.'s commitment to developing a creative workplace (they don't use the term "working class" but rather "working people" or "people other than the educated upper and middle classes") culture critical of existing media and cultural institutions looks impressive, offering serious stands on most of the issues raised during the seminar itself.

### But does funding diffuse dissent?

The C.A.B.'s principles for discussion must have seemed much in tune with the concerns of union members. But why should decent working conditions be simply a "pre-condition" and not also, for instance, a *goal* of workers' cultural efforts? The C.A.B. paper, like others distributed in the package, was not directly discussed during the



seminar. This was unfortunate as it prevented more probing discussions of where, in terms of social or artistic principles, artists and organizers might actually fit in the divine scheme of this influential organization.

Another implicit but significant issue introduced by the presence of this group was the relationship between state funding and union sponsorship. The occupational enthusiasm of community arts officers for democratic culture and access to arts resources has undoubtedly provided an important stimulus to the recent surge of community-oriented arts programs. For some commentators however, this structure suggests possible political limitations when it comes to actual cultural strategies. As Ian Burn argues in his report of the seminar, the tendency of community arts officers has been to diffuse dissent in working class communities, where unemployment, insecurity and social problems could easily find expression in more volatile forms than the work they have helped to produce. He attributes to a similar kind of deflection the tendency at the seminar to emphasize administrative requests for more funds, more projects, more representation, more communication between groups. This suggests an inevitable schism between principles and practice for those indebted to government support, though it's not clear whether the transfer of funding to unions or other groups (which would make the Australia Council, at least, quite happy) would automatically alter the process since the commitment to democratic "representation" is such a deep one.

Also among seminar delegates were a number of artists (or "art workers", a term intended to recognize communicative and organizational as well as artistic skills) engaged in current work with trade unions, or hopeful for the development of new projects to provide a source of income and a new social context for their work in a period of declining state funding of the arts and general disillusionment with traditional art institutions and practices. Those already so engaged included the Redback Graffiti poster collective from Wollongong, which works as "artist-in-residence" to the South Coast Labor Council with funding primarily from the Council and other government groups; the Workers' Cultural Action Committee from Newcastle; and other artists from Sydney working with union media, including several who had been members of the Art & Language

Group and The Fox in New York. Others active in theatre and the visual arts also spoke of their work in non-union community contexts, and articulated some of the motives, potentials, and conflicts involved in making art in such settings.

An important part of the conference was the presence of arts officers from several of the state Labour Councils; this is a relatively new position but clearly important for the further development of art projects designed in or for the workplace. The ACTU itself has hired an Arts Officer, Jean McLean, whose duties included the organization of this seminar. The poster advertising the event counselled its readers to "contact your local arts officer or Jean McLean of the ACTU for further information", an excellent strategy for informing union members of her presence, and of the presence (or more likely absence and therefore possible presence) of such officers within their own unions, and thus for encouraging workers to think about potential cultural activities within their own organizations. So far I believe three states and only one union have such arts officers; one of the goals agreed upon by the seminar was to encourage more Councils and unions to include this position in their organization.

### Artworkers' Union

A number of representatives from the Artworkers' Union introduced the material problems of adequate recognition and compensation of artistic production as work. Throughout the conference they reminded participants that the desire to contribute skills to the worthy causes of union and social struggles has contributed to the situation in which artists continue to be drastically underpaid, by unions as much as by other employers. Members of this association, which, not being an officially certified union, is not part of the ACTU, hoped to win new policy and support from the union movement for its work, in addition to discussing artistic work for unions and community groups. Photographer Helen Grace of the Artworkers' Union commented in the special seminar issue of the Community Artworkers' journal on the impact of the lack of proper recognition of work skills on such production:

"This difficulty (of obtaining good photographs for union media) can be understood in terms of the widespread deskilling of work which is a feature of the introduction of technology in many areas. Within the union

movement itself there is what might be called an attitude of 'de-skilling' towards cultural work. It is assumed, for example, that anybody can take pictures . . . Not only is the work not regarded as skilled, it is not even regarded as work-in-its-own-right! . . . Until photography is regarded as work, requiring certain skills which are only acquired through constant practice it is unlikely that the union movement will obtain the sorts of images which are of most use to it."

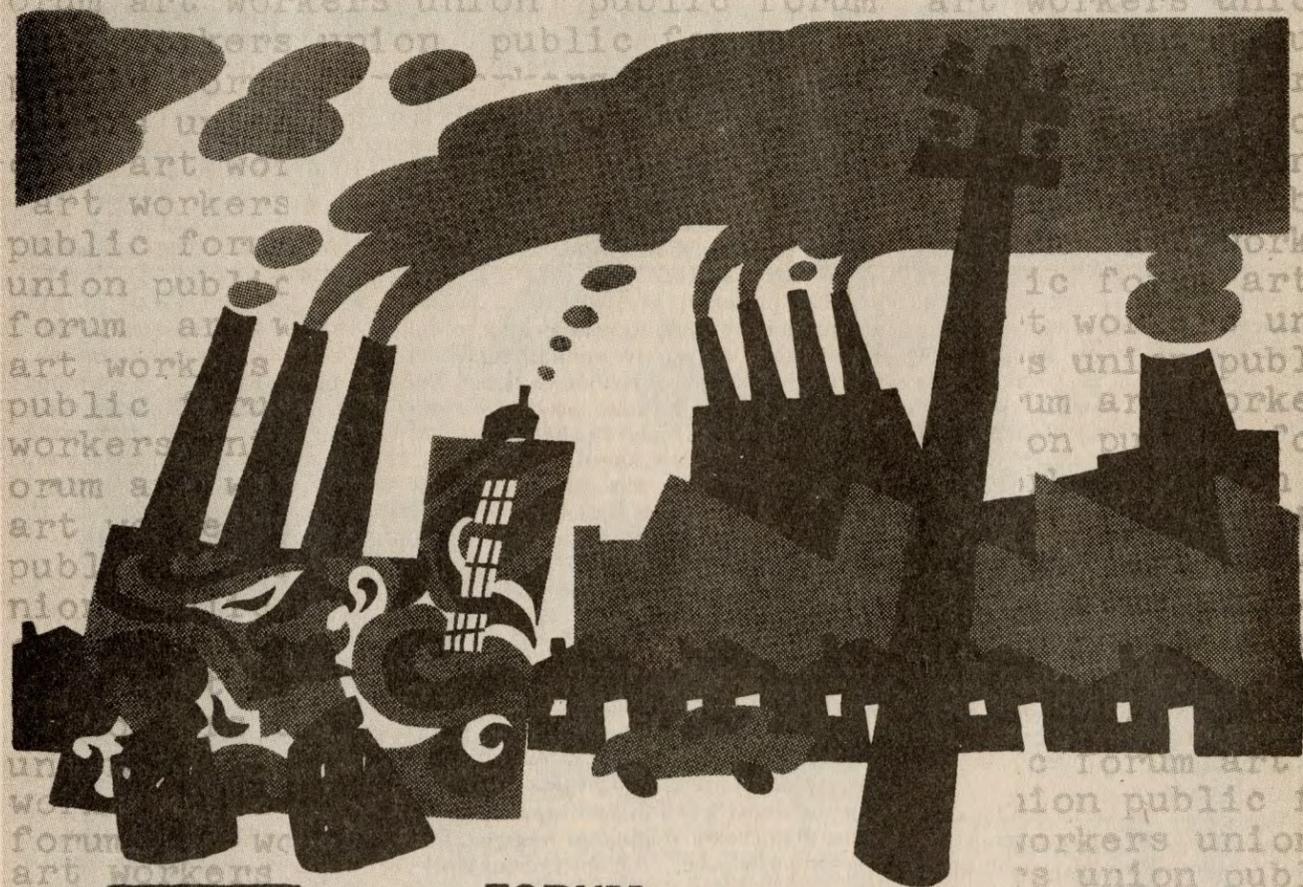
The pressure on the union movement created some confusion about the mandate of the seminar, which confessed to its lack of preparation by tabling the issue of support for further research. The Artworkers Union's exposure of the problem of deeply imbedded assumptions about the availability of committed artists as cheap resources of talent and skill (whose assumed enjoyment of work justifies economic exploitation) seemed to have been an unexpected contribution to the general discussion, but this was certainly an important issue both for the artists concerned and for the shared goal of the seminar to challenge historically and conceptually the fragmentation of labour, creativity, and art.

### Technological change and the new leisure

Several conference speakers were members of the Amalgamated Metalworkers and Shipwrights Union (AMSWU), reflecting the important role assumed by this union in the promotion of workers' awareness and activism in approaching the dynamics of technological change, quality of work, and the changing relationship of work and leisure. These issues and their political implications were introduced in the first talk of the seminar's agenda quite articulately by Max Ogden from the AMSWU. Ogden was the first of many to introduce the prospect of more leisure time for workers as a consequence of the current struggle in Australia (led, not surprisingly, by the AMSWU) for a shorter working week. Others of a more optimistic bent approached this prospect precisely as he warned against: as more "free time" to be filled by culture, as new vistas for a kind of social-work-of-expressive-rights, thus leaving the original problem of the capitalist division of labour, and of labour and creativity, intact.

Ogden's concern with the impact of new technology on the actual work process was important in introducing the elimination of creativity from

# WHO GETS THE MOST OUT OF COMMUNITY ARTS?



**3 FORUM**  
**THURS. 26th JUNE 8pm**  
**TRADE UNION CLUB**  
**111 Foveaux St. Surry Hills**  
**Bronwyn Barwell: Chair**  
**Tom Zubrycki: Video/Film Maker**  
**David Humphries: Community Muralist**  
**Vivienne Binns: Blacktown Artist-in-Community 1980**

poster by Art Workers Union

labour for the vast majority of workers; it raises a critical problem in how to oppose such oppression without simply opposing technology. For Ogden, introducing creativity by providing pastimes for the hours after work is clearly not a solution, and there seemed to be general agreement at least in principle with this stance.

But before reviewing further the actual subjects and controversies, let us conclude this annotated roll call by mentioning several groups *not* present (at least in terms of significant numbers or participation) at this gathering. These included, as mentioned, rank and file workers; their numbers were small enough to invite concerned or sarcastic comment particularly from purists challenging the intentions of everyone else. The goal of organizing popular worker participation in cultural activities was

of course prominent, and it seemed obvious enough that the seminar was intended to address, not replace, strategies for increasing such participation. There were no visible representatives of the many ethnic communities which form a large portion of the labour force, except in a play; and there were no Aborigines. This seemed odd at first given the currently popular engagement with Aboriginal culture and politics among many artists. But it is not surprising in light of the isolation of Aboriginal people from industrial production, grounds for both political and sentimental interest on the part of progressive white artists. (A recent Adelaide film about Aboriginal rock bands, *Wrong Side of the Road*, is an important example of this.) There were no organized left interventions presenting party programs or

principles, surprising for a Canadian viewer, though no doubt fortunate given the delicacy of this stage of collaboration; and few academics to offer more theoretically developed perspectives on the economic, historical, or artistic developments in working class cultural life, or on the current contexts and constraints within which new strategies could be discussed. Such perspectives were introduced to the degree that unions such as the AMSWU had conducted their own research on new technology, for instance, or simply in discussions about art and social consciousness, and the implications of recent practical experience.

**Distrust of mass media, dislike of technology**  
 Finally, there was not much participa-

## ARTISTS AGAINST URANIUM

The South Australia Artworkers Union has organized a travelling exhibition from Artists Against Uranium which first opened simultaneously at the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide (S. Aust.) and on Parliament House lawns in Canberra (national capitol), in July of this year. Since that time the exhibition has toured to a number of places across Australia, acting as a kind of travelling petition by gathering new entries from artists as it travels. New works which are added become part of each of the separate shows, which now number three or more, so that all remain identical.

This mobile and accessible format is made possible by the form of the works exhibited. Each submitted work is sent to the show's organizers in the form of a 35mm colour slide; from these slides, colour photocopies are produced and placed in plastic pockets, which can be easily displayed. This process allows the representation of works in any medium: painting, collage, printmaking, photography, drawing, sculpture, performance and writing are all included in the collection. Each show now contains over 200 works but can still be packed into a small box for convenient transport.

For the organizers, the importance of this show rests not only in its collective "content" as a group of strong images of protest against the political insanity and physical destructiveness of nuclear weaponry. The show is also important in its use of colour xerox techniques, only recently available in Australia, to create a radically new means of reproducing and disseminating art. The development of new technology makes it possible to collect and show works attacking the effects of technology in another sphere: war. Part of the impact of the show is its silent statement on the destructive motives and potential uses for developing technology, which adopts the forms responsible for the visually "immediate" impact of magazine advertising for quite different purposes. As one of the exhibit's organizers, David Kerr from the

Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide, points out, this aspect of the show makes it possible to illustrate how new technology is nurtured and guarded in order to maintain positions of profit and power, while suggesting at the same time that subsequent adaptations of technological innovations make it possible to attack precisely those positions.

The production of such images as political and visual gestures has won admiring speculation from local critics. "Theoretically," mused one in the local newspaper, "you could have simultaneous exhibitions in every city in the world. Ah! The wonders of modern science!" This critic adds rightly that the exhibition's effect is chilling and powerful. **Artists Against Uranium** was shown recently in a small community centre in Prospect, just north of Adelaide; the standardization of format and size created by the reproductive process in fact works very effectively, balancing the dissimilar forms and juxtaposing certain recurring images of mushroom clouds, distorted babies, huddled families — with a wide variety of forms, from didactic messages to more complex or abstract images.

Copies of any work are available to viewers for \$5.00; or they can decide to produce or contribute their own work to the collection for subsequent exhibits.

These shows (there is one also in slide form) have been shown in galleries, community centres, schools, technical colleges and universities (in one instance co-sponsored by the Campaign Against Nuclear Energy and the AMWSU), and other venues throughout Australia. As the critic propheticized earlier, organizers also plan an overseas trip for the collection so that it can carry the issue of nuclear weaponry to other countries and at the same time transform the collection into an international exhibition, concentrating the opposition in work by artists from many countries.

Canadian (or American) readers who might be interested in sponsoring this Exhibition, who could provide a venue, or help to organize it, or who would like more information, are asked to write:

Artists Against Uranium  
 P.O. Box 308  
 North Adelaide  
 South Australia 5006  
 Australia



Helen Grace

**Ted Cenatevko, Amalgamated Metalworkers and Shipwrights Union, speaks from the audience at ACTU seminar.**

tion, either in representation or in topics of discussion, of work with technological or mass media. An important exception were representatives of at least one of the successful — if poor — and excellent community radio stations in Australia. Judging from exposure to those in Melbourne and Adelaide, these stations are outstanding resources for new (popular) music, cultural and political journalism, and community review, which deserve more attention than possible here and than was apparent at the seminar. Though there is a growing involvement with community radio by parts of the union movement, the relationship is still an unclear and uneasy one; perhaps due to the distrust of the economically and politically monopolized mass media by the labour movement, which was the subject of a recent ACTU conference on media. But the dislike for new technology seems more general; the artists present showed a surprising lack of interest in new media, their susceptibility to Luddite antipathy leading them towards murals and live theatre rather than towards radio, video, or other media. This seems a surprising limitation of interest, not only to a viewer with "Canadian experience" (where interest in new media can just as easily suppress other concerns) but also for residents of a country in which video-discs are shown daily on TV, and where cassette-magazines and cheaply produced singles are part of the popular (alternative) musical culture. This limitation undoubtedly also has

external cause in the ferocious control of mass media by its few owners.

### Continuing commitment to social realism

Much of the discussion in the seminar addressed the imperative that art be more relevant to workers, tending to steer away from debate about artistic strategies or assumptions. The exploration of aesthetic-political ideas was of course not the purpose of this occasion, which emphasized practical goals. But what is "socially useful" for workers in art? For some, being able to catalyse expression and artistic involvement seemed an adequate goal; for others, such expression needed to reproduce images of real experience and conflict of workers on the job. Others objected to any limiting definitions and argued that workers should be exposed to *all* types of art. The process of informative representation and the didactic ends of the work seemed to be in most cases too readily identified, suggesting a strong commitment to social realism as a continuation of earlier traditions in Australian labour history.

The ACTU seminar had no trouble agreeing that the ACTU should actively seek more representation within cultural funding authorities. An implicit political difference emerged however with the majority's refusal to recommend that it seek a "greater proportion of funds" for arts programs through the labour union, preferring the less controversial

request for "an additional amount". For the rest, the delegates' proposals included calling for more workplace art facilities, the allocation of more union and government funds for cultural activities, the inclusion of courses on media control and culture in TUTA training programs, more union claims to employers for art facilities and funds, closer links between arts councils, community arts officers, art workers, and union arts officers; more contact between art workers and shop stewards, and more support for cultural and community workers from ACTU Councils. A more extensive proposal relating to the Artworkers Union was referred to a committee for further research before recommending policy to the ACTU executive.

Officially the next step in the development of this cultural movement is in the hands of the ACTU executive, who will receive the seminar's recommendations and consider them in relation to its own actions and priorities. Of course the discussions and the various publications, performances, and meetings which were part of the seminar will also encourage those present in their attempts to formulate new ways to make art more relevant and popularly accessible. □

Jody Berland is currently travelling through Australia. She is a former editor of *Mayday*. She last wrote "Being Where?", in *FUSE*, Vol. 4, #5, July/August.

## CANADIAN FARMWORKERS UNION

### The effects of an automated agribusiness on workers' lives are often hidden.

The following material, photos, and statements are taken from interviews and photo documentation taken on several farms this summer, as well as interviews done in Toronto and Montreal, in the fall. There is no correspondence intended or otherwise, between those people depicted in the photographs and the statements accompanying them, or the opinions expressed in the article.

Popular imagination is encouraged to perceive the ups and downs of agricul-

tural production as the battle of the small family farm against both the ravages of inflation and the weather; while the all-too-infrequent revelations of retailer rip-off — supermarkets pocketing an 85 per cent mark-up — seems to explain why we pay more and more for the necessities of life. Although most people are now aware of the nefarious activities of the energy, communications, and manufacturing conglomerates, the agricultural multi-nationals remain hidden in the shadows of corporate legend. Yet

five corporations control the world's grain trade, three control the world's tobacco, and the food processors and distributors aren't far behind. Hidden, too, is the immense workforce that brings in the crops these corporations trade in. In fact, the family farm (whether a quaint third-world peasant, or Old MacDonald himself) is a rapidly deteriorating entity obscuring the reality of agricultural industrialization and monopolization.

Ignorance of the reality of agricultural production serves many



Photos: Beveridge and Conde

Usually the table gangs are local women. There's not a lot of work for girls in the area. Macdonalds pays minimum wage. There's tomatoes and cucumbers, but that's worse. It's normal that women on the table get less, even though the work's just as hard. I work from planting in early May right through to stripping in December. Then it's unemployment for four months. There's no choice, no other work.



**The farmer's real nice, but it's there, you know, racism. We let him think we don't see he's pulling things on us, like putting extra leaves on the stick. Not a kiln and a half, but extra. But you keep quiet about it. We keep things cool. Like he's got our family history. He knows if you've done anything bad, like police records. The Government gives it to him.**

**You go to the farm labour pool to find a job. I was in there and a English person from Elliot Lake asks if there is a job. The man says "You speak English, good. We can get you a job right away!"**

**... Well, let's say you go to take a coffee, and mostly it's full. You are served like you are an animal. The English people they stay and sit after the coffee is finished. A Quebecois, please, the door.**



interests, not the least of which is the exploitative conditions of agricultural labour. In the advanced industrial states such as Canada it is a form of labour directly dependent on the conditions of structural unemployment and its resulting social migration.

In the early 1970s there was a crisis in the supply of agricultural labour in Ontario due to the relatively high level of employment carried over from the economic 'boom' of the 1960s. Headlines decried the fact that "Canadians did not want to work", a concept that still carries residual currency today. Initially directed at farm labour, it also fueled an attack on the 'welfare state', and more insidiously on unemployed youth, especially the French Canadian 'hippie' — the main source of cheap farm labour. Of course it was seldom mentioned that the work those upright Canadians advocated for their aliena-

ted youth averaged a ten to twelve hour day, a seven day work week at minimum wage or less, substandard housing, hazardous and sub-human working conditions — in short, contract labour under near-feudal conditions. The crisis was temporarily averted by the introduction of offshore labour from the Caribbean.

### **Farmworkers excluded from protective laws**

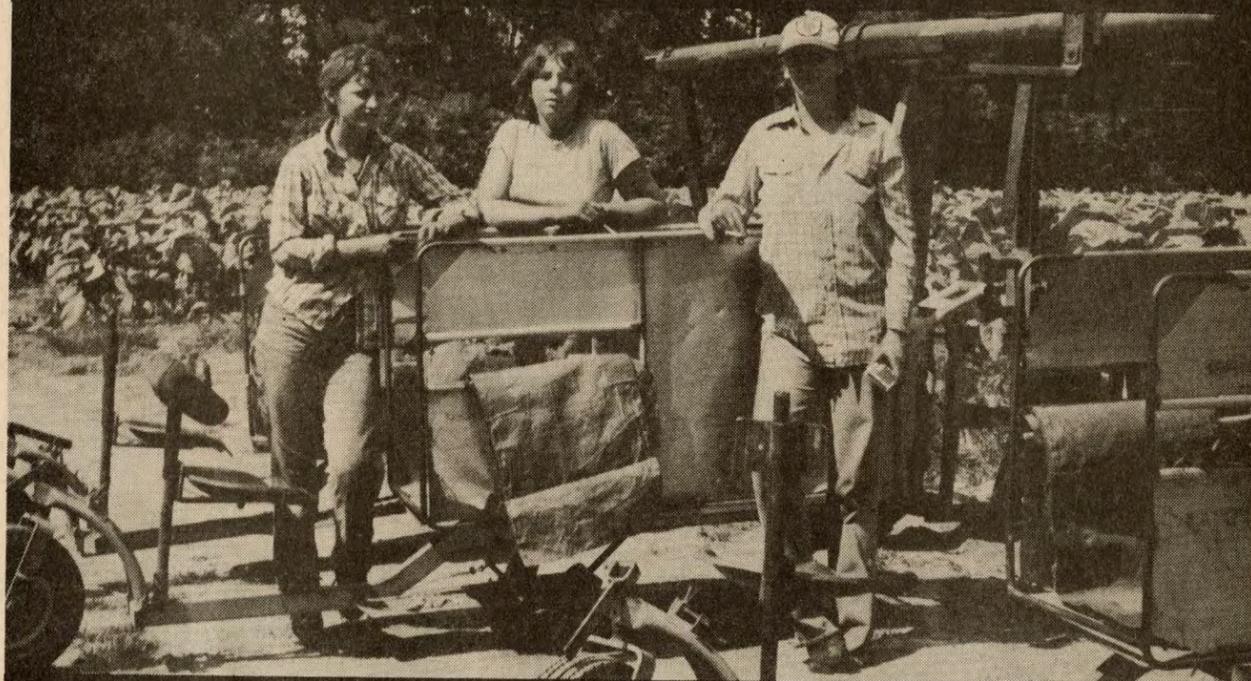
The anarchy of agricultural production is reinforced by the fact that every province in Canada, with the exception of Quebec, and more recently B.C., excludes farmworkers from their respective labour legislation. The position of most farmworkers is like that of most industrial workers at the turn of the century. They have no legal protection from

exploitative employers and must fight for the very right to unionize itself.

The Canadian Farmworkers Union (C.F.U.) was founded in B.C. in 1980 where it has successfully challenged provincial legislation and won a number of contracts. (see review **A Time to Rise!** p. ). The union was able to partially circumvent the traditional problems of organizing a seasonal workforce by establishing itself in the East Indian community, who made up a large percentage of the workforce. It also means that the union fights racism as much as it does exploitative working conditions.

Originally a B.C. support committee, the Ontario C.F.U. began organizing in the spring of 1981. It is estimated that there are 70,000 people employed in farmwork in Ontario. The single largest concentration of this workforce is on the tobacco farms in

**People think farm work's real healthy, you know, real honest work. But you can get sliced up pretty good on the primer. One girl got her hand cut so bad trying to get a baggie off the carrier, she can't work this year.**



**Our memory fades from one year to the next. People gear up to tobacco, then out the first day, and you remember how lousy it is. People don't really have any choice, like I don't have the education, eh. Once they've heard you've worked tobacco a couple of years, that's it, you're a seasonal worker.**



the southwest portion of the province. Next to wheat, tobacco is the largest national gross agricultural earner. As tobacco also has the longest harvest period, it seemed the logical place for the union to start organizing.

The average tobacco farm is roughly 45 acres, and hires a crew of five pickers (primers), a driver, three table women who prepare the leaves for hanging, and a hanger who puts them in the kiln to be cured. The crews are paid to fill one kiln a day which can take from seven to ten hours. Because a farmer wants to keep a crew for the six week harvest period (most crops average one to two weeks), wages are slightly better in tobacco than elsewhere, averaging between \$40 to \$50 a day. But when it is considered this is based on a seven day work week with no provisions for overtime or week-end work, nobody's getting rich. It is also common practice for farmers to withhold \$5 a day which is paid as a 'bonus' at the end of the season. It has not escaped some farmers attention that substantial savings can be made by firing a crew before the season's end and hiring a new one.

Although wages do not appear to be a major issue among tobacco workers themselves, what is often forgotten are the social costs involved. A tobacco worker may get a minimum industrial wage for six weeks, but is not paid for travel or the periods of unemployment between jobs if they're available. Of course in order to work in the first place the worker can have no other commitments, job or otherwise. To expect that a workforce of 70,000 people be readily available for such limited periods of time with no job guarantee in a supposedly advanced industrial society is nothing short of social insanity.

### **Poor health and safety records in farm work**

Of more immediate concern to many farmworkers are health and safety conditions. Farmwork rates third in industrial accident statistics. And this does not take into account the use and effects of pesticides, about which little is known or recorded. Tobacco outstrips all other crops in its use of chemicals, and it is common practice

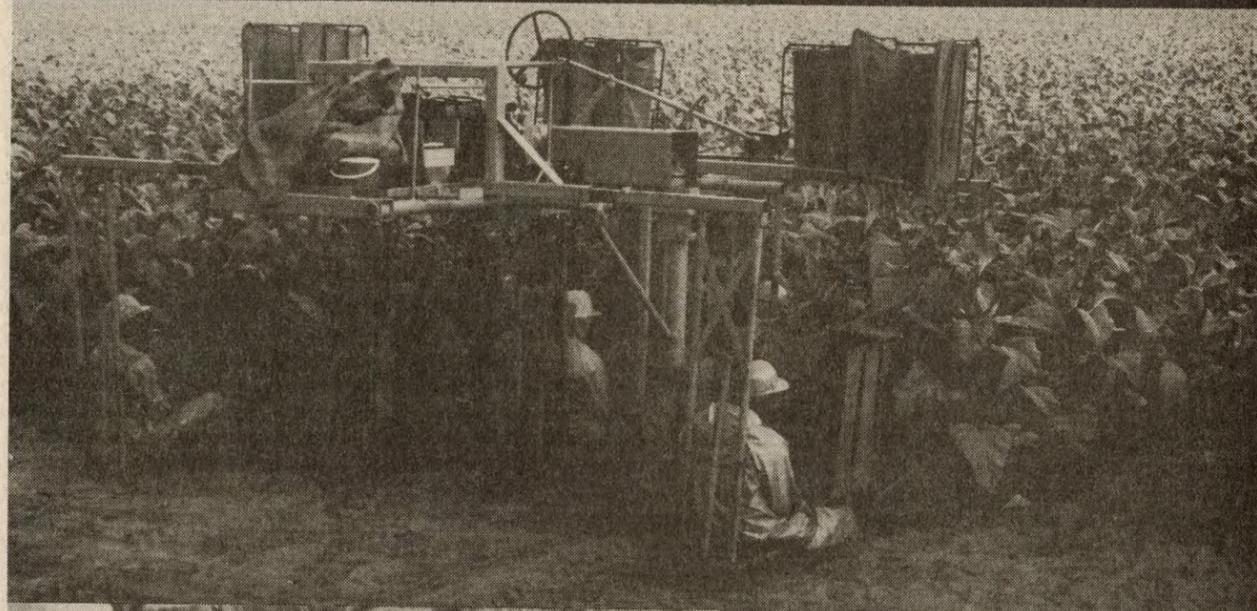
for a farmer to spray while workers are still in the fields. The only regulation governing the use of pesticides are the manufacturers' recommendations and even these are often ignored. Two pesticides currently used in Ontario have been banned in the U.S. as being carcinogenic.

Two strategies were open to the union. Either to organize from farm to farm, or to establish an organization outside the farms themselves. Even if the union were to achieve favourable legislation, the first option would be impossible given the transient nature of the workforce. The union would have to spend its time re-certifying every farm each year. The second option would require the union to establish itself in one place year around, and act as a hiring hall from which farmers would draw their labour. This practice is now used in both California and B.C. Although a large percentage of tobacco workers are local residents, they are understandably the most cautious regarding the union as tobacco is often their only source of employment in a small and tightly-knit community. The



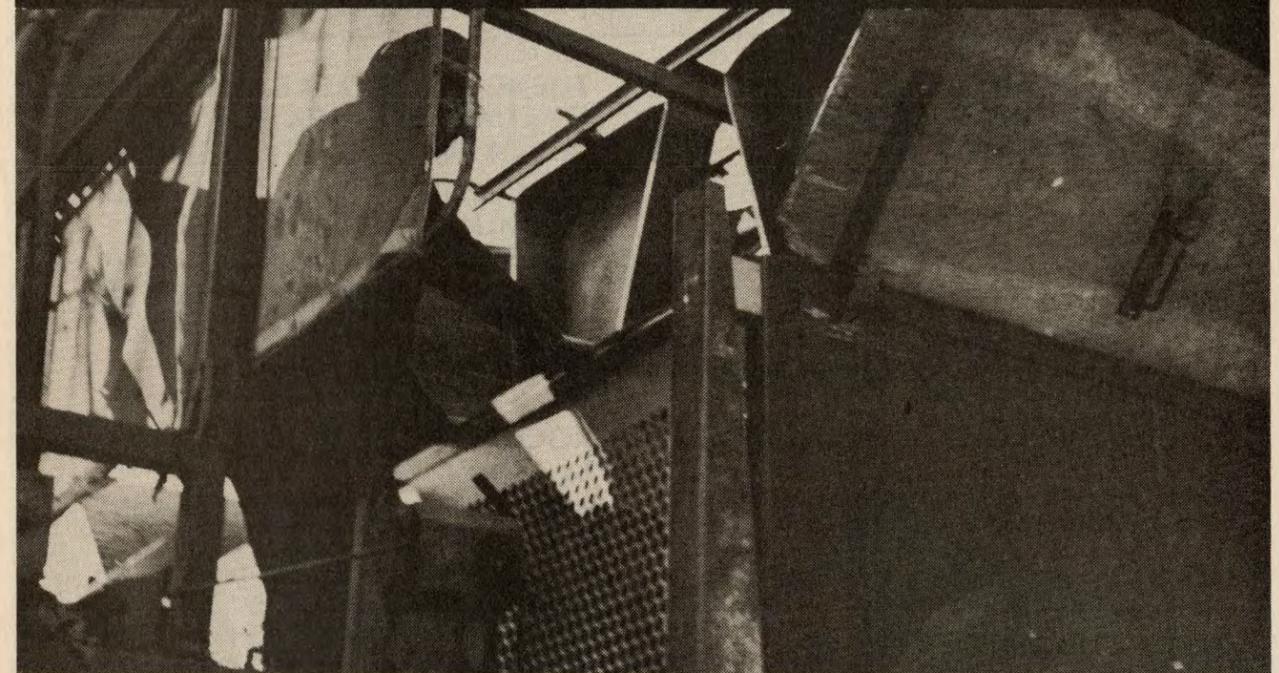
**A lot of women have to have operations on their wrists. They'll get a pinched nerve and their hands go numb. My next door neighbour has this right now. She's afraid to go for Workmans Compensation. She's afraid the farmer won't hire her back again and she's worked for him for five years. She's on nerve pills now.**

They spray for suckers three times. It burns them up — shrivel up to nothing, and we're breathing that stuff. We'd be on one side of the field and the farmer he'd be spraying on the other. I passed out one time, it was that bad. It's like a bad case of the flu, you throw up all the time.



Usually it's such a shitty situation that you don't care about it, like you want to earn your money and get out. Who wants to know about the rest. I mean, it's work. It's just as good as working in a factory, but nobody respects you for it. If you've got absolutely nothing else, you go and you do seasonal. There's no knowledge of the amount of people who work as farm labour: They're just invisible.

A lot of farmers say if the union gets in, they'll automate. I figure they'll do it anyway if there's money in it. I'd like to see something happen to throw a monkey wrench in it myself.



Québécois generally support the union but are a more transient component (the majority only work in tobacco for a year or two), and the union would have to establish a base in Quebec and co-ordinate the hiring between the two groups. The offshore workers cannot be legally unionized, yet many have the strongest union consciousness. However, the Barbadian government for one has indicated it would recognize the union as the bargaining agent once established.

### Year-round organizing of seasonal workers

The union succeeded in establishing a presence, but also realized the immense difficulties in organizing a seasonal workforce. Its strategy now is to organize year around operations such as greenhouses and mushroom growers, and to use these as a base to both challenge existing labour legislation and to begin organizing seasonal workers.

The organization of farmworkers goes beyond the important issues of workers' rights and protection. Given the composition of the workforce — predominantly new immigrant and minorities — it must deal with racism and immigration as well. And beyond these the union has to deal with the

actual organization of production itself, for the very concept of a union challenges the often archaic traditions of agricultural production.

Two new factors are appearing which make unionization of farmwork more immediately critical. As the current economic crisis deepens, its attendant massive unemployment will create a new crisis in the supply of labour, this time one of over-supply. Already this is having the negative effect of intensifying antagonisms between the offshore and Canadian workforce. (This is much less evident between the Québécois and offshore workers, as both are subject to racist attacks). Clearly the offshore program will have to be re-evaluated. Recognizing the right of offshore workers to work, the C.F.U. is taking the position that if labour is needed then these workers should be allowed to immigrate with full rights. As it stands the offshore workers receive lower wages than their Canadian and Québécois counterparts, from which they then have to deduct one half of their airfare, mandatory medical exams, local transportation, upkeep etc. But this is only a part of the problem. An increased supply of labour will provide the excuse to lower wages and benefits on the part of the farmers who are, in turn, being

squeezed by the tobacco monopolies. Already this year some farms were only offering \$35 a day.

The second factor concerns automation. Already 10 per cent of the tobacco farms have automated harvesting systems. To be fully efficient an automated system needs to operate on an acreage three times the average size of current farms. At this scale it replaces twenty-six workers. Automation coupled with the bankruptcy of small farms resulting from depressed prices and high interest rates provides the basis for the corporatization of farm production and the elimination of an already under-employed workforce.

The main obstacle to the unionization of farmworkers at present is the exclusion of farmworkers from the Ontario Labour Relations Act. This means that farmworkers do not have the right to unionize. Ultimately farmworkers themselves will have to challenge the law, but public support for the amendment of the Act and for the union will be important. □

Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge live and work in Toronto. Similar work has also recently been published in *Ovo*, Montreal and *Art Network*, Australia.

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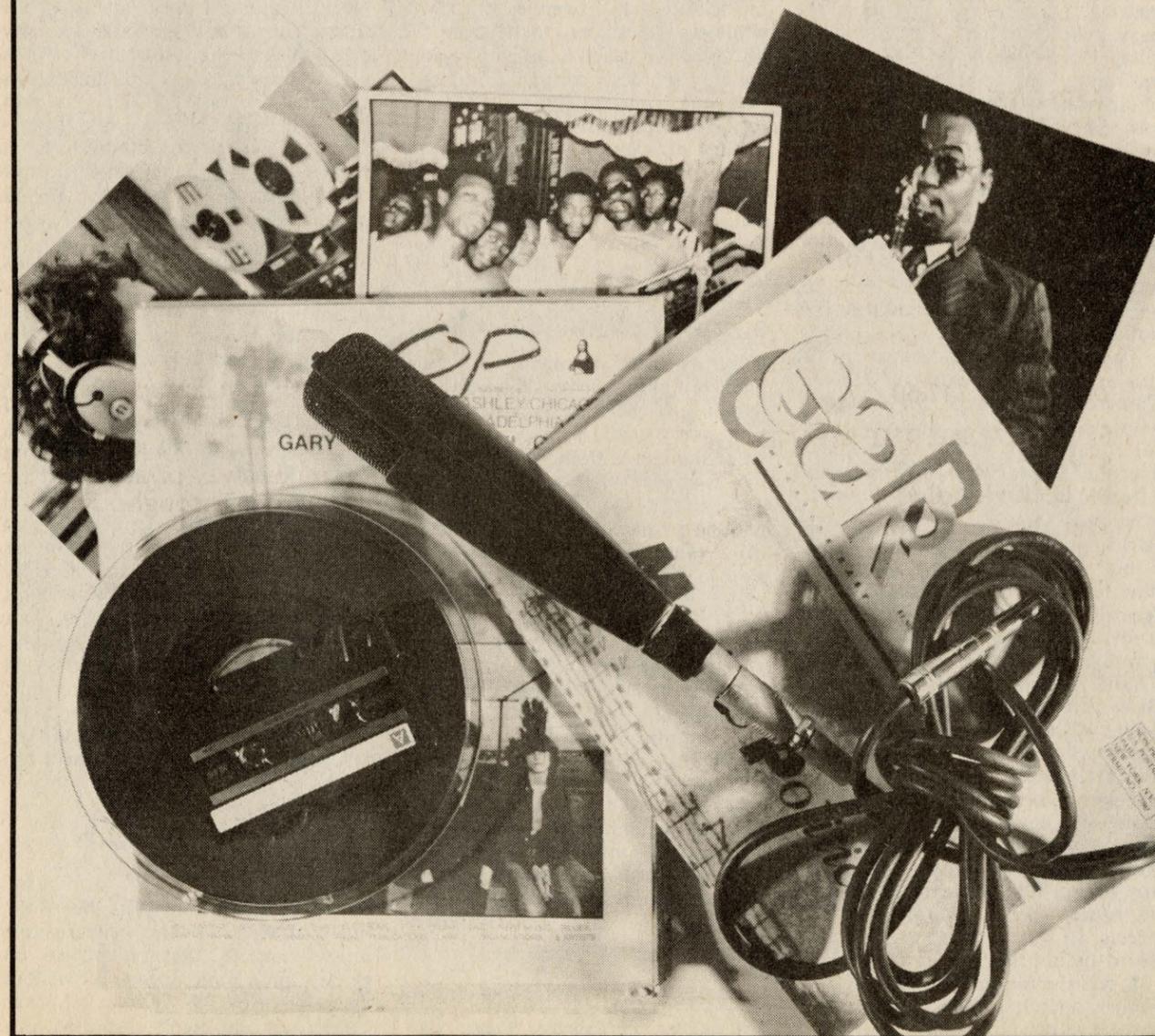
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# FUSE



## MUSIC IN CAMEROUN

Despite "independence", French control is ever-present — and the music industry is no exception.

HANK BULL

Flying over Africa. We had eaten breakfast in Brussels. Now we were looking down on the Sahara desert, naked and dangerous. As the flight passed over northern Nigeria, geometrical patterns emerged from the hazy yellow ground. Roads, walled villages, long parallel lines of greenery reclaiming the sahel. Memories of photographs, records and films locked into sync with the actual moment of looking down. In these human inscriptions on the earth's body, a map of the African patterns articulated in textiles, music and architecture lay suddenly before my eyes. The act of recognition is instant. The "unity of Africa" is unmistakable even from five miles up. It may be an abstraction but it is not a mirage.

The ground turned dark green, the sun set and we landed in Douala, Cameroun. We emerged into the big, empty lobby. Everything was closed for the night with one major exception. From the middle of the hall a record kiosk was sending out the fabulous sound of contemporary African music. My face lit up and with a big grin I spent my first thirty minutes in Africa checking out this record bar real close. As well as music from all over the continent there were prominently displayed records by Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, James Brown and other jazz and blues greats. There was also a lot of reggae, Cuban rumba, salsa, Brazilian samba and even records by English groups like the Specials. The model I'd seen from the plane window was being stretched. The people of Cameroun had the widest awareness of world music of any nation I'd yet encountered. This impression was confirmed on the streets. In the market one day I even heard Indian film music.

It was the music that brought me to Cameroun, the specific intention being to meet artists and exchange ideas with

them. It didn't take long to get started. Within two days my companion and I had settled ourselves in a suburb of Yaounde, the capital city, and made friends with a man named François, a musician in his twenties who was willing to introduce us to the scene. We also received much help from various people at the Canadian Embassy, everyone from the Charge d'Affaires to the Receptionist. Canada has long history of relations with Cameroun, partly because both countries are bilingual. Some of the best schools are run by Canadian brothers and the trains are often pulled by Canadian locomotives.

"Let's go play some rhythm."

Together with François, we spent many a night in the bars, listening and dancing. If there was a keyboard of some sort it would be mandatory that I sit in and jam with the band. This was fine as long as we played the blues, but got quickly beyond me if it came to playing a makossa, a bikutsi or any of their other rhythms. The guitarists would sometimes weave a piece of paper into their strings to give them the percussive sound of a marimba, the "balaphon" which is the traditional instrument still played in a few bars but thriving in the villages. It seemed that people would not refer to music but to rhythm — "let's go play some rhythm" — and ears were attuned to pick differences in rhythm as much as the differences in melody.\* A few years ago Manu Dibango, a tenor man who'd spent considerable time in New York had a smash hit in the U.S. with a tune called "Soul Makossa." Since then many bands have been playing this rhythm in an attempt to repeat his success.

Yaounde is a city of over a million

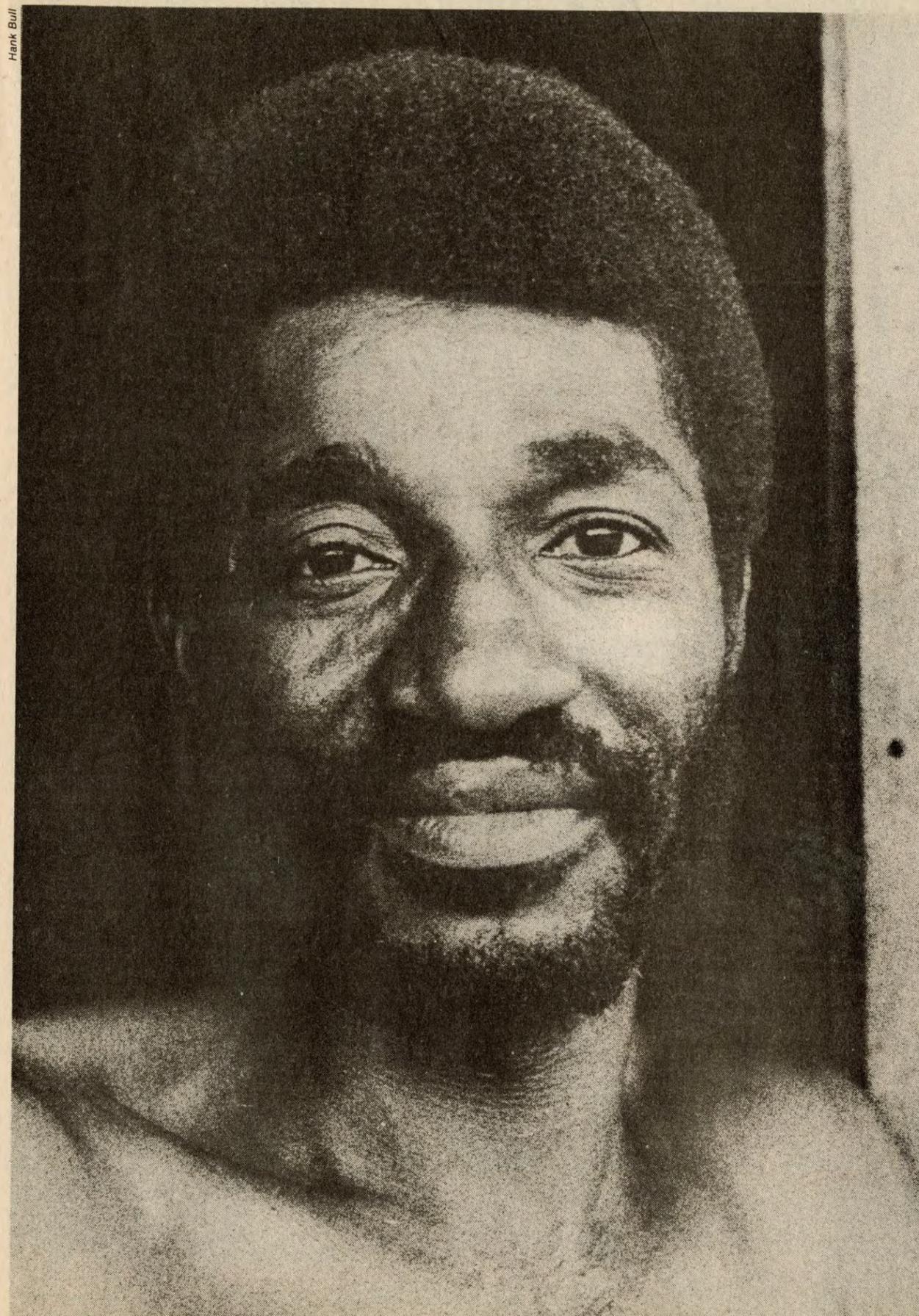
\* *Muntu* by Jahn Janheinz (Faber), 1961.

people situated in low mountains and surrounded by rain forest. The cloud-bursts are heavy. The highways are often impassable. The temperatures at night are comfortable but you still work up quite a sweat on the dance floor. The downtown looks like any city anywhere — buses and crowds and bomb craters disguised as construction projects. Here you can live as if you were in Europe. Everything is expensive, imported from France and takes a long time. Most of the buildings on roads leading in and out of the city centre have big red X's painted on them with the sign *15j*, which means, "to be demolished in 15 days." These are apparently permanent signs, to which no-one pays much attention. Stretching out from the core are various suburbs, some of them deluxe, some apartment buildings, but most one story, tin roof dwellings without plumbing, on unpaved streets that turn to mud gullies when it rains. There are sprawling markets selling colourful textiles, herbal medicines, fruits and vegetables of all kinds (the ground is paved in mango pits), a stunning array of fresh fish and such delicacies as monkey. The home cooking was, incidentally, delicious. Lots of basil, fresh palm oil and chillie peppers that are hot and sweet at the same time. Throughout these neighbourhoods are open front record shops and little bars, all of them pouring music onto the street.

### The traditional with the modern

In one of these shops I first heard the music of Messi Martin, an irresistible intertwining of rhythms played on electric guitars and drums. We went to visit him. He is known all over Cameroun and highly respected as a

Hank Bull



Messi Martin, master musician. Yaounde, Cameroun.

remain "pure," unspoiled by outside influences, "primitive," when in fact Africans are full of energy and enthusiasm to play their contemporary part. Africa has always been very open to ideas from the outside. Jimmy Rogers, "the singing brakeman," was well known all over the continent in the Thirties and the same Cuban beat that turned on Dizzy Gillespie was a craze in the Congo, blending with local rhythms to create a style that has had a strong influence on all the neighbouring countries. The Brazilian samba is in fact an Angolan rhythm. The Africans are watching their music with the changes. The beat has been echoing back and forth across the Atlantic for five hundred years and continues to do so, so that's not the problem.

The problem is created by a music industry which forces musicians to compete with tapes and records on one

hand, and refuses to give them the opportunity to record on the other. "The world is being put into a can," said Steve Lacy. More and more you hear cassettes or record players in the bars. It is more difficult than ever for musicians even to find a place to play. Africa's greatest resource is threatened by the same powers that have nearly erased her philosophy, religion and art.

There is no television in Cameroun. I have travelled a lot but this was my first visit to a country without television. There are instead an ever-increasing number of home video shops, selling dubs of films and French TV. The influence of France in Cameroun is staggering. In spite of its independence the country appears to be still a colony. Terms like "independence," and "North/South," mask the fact that little has changed. Virtually all of the country's wealth, a nation as well endowed as any, is

siphoned off to France and the multi-nationals, so that it must depend on grants of "aid." Imperialism destroys a culture and then calls it "underdeveloped." It is in this context that the North/South dialogue must be considered.

One is tempted to suggest cutting off all connections with France. It seems in some ways futile even to build roads in this climate where the jungle could devour a city in a year if it were allowed to. No wonder bureaucracies based on paper and straight lines seem doomed to failure. It is the climate that corrupts them. But the cut-off suggestion is unrealistic. What about the more modest concept of "Africanization?" The governments have been Africanized and so has the church to some extent. Whether or not the same can be accomplished with industry and commerce is another question. Camerounians, even more than Canadians, cherish their stability. They are mostly too close to the fray to be the least bit interested in political upheaval. Another possible route to change could be opened up by music.

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti is a flamboyant and highly politicized Nigerian musician who recently got press for being arrested on the presumably trumped-up charge of stealing a car. His songs have titles like "Coffin for a Head of State," while in his interviews he talks mostly about the scandal of Nigeria's OPEC policy and the political rotteness of Africa's puppet governments. He mocks the middle class African's eagerness to imitate the European instead of developing a unique African culture, and rediscovering the wealth of his own culture, and indeed what this has to offer the European, in the realm of medicine for example. Fela Kuti is a strong advocate of pan-Africanism. African solutions to African problems are what is needed, from architecture to agriculture to music.

Indian classical music was dying out until the interest of people like Yehudi Menuhin, John Coltrane and of course the Beatles, stimulated a rage of interest. Now it thrives as never before. Would that this same kind of interest be shown to African music. It is, after all, where the global rock rhythm comes from. □



Douala — a home-made studio behind a record shop where horns, guitars, voices and drums were skillfully mixed onto 4 tracks. The musicians hope to produce their own record — a first for Cameroun.



photos: Hank Bull

Mama Ohandja and his Orchestre Con fiance Jazz: traditional "Eton" dance rhythms on electric guitars.



(left) Les Veterans celebrate May Day. (right) Manga Charles (standing left) and his Orchestre Balaphon.

fine musician, but lives modestly. He was very gracious and understood immediately the pictures we showed him of the kind of art we do. He has been able to translate the traditional rhythms of his tribe (Ewondo) into contemporary music. His group is typical: two electric guitars, electric bass, a set of drums, congas and keyboard. With these instruments he brings together the traditional with the modern; the classical with the popular. There is no distinction made, as in our society between "high" and "low" culture, unless you wish to compare Messi Martin with someone like Laurie Anderson, whose "new music" makes the charts.

At the bar the men drink beer, the women drink pop and everyone drinks whisky for a treat. And everyone

dances. The difference between the European's sense of rhythm and the African's is that the European perceives it primarily in movement. In traditional African religion the God, each invoked by his/her own rhythm, rides the dancer who embodies his/her presence. It is through the language of rhythmic dance that Africa communicates with the Gods. Not that these rituals are still enacted in the bars. They have been replaced. But the memory is there. And some still know.

The way that the music business works in Cameroun is generally speaking like this: the bar owner also owns the musical instruments, sometimes to the point of being responsible for the purchase of new guitar strings. A band will play the same bar as a steady job, sometimes for several

years. There are often arguments over wages and so on, as one can well imagine. Those bands who are lucky enough to record must leave the country, there being no recording studio in Cameroun! Occasionally groups will travel to France and record there, another reason why Paris can still be called the capital of Africa.

**Bringing African music home again**

With western influence on the upswing, the disco beat gets stronger. Although this often results in a banal and over-commercialized product, it is not the essential problem of African music today. Indeed cultural imperialism in this case is the expectation that African music should

Hank Bull is an artist/musician who lives in Vancouver. He recently returned from a thirteen month working trip in Africa, Asia and Europe and is currently raising support to bring Cameroun musicians for a Canadian tour.

## THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF ARCHIE SHEPP

**"That music that they call 'jazz' grew out of slavery. It grew out of our suffering, it tells our story . . ."**

**NORMAN 'OTIS' RICHMOND**

The controversial saxophonist Archie Shepp recently appeared in his third film *Imagine The Sound* which was screened at the Sixth Annual Festival of Festivals in Toronto, (1981). The film was made in Toronto and was produced by Ron Mann and Bill Smith. Shepp has also recorded an album *I Know About The Life* for the Canadian label, Sackville.

Shepp says he is being turned into a nomad and spends a great deal of time recording and performing in Europe and Japan. Today he is without a contract with an American record company. "In the '60s I got to do a little travelling, I was out in California, but I've never really worked that much in the United States to tell you the truth," said Shepp.

When not performing and recording abroad Shepp teaches at the University of Massachusetts, in Amherst, where he recently got tenure.

While Shepp's career in the academic world is somewhat secure his career in music has not been all fun and games. He was born in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida but spent his formative years in Philadelphia where he grew up with people like the late trumpeter Lee Morgan. He went on to graduate from Goddard College in Vermont with a degree in play writing and moved to New York City in the late '50s.

His play "Junebug Graduates Tonight" was produced by the Chelsea Theater and three of his one-act plays were produced at the Public Theatre. But as a struggling playwright Shepp found it difficult to make ends meet. He turned back to music which he started playing when he was 15 and first performed with a Puerto Rican band which paid him \$15 to \$20 a night as an alto saxophonist. After switching to tenor sax his playing soon attracted the attention of pianist Cecil

Taylor and Shepp performed on Taylor's *Into The Hot* album.

Shepp is one of the most articulate and outspoken musicians in the business and his words and typewriter have gotten him as much attention as his horn. He has been published in the *New York Times* and *Downbeat* magazine as a writer.

In 1966 he wrote, "What do we base jazz on? It is not that we see jazz as an art, or even as an artifact, but we see jazz as one of the most meaningful social, aesthetic contributions to America . . . it is anti-war; it is opposed to the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, it is for Cuba; it is for the liberation of all people. That is the nature of jazz. That's not far-fetched. Why is that so? Because jazz is a music of my people. It is precisely that."

His music has always reflected his concern for African-Americans and other oppressed people. "Attica Blues", "Blues for Brother George Jackson" and "Dr. King The Peaceful Warrior" are some of his tunes. In 1976 he teamed up with drummer Max Roach and recorded an album *Force* which contained a cut "South Africa 1976".

The following is taken from two interviews that I conducted with Shepp in Toronto on November 4, 1979 and April 14, 1980.

**Norman Richmond:** Most of the questions I am going to ask you are going to be of a political nature because these are questions that I have been wanting to ask you for years. How do you feel about the now independent state of Zimbabwe? What are your thoughts on this situation?

**Archie Shepp:** I am rather concerned about Africa in general. But to make a long story short I am very happy that the Black folks there have gotten their

independence. But I am more concerned about their ability to keep it once they have achieved it. I was very impressed by the revolutions in Ghana and the establishing of Jomo Kenyatta as the President of Kenya. Subsequently I have heard rather distressing things about places — particularly Kenya for example — the treatment of their own national citizens vis-a-vis say white colonials. Apparently white colonials still receive preferential treatment in some areas of so called Black Africa that are ostensibly free for Black people to achieve their freedom. So I would hope that the newly independent nation of Zimbabwe does not achieve what amounts to merely certain independence which might be defined more socially than economically because it is indeed unfortunate when Black people in their own countries win their freedom and yet are still treated like second-class citizens.

**N.R.:** What are your views on the possibilities of African-Americans forming something like the whole nation state? That particular argument has been going on for fifty years or so.

**A.S.:** Well, rock 'n' roll killed that.

**N.R.:** I don't understand.

### Rock 'n' roll — integrationist music

**A.S.:** Well, rock 'n' roll was essentially an integrationist form of music. Look at the music you heard in the Sixties and that was prevalent during the Sixties. It was a form of music which might be defined along the lines of being more relevant to the community ethos. If we take a revolutionary perspective, the music of the Seventies is a very pacifistic one. One, interestingly enough, where white players have achieved a similar expertise to



Ozell Bonds Jr.

**"If we take a revolutionary perspective, the music of the 'Seventies is a very pacifistic one."**

Black players at least in regards to playing blues music. That has been a major breakthrough in terms of white popular music in the new world. Prior to this time whites had never achieved a convincing imitation of Black musical forms but now they actually have and particularly when they emulate the blues. I think that rock 'n' roll represents certain tendencies towards assimilation in the American negro that had not formally existed. Earlier forms like the so called 'jazz' music are indicative of a certain identity consciousness and the fact that the negro people were in the process of re-forming their own identity in the new world along very creative and Black lines. The Sixties were very indicative of the emergence of a Black consciousness. The very slogan "Black Power" indicated that nationalism was a key factor in the political thrust of the Sixties. Later there were other elements that surfaced; particularly the Black Panther Party and some aspects of Marxism became characteristic through groups like that. But as far as the actual formation of the idea of a nation state, I think that went out with the Sixties. I think Black people in the U.S. are, today at any rate, much more into assimilation, consciously or unconsciously.

**N.R:** Do you see that as something permanent or as a temporary lull in the struggle?

### Identity crisis of Black youth

**A.S:** I don't see so much a struggle for political objectives as I see the struggle for identity, at least in terms of equal importance. Right now I think that Black people, particularly young Black people and Blacks under thirty are in the midst of a serious identity crisis, especially those Black youngsters that are being more and more exposed to academic and white intellectual, quasi-European information.

**N.R:** Malcolm X — the song "Malcolm, Malcolm, Super Malcolm" — how did that come about?

**A.S:** Well, right after the assassination in the Audubon Ballroom I was inspired to write that poem.

**N.R:** What was your relationship to

Malcolm and had you ever heard him speak?

**A.S:** Yes, at least twice on the streets and once in Temple Number Seven (The Nation of Islam's Harlem Temple) before they burnt it down.

**N.R:** What influence did he have on your music and the music that came out of the Sixties?

**A.S:** Well, I had met Malcolm but his inspiration was not so much a musical one as a political one and what I was getting at was the fact that Malcolm represents a process — the evolution, in terms of his own social ideas, of the Negro from the country to the city. Malcolm impressed me because he was an urbanized Negro, an urbanized Black man. To that degree my own upbringing, having been born in Florida, made me know the difference. The music was different. For example, the music of Charlie Parker represents the urban rhythms. It carries with it to be sure the background of the blues and the fields, and hollers and the shouts. But actually it speaks of another time, of the Black man in another place. Likewise the music of Coltrane. So if I were to look at Malcolm as a political counterpart to these events, he represents the evolution of the urban Black man. For example: the Honourable Elijah Muhammad who had more southern roots, was a man who was much more suspicious of an amalgamation with whites and alliances with any groups other than his own people. But Malcolm's political and urban sophistication allowed him to have a larger perspective of things. So if I were to equate this with music, I would say that Malcolm's influence was the influence of the urban lifestyle and the rural lifestyle which is understanding how the Black man had to behave in the city. Coltrane understood what we had to do in the cities and what we needed to feed on in terms of our spiritual language. It was refurbished by Mr. Coltrane's quartet (Elvin) Jones, (McCoy) Tyner and (Jimmy) Garrison in that period. I equate Coltrane's music very strongly with Malcolm's language because they were just about contemporaries. I believe that essentially what Malcolm said, is what John Coltrane played.

**N.R:** As far as Islam — do you think that it had a role to play in Black music

say in 1913 when Noble Drew Ali formed the Moorish American Science Temple or did it come later in the Forties with the be-bop era?

### Black Islam

**A.S:** Of course Islam has always been a very approachable area in terms of our experience as it has always been accessible to Black people. And Black people throughout the world of various descriptions have made reference to this religion in a very profound way. The American Negroes, Black folks in the U.S., that were brought here, might have been some of us Muslims to begin with long before Noble Drew Ali formed the Temple. But then we wouldn't have had knowledge of Islam because slavery did pretty much functionally destroy any knowledge we would have had of this kind of history. So perhaps it was important for Islam to resurface in the U.S. or should I say Black Islam because as you know that form of religion was equally political. There is as much politics up in the Black Muslims as there is religion, at least formally. So I think that the Islamic movement has played a more directly active political role than even Christianity in this country. Although you couldn't leave out the political implications of Black Christianity vis-a-vis Nat Turner, Frederick Douglas and Doctor King. Even though Douglas was not a preacher he was probably pretty close to certain Christian groups given the period in which he lived. Or Harriet Tubman, who used the spiritual as a means to identify escape routes to Canada. So it is not only Islam that has had a revolutionary impact as regards the politics of the Black people, but also Christianity.

**N.R:** Could you equate what you said about Elijah Muhammed and Malcolm to Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois?\*

**A.S:** To some degree but I think that there were other factors at work. Mr. Garvey was a profound nationalist from the beginning and he never swayed from his position. Both Mr. Garvey and Mr. Du Bois took pan-African positions. Du Bois had a larger diasporic perspective throughout his life even when he joined the Communist Party which was



"(Diasporic music) attaches and underscores and helps to develop our sense of community

obviously a testament that he had accepted the class struggle definition of struggle vis-a-vis a nationalist's definition. So I wouldn't necessarily say they were parallel although there were some similarities perhaps.

### Nationalistic content in be-bop

**N.R:** I was reading in Duke Ellington's book where he called be-bop "The Marcus Garvey Extension", and I wondered if you had any idea what he was speaking about, because I don't know if anyone was West Indian inside that whole be-bop movement. I might be wrong.

**A.S:** Well, he might have been referring to the very strong nationalist content in the be-bop movement. That was when the brothers first started to take on Islamic names, some of the brothers made pilgrimages to Mecca, and I don't mean so much to cite any specific religious affiliation of Black folk during that time in that particular music area, but the fact that they were somehow consciously rejecting white Christian elements. That's why I cited earlier the fact that blues players in general have not taken on those kinds of conscious political stances, and the fact that Duke Ellington pointed this out was very insightful, because people

like Charlie Parker, and before him Lester Young, refused to go into the army, refused to fight the war, they were conscientious objectors. Some people say that's where Bird got his name, because the guys who refused to go into the army were called "Yardbirds". So there again, he was one of the early conscientious objectors. Max calls him a freedom fighter. Well, in a way you could see that, and perhaps that was the implication of Duke's statement. I would see that as an allusion to the strong nationalist content, and the fact that Marcus Garvey himself aroused the nationalist consciousness of many Black people regardless of whether they were West Indian or not, particularly in the New York area, and perhaps created one of the largest autonomous Black movements in recent history. He brought together close to a million people, so Mr. Garvey should be given a great deal of credit for his efforts. He was a diasporic man in many ways. He belongs to us, as a people.

**N.R:** What do you think about reggae music, and the way it's coming out today?

**A.S:** There again I see it as a diasporic consciousness, a deepening of the diasporic aesthetic in a way, because it's African-American blues, it's given a kind of a beat which represents

certain religious revivals in the West and particularly in Jamaica. I see it as very important music because again, it attaches and underscores and helps to deepen our sense of community with brothers and sisters in another area of the Americas. In a sense, they have created something different, but of course it's based harmonically on African-American blues music. I think the beat itself comes partly from some of the cult music of Jamaica, but the actual harmonic content is provided by African-American blues music. Everything from boogie to stride piano and jazz has made possible forms like the reggae; it's a very modern blues form.

### African experience

**N.R:** What other parts of Africa have you been in besides Algeria and Tunisia? You have been to what they call West Africa haven't you?

**A.S:** Not to what they call Black Africa. I have always wanted to go but they don't have the money and you see the places with the best climate are the hardest to get to. Particularly the new world Black men don't seem to go to those places too much — not unless he is a certain kind of new world Black man. Now occasionally some of our better known brothers and sisters have been able to travel to those areas of the

world. But apparently I am not yet well enough known.

**N.R:** What influence did that whole African experience, both in Algeria and Tunisia, have on your music and politics?

**A.S:** In Tunisia I was only there for a few days playing at the Carthage festival and there were a few people who treated me very nicely. But in Algeria I had a much more long-standing relationship you might say. I was invited to the first pan-African festival by Eldridge Cleaver and Max Roach was to have been there at the same festival but for some reason he did not come. Stokely Carmichael and Miriam Makeba were there. It was a really glorious event. And while I was there I encountered people — the Berber people who are known as the Tuaregs — at a high school just outside the city. I was taken out there to meet them and I was taken immediately by the great beauty of these people and their music and I suggested we might play some music together out in the school-yard which we did. And later we were recorded at a big concert which was attended by President Col. Houari Boumédiène.

Subsequently through the offices of Stokely Carmichael who was then in the good graces of the Algerian government (this was prior to the death of Boumédiène) we were invited to Algeria again to make a film under the auspices of the Algerian government in Hoggar, which is just on the border of so-called Black Africa. This was partly engineered and sponsored by Eldridge Cleaver and the Black Panther Party. I was able to take with me Don Byas, Steve McCall, Cal Masset and an Algerian musician who we knew as Umani. We voyaged from the city of Algiers down to the Hoggar and filmed with the Tuaregs on their campsite which included one of their ritual dances and filmed them in full dress and so on. This film is now with the Algerian government.

Of course, that trip had profound influences on me in many ways. I couldn't only say politically as that was probably the least of my involvement with the trip. Though I did have very stimulating conversations with Mr. Cleaver during that period and with one of the army colonels, who along with the Mayor of Hoggar, ran the municipality of Tanampucet. They spent quite a bit of time talking about Sidney Bechet as the army colonel was a very hip cat.

## R & B in South Africa

**N.R:** Would you go to South Africa to



Ozell Bonds Jr.

**"Africa has never seriously come to grips with the problems of slavery . . ."**

play if you were asked by a promoter? **A.S:** It would depend who the promoter was. In fact Max Roach was asked to go to South West Africa about two years ago, by one of our students here at the University of Massachusetts. His blood brother lives in South West Africa and is prominent in the government there. They were trying to put on a big festival in South West Africa which was going to be a Black thing. Of course South West Africa is a Black nation, there are a number of implications to their autonomy right now . . . it's the territory that the United Nations now holds in contestation, I believe. At that time Max Roach had intended to go there, but it didn't come off, for some reason.

So when you ask the question, "Would I go there?", it depends on who would ask me to go there.

**N.R:** I'm asking the question because there seems to be a movement now to get people from Black America, specifically rhythm-and-blues artists, to go there and they're being used by the government.

**A.S:** I think in general rhythm-and-blues artists have not represented perhaps our most politically conscious element in the music industry. Historically they haven't, and I support and endorse a lot of blues music. I love it, but I don't think that the people who play that music by and large have been

the most representative spokesmen of our political aims and desires as Black people here in this country. At least until very recently, now you get people like James Brown singing about "Black And Proud", and then some kinds of nationalistic elements creep in, and B.B. King's song about the welfare. On the one hand the blues *documents* a lot of social events, but in terms of blues players specifically being spokesmen, or politically conscious, well that's not always been the case. Surely, that's why these promoters go to those kind of people rather than to other types of elements within the African-American music industry, because there they might run into a very sound rebuff from people who are perhaps, hopefully, a little more politically sophisticated.

Again, I'd say it depends on how an invitation like that was made. If it came through people whom I considered politically sound, I might be involved with something like that. The kind of thing that Max was about to do earlier seemed to me to be reasonable, because it came through people whom I respected politically. But I guess a whole commercial hit is what you mean, some big commercial agency asking me to come over there. I think I would have a number of reservations. I suppose, for these performers, anybody has a price, money buys a lot of things today, so

I'm just saying it's not easy for a man to turn away a million dollars, especially if he's down on his luck. It's a time when political commitment means a lot. Everybody doesn't have it.

## The pan-African world

**N.R:** A lot of African people from the Western Hemisphere say, "We are all one", but a lot of times people see pan-Africanism as just the unification of the African continent.

**A.S:** Precisely. Which excludes a good deal of the diaspora, and it lets us off the political, historical hook. Because once again I think that the problems of Africa for Black folk, and particularly the problems that Africa is having today, rest partly in the fact that Africa has never seriously come to grips with the problems of slavery, and the whole nature of the slave trade: how it developed, how Black people were sold into slavery, their own role in it, and in fact how Black people in the United States could be brought back into the African system. They haven't gotten to that level because they haven't first dared to psychologically deal with their own complicity in something of which they may be historically ashamed. So today I think the American Negro could play a most crucial role in the liberation of Africa.

Why is it that the white people are always saying, "Why don't you niggers go back to Africa?" How come the Africans don't say, "Why don't you niggers come on home?" That's the quandary of the American Negro today, that the white man doesn't want him, and neither does the Black man in the country that he was originally shipped out of. So you started by saying, "Where else is this music played?" It can only be played here, I think.

**N.R:** Keith Richards recently made a statement that there was nothing happening in Black American music, and Frank Zappa has made a similar statement . . .

**A.S:** Well, Frank wrote a tune for me years ago called *Archie's Tune* — but I'm still waiting to hear it.

**N.R:** But you didn't read what Keith Richards said?

**A.S:** No, and frankly I'm not on the defensive with those guys, because I don't think they really know anything about this music. They have become arbiters largely out of default, because of lot of this music is not played on the air popularly, we have no real access to television or mass media.

Furthermore I think many Europeans feel today that they have created

a form of so-called jazz music which is equivalent to African-American jazz music. That's another danger in using the term "jazz", because if we call it "African-American music" it localizes it, it fixes it, it's ours. So now they ask me when I go to Europe what I think of "Polish jazz", which is like asking me what I think of Polish slavery. Because that music, that they call "jazz", grew out of slavery. It grew out of our suffering, it tells our story, but nobody wants to look at it like that because that's too political. So it's understandable that a white boy could say that there's "nothing happening" with it; it threatens his whole existence. First of all it identifies him as a slave master.

My own hope is that the kind of music we're playing will eventually be understood to be of importance to our own people. It should be seen as worthy of research. I don't only mean jazz music by that, I mean diasporic music. That we should begin to educate ourselves out of a Top Ten mentality, that we should begin to take a long, serious look at our music, not only the music created here in the United States, but created throughout the African-American, the pan-African world. We should begin to look into that music for certain types of political analogies, references that we can find.

## Black classical music

**N.R:** I'm interested in how you see the term "jazz". I know you use the term "Black classical music".

**A.S:** Well I tend to stay away from that term "Black classical music" because Random House and white folks seem to have pre-empted "classical" as meaning specifically the Western music that was played around the 17th and 18th centuries, so rather than get into those kinds of arguments, I define the music as African-American instrumental, African-American vocal and dance music. It's clear that no single culture can pre-empt the word "classical", particularly when it's much older than that culture to begin with. For example the word "classical" can apply to cultures of India, China, Egypt, Africa for that matter, which are much older than any areas of Western classical music or any Western classical art. So it's rather presumptuous for any single culture to pre-empt that word. I've had a number of students question me about that because of course it does contradict the Random House definition of the word "classical", which is a racist definition by my own thinking.

So it's not that I don't believe that Black music is classical enough, but the ambiguity of the definition often raises problems when you try to define the music along those lines.

Nor do I reject the term "jazz", but I think it's meaningless when we try to figure out the sum total of what African-American music is, in all its various forms. Because so-called "jazz" music is a conglomerate of blues, work songs, ragtime, all these various forms. Unfortunately Negro music has been fragmented into all kinds of meaningless terms, like "disco" for example, which is simply another way of referring to modern African-American blues music. But people don't use those terms because then they'd have to start giving Negroes money for those items. That's why they use the term "jazz", because it's so general that it never cites the Black people as the actual originators or creators of that music. Even if it were "jazz", then who's the king of it? — it's Benny Goodman. Who's the father of it? — then it's Paul Whiteman. So ironically, even if we're stuck with the term "jazz", it's something again that Black people seem not to have created, and they don't even control, so it's not a good word for us. It's not an effective word, Duke Ellington never used it, Louis Armstrong never used it, neither did Sidney Bechet, neither does Max Roach, so why use it?

## History of jazz

**N.R:** Do you think that so-called "jazz" began in New Orleans?

**A.S:** Not necessarily. I think it began when they put the first Black man on the boat. There are good reasons for believing that certain elements of the music were reinforced in New Orleans especially because of certain historical factors, mainly because the drum existed in New Orleans to a much later date than anywhere else in the United States. And the second factor is that the whole African culture was reinforced by the uprising in 1799 in Haiti, when many Black people were exported from the island of Haiti and sold to New Orleans, just prior to Toussaint Louverture's revolution in 1801, which resulted in the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Because it was the Haitians' taking of the island of Haiti which destroyed Napoleon's dream of an empire in the West. He had planned to use Louisiana at that time. But after the destruction of his plans by Toussaint Louverture and the successful revolution by the Haitians he sold Louisiana to the United States.

In 1799 there had been a big shipment of Blacks from Haiti because of the war that was raging prior to the settlement of that territory. So the culture was reinforced in New Orleans, it was like a fresh injection of African culture, because these people came directly from Haiti and many of the brothers and sisters who went to the West Indies were shipped directly from Africa, whereas in later years, particularly in the 19th century, many of the brothers and sisters in the United States appear to have been bred in the West Indies. Which is why people of West Indian descent sometimes make the claim — and it's a divisive one I think, it's not a very positive one, it certainly doesn't reinforce our diasporic consciousness — that the American Negro was "washed white" through the fact that he was not directly from Africa, but often had come from the West Indies where certain types of amelioration of his experiences, attenuation had taken place, which we can see through the whole latter-day middle-class experience of the American Negro. But I think many of our people right here — I know in the South for example, I was born in the South — many Blacks came directly from Africa. I know that because there's a bunch of Black niggers where I come from! They ain't got too much admixture, you know what I mean? So that speaks for itself, in fact, I'm not doing so bad myself. You see what I'm saying?

So I think the African-American experience here in the United States is pure enough, we don't have to cop any pleas or explain ourselves to anybody. I think what we did in Watts, and in Harlem, and in Jersey, and in Chicago, I think our struggle has been on a par with any freedom-loving people anywhere, even with that of the Vietnamese, because we're fighting from within a structure where we're definitely in a minority and a lot of cats out there are in the majority and don't seem to be able to do anything!

Even Africans have yet to accept their relationship to African-Americans. How can Africans be free when Negroes in the United States are not free? One of the most critical questions that Africans must answer for themselves is that of their own role in the slave trade. They've never done that. Subsequently there's a whole guilt/fear trip in terms of communicating with American Negroes on a contemporary level.

For example, if you look at Africa today, you see that they need agrono-

mists and other technical people. Very often their own people whom they train don't want to go back to Africa. Yet there are thousands of trained people in the United States, Negroes who would love to go to Africa and work — if Africans would open their countries to Black people and say, "Come back home, brother". Africans never do that, because within this diasporic consciousness, there's a certain level at which we've never really come to grips with ourselves. Part of it's social and economic, so the Marxists try to provide a simple answer; but Marxism is too Western, it doesn't solve our problem. If we could see that there is some continuity between the field cry that some guy's making in Georgia and some Ashanti working in a field in Ghana, that's a basis.

### "Diasporic Music"

**N.R:** Do you think that we can say that this music is an African-American music exclusively, or do you think that there was a parallel development? Was this type of music played in South Africa and the Caribbean as well as in the United States?

**A.S:** Actually, no. It only happened here in the Diaspora, in this area of the Diaspora. Incidentally that's another name that I've begun to call it, "Diasporic Music" because I feel that there we get into the Caribbean, South America, the United States, the whole Black continuum. "Diasporic Music". And my own concept, musically, is going more and more in that direction. With the big band I've been reaching for more what you might call "Third World" elements. An expression of a Black message, one which speaks for the entire continuum.

I'd like to get a team of research scholars and musicians, writers, and go into an area like Brazil, up around Bahia, or Cuba into one of the heavily Yoruba areas where a lot of that music and that lore is still alive, and begin to document some of this material, and to begin to utilize this as a form for creating other types of diasporic musical structures — similar to the reggae — because rumba and all these forms had international implications, especially when they came from down below the United States. They've usually had tremendous implications as regards dance, and they've had a lot of our implications as regards their universal reference, perhaps in a way that our own music has not had. We've reached Europe, but a lot of our music has yet

to reach South America. But a lot of South American music has been very successful in reaching the entire world. Like Samba, we've reached the world differently, and we've reached other areas of the world. So-called "jazz" music often reaches the intelligentsia, it reaches the middle class, because it's a very sophisticated music, whereas our dance music reaches the mass of people in those areas. When I was in Japan, not too long ago, we played to a hall of maybe 2,000 people, and that was our biggest audience. When Earth, Wind And Fire came through, they were staying at the same hotel, I know they played to about ten or fifteen thousand. Because their music appeals to a whole mass audience that my music would not appeal to.

Then again I think it's the whole nature of blues music appealing to essentially a working-class audience. They're the people who go out and buy the 45s. And they create the whole Top Ten syndrome. So somehow those people have to be assuaged, and they have to be engaged, because a lot of those are our people, and we shouldn't forget the fact that "A Love Supreme" was a gold record. In fact they sort of withheld that information from John Coltrane. He discovered it by accident. If Stevie Wonder gets a gold record, well, usually it means that you rewrite your contract. But John just came up to the ninth floor and he saw this gold record and he asked the A&R man "Isn't that a gold record out there?" And the A&R man said, "Yeah, I forgot to tell you . . ."

They don't want niggers playing that music no more, man. That music was the music they played in the Sixties, and the Sixties were a turbulent period here in this country. I hope the Eighties will be the same way, but on another level. I'm not talking about the kind of engagement which would result in the lives of many of our people being lost, but I'm talking about a level of engagement in which we would really begin to change things. That's truly a revolution, another level of revolution which we haven't achieved yet, but I'm hopeful that we can. And I think that there again, music could help us to realize this if we could seriously understand all its references. □

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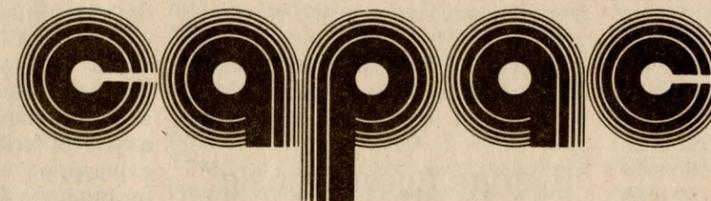
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# THE MEANS OF MIXED PRODUCTION

## FUSE looks at three Toronto artist-audio studios that are private but methodically collaborative.

CLIVE ROBERTSON

### IAN MURRAY

**Ian Murray co-founded (with Brian McNevin) the Centre for Art Tapes, Halifax and he has been instrumental in re-organizing Trinity Square Video, Toronto since April 1978. Murray has worked as an artist, curator and animator particularly in independent community use of audio and video. His work has been seen and heard widely in North America and Europe.**

**Ian Murray:** The reason I have this (audio) equipment is, the same as my darkroom — black and white photography and audio are the two kinds of technology where I can conceivably own and control my own tools. I can't afford to own video or motion picture equipment that I would use, or any of the other technologies that I use with regularity. So apart from audio and basic black and white photography everything else has to be shared through a co-operative or rented.

**FUSE:** When did you first set-up an audio facility for recording and editing?

**I.M.:** The first thing I had was an open reel tape machine which I bought in 1970 together with thirty tapes that the owner of the machine gave me. I started my art works using his pre-recorded tapes which were basically people pretending to be on the radio, pretending to make records, people dealing with the clichés of mass culture but by themselves with a small portable tape recorder. The next piece of audio equipment I bought was a Simpson Sears' record player which was used for playing records which I had altered. My interest has been in mass media objects rather than mass media. As an artist my interest is to alter and create oppositions within the products of the mass media more than to aspire to be on mass media. So, in general, the equipment I have put together is all consumer equipment and relatively low-priced consumer equipment which I have picked up

along the way according to projects that were necessary.

The first piece of editing equipment I obtained was a stereo open reel recorder which I got in 1972. Before that I had either used facilities in schools or rented studio time which turned out to be more expensive than buying my own recorder. After that each piece was added slowly according to specific art works I needed to produce. The most expensive piece of equipment I bought were these two cassette decks which I've now had for about a year — they play continuously and I use them in installations. All of the equipment I have now could be replaced for about \$5,000, with the exception of the cables which are probably worth \$3,000 by themselves. The most important item I have is cables.

**FUSE:** So you've designed a flexible system for patching source material together.

**I.M.:** Most of the material I use in my work are recognizable pieces of audio, directly off the radio or TV or records and is then altered. Other materials include sound from specific environments mixed with other natural sound. The only synthesising type of equipment I have are customswitching devices. It's all on and off switching. There are no musical instruments and there is no musical orientation to the system.

**FUSE:** Your own self-educational experience has been varied audiowise from documentaries in the North, to your own composite installations, to curatorial projects such as the **Radio By Artists** series — what is the common link apart from the technology?

### "Everything but music"

**I.M.:** I say that I do recordings of everything but music — which really isn't completely true because I have done a few albums for people and also some fairly serious music recording.

It's always been in situations where it wouldn't have been recorded otherwise or where it has been far out of the musical mainstream.

**FUSE:** You did do an early record of your own?

**I.M.:** **Keeping on Top of the Top Song** that was in 1970 and it was my biggest lesson in audio because the original masters for those recordings were left on top of an electric heater and I learned a lot about magnetism and recording from that particular experience. In 1972 I was able to edit those things by myself at home. The nature of those works was either to layer sound or butt edit pieces of sound in a very straightforward manner, so there was little manipulation of sound that couldn't be immediately recognized by the audience. It never interested me to make music out of sources although it has always interested me to make works that function as art objects. As well as my own work in the last ten years I have done almost every other kind of audio recording, editing and mixing possible with the exception of some normal radio/record recording practices. **Radio By Artists**, probably encompassed more of the range of techniques than any other single project.

**FUSE:** Briefly, what did **Radio By Artists** consist of, what was your intention for the series?

**I.M.:** The intent was to produce a broadcast-quality radio series which consisted of nothing but works by artists for radio. In doing that it involved perhaps the broadest range of audio techniques that had been used in any one series. There was no real explanation of why or what specific meaning the work had, it just allowed a listening audience to have contact. My main reasoning is that I feel that art is far more accessible to an audience than art appreciation. The nature of art in many cases can



Ian Murray during recording session in his temporary studio in Cape Dorset, Baffin Island, 1977.

connect directly with the average listener, simply because the average artist is an average listener and does have some involvement in their own actual community as well as the supposed community of artists. So I thought there were a lot of artists whose works would function well within the context of radio. My interest was not so much getting artists on the radio as getting that kind of material to people, as well as making a statement of what artists concerns towards radio would be at that particular time. There were over 30 pieces ranging from someone talking into a dictation machine to multi-channel studio recording; from semi-documentaries to completely synthesized sound.

**FUSE:** You have a diverse way of working. I imagine this is to produce a spectrum of response; are you thinking of more efficient ways of distribution that may or may not improve the relationship between yourself as producer and your audience?

**I.M.:** I started out using audio because I was interested in the record as an object that is highly collected in our society. I was interested in radio as a network and reflecting on it as an object of communication. That has remained true . . .

**FUSE:** What do you mean by 'object' here, is it as a product?

### Investigating the record as object

**I.M.:** I am interested in the record as something which is not only the obvious documentary properties they have — this is the way most people consider records. I am interested in the physical and ideological functions, as much as performance, composition, etc. That's why I am not so much interested in artists being on television, or radio or best selling records by artists as I am in some investigation of the nature of, if you like, the commodity — the object.

**FUSE:** Maybe you could give an example of one of your installations and the environment that you construct and the material that you present. Particularly the way in which you attempt to construct different relationships between the audience and the material.

**I.M.:** One piece called **Towards the Northern Service** involves two large speakers on either side of a room and a television set against the wall in the centre of the back wall of the room. That piece had a loose Jamaican dub recording, called "Production Dub" with a rap on top by a white disc jockey who used to be assistant head of CBC's Northern personnel office. He did a rambling agitational spiel on the North, how he sees the Northern

Service as treating the North as a third world culture to be controlled. He came to see his job as being part of a system of cultural genocide. You heard the Jamaican dub music on both speakers, you heard his rap on one of the speakers. On the other speaker you heard a direct translation into Inuktitut of what he was saying. The spoken Inuktitut portion modulated the television set; it turned it off and on. The television was set to a CBC station so little bits of CBC programming would come through each time the Inuk was speaking. In that way I was using the music as a structure to examine how do we apply our progressive or most liberal attitudes towards cultures, towards the preservation and destruction of cultures. So that the music, his rap, the translation and the CBC all became definable elements within that context. The audio recordings by themselves do not explain what the construction was anymore than the physical layout of the speakers and television would by themselves explain it.

**FUSE:** The critical aspect of your work is implicit which makes it difficult, say in this case, for a southern audience to understand this issue, considering how little the politics of the North are given coverage.

**I.M.:** I'm very careful not to give people

an obviously documentary view. The experience which the audience would have is of course determined by their past experience and their attitude. The construction of the work embodies audio as four of many elements, the experience is very much designed for the environment in which it's going to be shown. "Tutorial", a piece which I had at Harbourfront in 1980, is another. Some people have read it to be particularly about the system of tutelage and white control in the North, but it is just as true about the nature of the art institution and the relationship of the audience to the work. It was not constructed to give people information about the North but was rather using a situation to deal with their similar problems.

**FUSE:** You spend quite a bit of your time in the North and go regularly. How much does that allow you to understand politically what is happening in southern Canada and therefore the applications of your installations?

### Growing up in a peripheral region

**I.M:** My experience and work in the North are similar to my experiences in other places: the questions of regional and local control, of local culture and of cultural producers. In some ways aspects of those problems become more extreme, or at least more noticeable in the North. Most of the work I've done on the North has been done in Toronto and is not drawn directly from the North itself. I would say the origin is more closely related to my past in the Maritimes — growing up there in a situation that was politically, economically and culturally peripheral to anything that was being offered by society at large as being acceptable. My experience in downtown Toronto, my experience in Northern Nova Scotia and in the Arctic all have certain parallels which

focus on the inability of people to both accept their own responses to things and to have a sense of authority about their own response. Coupled with this is an inability to project an image dissimilar from that which the mass media, or the government media would like to portray. One of the major differences is that, in the North I have spent a fair amount of time training local people more specifically in the use of technology to control their own affairs than I have perhaps in other situations. I attempt to carry out technical and instructional tasks for people as an adjunct to my own art work. I am not particularly interested in proselytizing with the content of my work, or making general statements within my work that perhaps could be dealt with better in a more specific way on a community level. I have worked with co-operatives and individuals who are trying to make statements within their own community as a way of removing those aspects from my own work. I am very much interested in using media in a wholistic traditional artist's sense. I think that much of what we've learned from much of modern art is important politically. . .

**FUSE:** What sorts of things?

**I.M:** I think that the question of the medium as the message has been made superficial and popularized by mass media but I think it's an important political concern. What you see happening now with U.N.E.S.C.O. in relation to journalism is part of that debate. (Suggested licensing of journalists particularly by countries with state monopoly controlled media -Ed.) What you see in local communities as a rejection of Anglo-American culture is quite disturbing politically to most cultural producers in the English speaking world. The format of the newspaper or the news program has a greater effect on the information that gets across than having a Fabian, Socialist, Conservative or Marxist

slant.

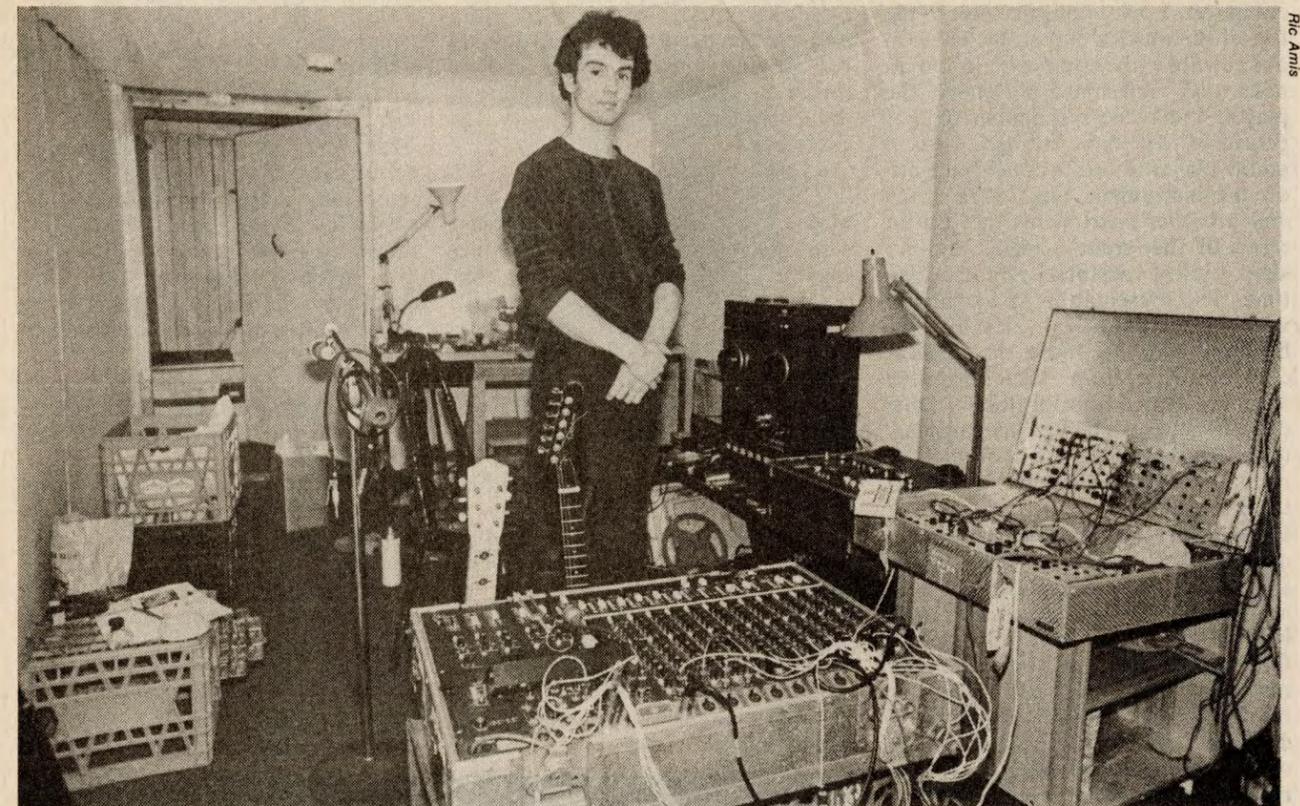
**FUSE:** Still the structure of mass media formats is based on their dominant ideological position, form still following function. Because you use different structures it seems suggested that you are presenting different ideological values?

**I.M:** Yes, there are various and conflicting values embodied in the different elements and methods in any one work. My feeling is that the "whole" of the working — including the ideological nature of the collage — is the best articulation I can muster. I still would say that the purpose of art is not to say things, in the direct sense transmitting information, as it is to show methods of doing things as well as to reflect on and to analyse the methods of communication . . .

**FUSE:** Don't you think your comments about "purpose" and how "direct the information is" is not valid for minority groups or for individuals who want to use any medium for direct, immediate purposes?

**I.M:** It's a difficult question. In working with various communities of interest I attempt to elaborate on the ideological nature of the medium under discussion. The basic quality of most communications media is an "authorization" of information and the authority of the controller. On the whole I think that modern mass media have two uses for the specific community — straight propaganda for use outside of the group or as an internal experiential/formulating device. Which use of the media should be decided before starting. In too many cases "community media" is only internal propaganda. This is of no use outside the group and doesn't allow the members of the group to confront their own internal problems or construct a presentation ideologically consistent with their stated goals.

## FUSE MUSIC SUPPLEMENT • FUSE MUSIC SUPPLEMENT • FUSE MUS



"... electronic technology (doesn't) deserve a class of its own anymore than woodworking ..."

### MICHAEL BROOK

**Michael Brook studied electronic music at York University, Toronto and has since worked as a musician, producer and engineer. Brook has recorded and toured with Jon Hassell, recorded Ronnie Hawkins for a commercial film documentary and played with a number of Toronto bands including Flivva. He has played on soundtracks for CBC-TV projects, designed audio installations for the Ontario Science Centre and recently fabricated electronic devices for an upcoming sculptural installation by Eno in Japan. He is the co-ordinator of Charles Street Video (an artist video post-production facility).**

**FUSE:** What did you have in mind when you put together your eight-track studio?

**Michael Brook:** I have spent a lot of time helping people realize their projects both musically and with video and helping musicians and artists modify their equipment. I wanted facilities for my own work but found no workable access locally. Originally I wanted a set-up close at hand where I could capture 'blind inspiration' but that only happens in movies so primarily it's become a tool for

learning how to compose. Because I don't read music, I don't write it. I thought I might do the odd commercial thing with other people, if it was convenient and interesting, but that's a peripheral function.

**FUSE:** Am I right in assuming that your studio is a testing facility that would be followed by going into a larger and more sophisticated studio?

**M.B:** It's more a note pad. I did preliminary work with Jon Hassell there for his last album (*Dream Theory in Malaya*). Some of it did end up on the record. A lot depended on Jon's style of working, we used my studio to find out what wouldn't work before we went to Grant Avenue Studio in Hamilton.

**FUSE:** You also used your facility to re-mix Hassell's live concert?

**M.B:** I did a mix for that compilation record (*Rhythm '82 Festival in England*, from OCA concert). My studio was taken to the concert to record, except we used a different board. We also used a lot of good microphones, simple sound sources and good processing. As it was live it wasn't necessary to create an acoustic space so my studio was sufficient.

**FUSE:** Are there any other collabora-

tive projects utilizing your studio?

### Working collaboratively or working alone?

**M.B:** For my own stuff I've never tried having someone else to come in. After playing both a lot of new ('free') music and rock 'n' roll I now don't know what I'd ask collaborators to do. Currently I play and record all the parts with the option of later re-recording them, getting those who can play specific instruments better than me to play the parts. Working with other musicians in an improvisational structure is hard unless you know, as a composer of your own music, what you want from someone. It's hard to ask someone to do something with vague instructions and then say, "I'm sorry but I don't think what you've done is going to be useful for me." You're going to hurt their feelings, as mine would be. It's hard on the collaborators because your instructions are vague so it's difficult for them to determine whether or not they've successfully completed the instructions.

**FUSE:** So what sorts of things are you looking for musically?

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**M.B.:** There's a great pressure to be a composer. You're obliged to get to the top of the musical hierarchy which in our culture is the composer. In Indian music it's different, it's more the player. I may be responding to that pressure. My main strength is as a guitar player. I can produce 'nuggets' on the instrument, small-scale ideas and on other instruments too. But in terms of the 'grand scheme', I don't keep a lot of variables in mind at one time. The presentation and structure which is composing — it's like the business end; it's more the musical equivalent of an administrative function. The composing doesn't come out of nothing, whereas the 'nuggets', the musical quanta do. The studio, for me is to help put those small isolated things together.

**FUSE:** Because you've worked in much larger studios are there many advantages using a small studio with less possibilities and less distraction?  
**M.B.:** Sure. When there are twenty-four tracks, you get into thinking that's how many you should use. For my stuff eight (tracks) is enough. I don't see how you can hear sixteen or twenty-four sounds at once. Sixteen or twenty-four track recorders are designed for rock bands. You immediately tie up five to seven tracks with drums, more for multi-keyboards, more for both straight and processed signals and so on. Its function there is to primarily add convenience when mixing.

**FUSE:** What is the effect of the technologies and tools (processing) that you use at various parts in the recording process in relation to ethnic or more historical ideas of music that interest you?

**M.B.:** Well, I think the word 'idea' is wrong for what I do, the musical 'ideas' come out of my hands, the embellishments are then perhaps ideas. I don't think that electronic technology deserves a class of its own anymore than woodworking techniques. Technology is also wood and iron — materials that some instrument builder decided to use. The electric guitar is everything between the string and whatever makes the air vibrate — that's the instrument. It's not the thing you hold in your hand. The resonating chamber and sound-board have been created electronically. The process is still the same. It affects the style of music but not its important aspects. As for processing devices they are sometimes constraining but you learn to use their limitations to your musical advantage.  
**FUSE:** Ian Murray says it's more

important for artists and musicians to produce small scale publishing projects that can be supported directly by specific community audiences rather than bothering with the state of the Canadian recording industry. Do you agree?

### The industry's scale

**M.B.:** Completely. One major problem with the industry is that it's only capable of thinking on one scale, that is you start to break even when you sell 100,000 records.

**FUSE:** Why do you think that Toronto has become less interesting musically with fewer and fewer exceptions.

**M.B.:** It's not Toronto and music, it's Canada and its contemporary culture. It seems that what does happen is inbred together with an overriding colonial feel. I don't think we've reached a 'critical mass' just in numbers of people. You have to have a sufficient number of people to have a large pool to draw from otherwise you pretend that there is a cultural situation when in fact across the country it still remains a few isolated

individuals.

**FUSE:** Do you think that more collaboration between filmmakers, musicians and video producers could lead to more co-operative employment opportunities?

**M.B.:** Theoretically it's possible, but reputation is often still more important than substance. It's also easier for filmmakers and video producers to re-use canned music preferably by dead composers. They often don't have to pay royalties and the music's set; so the musician can't mess it up.

**FUSE:** One last question. Given the stranglehold of mass corporate music, can oppositional forms of music shift the balance?

**M.B.:** There's industrial music that's made by the music industry. The work I and others participate in is more analogous to a cottage industry. There's such a strong paradigm in our recorded music of what is acceptable. Every attempt at changing the dominant musical structure probably moves a few more people over, but I don't think the balance will really shift or if it's worth worrying about. □

# KEEN



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**Op**, a music tabloid edited by John Foster in Olympia, Washington is a true breath of fresh air. Instead of presenting reader's with writers floating in their own imagined musical connoisseurship, **Op** instead critically covers a lot of ground in a very straightforward fashion.

Musics covered include "R&B, Reggae, Jazz, Blues, C&W, Bluegrass, Industrial, Ambient, Hardcore, Pop, Homemade and Polka." Editorially the paper is based upon Foster's (and his collaborators) interest and promotion of independent music. The paper reviews cassettes as well as records, total number of reviews per issue is some 250. The reviews again on the average are about one long paragraph in length. They are mostly critical without being spiteful. It's obvious that a lot of readers are also contributors. The paper was originally broken into two sections. One part covered new material for review and information needed by musicians and small labels, such as which radio stations programme what sort of independent music, how reliable they are, etc.

The other part is an ongoing alphabetical supplement which allows the paper to be historical. So for the 'H' supplement you have small labels beginning with 'h', artists that fit the 'h' alphabetized category, a one page article on the Hurdy Gurdy and so on.

What is fresh about **Op** is that it is so obviously an intelligent project that provides a reliable service and is getting the active attention and respect it deserves.

Foster who previously had worked in the library of a college radio station (KAOS) says, "I became interested in

every kind of music discovering somewhere along the way that most of the best music is ignored because it doesn't have big money behind it." **Op** is still the only independent music magazine available (there are many other posers) and with 10,000 readers Foster believes that the community he catalyses has become cross-supportive. Ads in the paper are inexpensive and from experience I can say that they do generate interest. Foster is threatening to quit when the paper reaches the letter 'Z' (they are currently at 'J').

Relevance doesn't mean distribution so **Op** is difficult to find. *Subscriptions are \$8 for eight issues in the States, \$16 for surface delivery in Canada. Send to LMN/Op, P.O. Box 2391, Olympia, WA 98507.* If you produce your own music or audioworks on tape or record, this magazine is nothing short of a must.

One of the most important attributes of a magazine, particularly a music magazine is that it contains something you unconsciously wanted to read. Hopefully something that you haven't read before. Given the abundant choice of source material, cultural writing (like mass entertainment pulp) is often endlessly repetitive.

**Collusion** is a new British music magazine edited by four musician/writers who had previously worked together on the improvisational musics magazine **Musics**. Steve Beresford, David Toop, Peter Cusack and Sue Steward have assembled a more accessible (externalised) and dynamic magazine.

Issue 1 (it's the only copy I've seen)

focuses on black music both contemporary and historical from one report on "Rapping NYC" to another on recording sacred flute music in New Guinea. There is a long, well-researched article on the development of Salsa and its Cuban Roots by Nestor Figueras. Among other things it describes Latin music in its North American context tracing the success of such music dependant on U.S. political relationships with Cuba. Barbara Peterson writes on the function of the Nigerian Praise Song: "Singers, by virtue of their mobility and their freedom to ridicule the powerful, are able to satisfy the curiosity of the man-in-the-street for gossip about the great, and to let those in power know how they are regarded by ordinary people."

**Collusion** also contains an article by Leon Thorne on "Who owns what in the UK record industry". Corporate girth is not news but it's worth knowing that RCA and Polygram owners (Philips and Siemens) are all involved in military contracts. Philips developed a "counter-terrorist" night viewing system for use in Northern Ireland. And what about those 'independent' labels like Virgin, Island and Chrysalis? Virgin "is the most successful of the 'hippie capitalists' being able to undercut its rivals by modern stock control and the use of non-unionized labour and hence quick turnover (of goods and workers)."

David Toop writes an investigative 'travelogue' called 'That Burundi Beat'. A 1967 recording of Burundi drummers (from an ex-French colony between Tanzania and Congo) was bootlegged, added to and appeared most recently via Adam and the Ants and BowWowWow. At the bottom of the page is a boxed sub-titled which reads: "LIGHT FINGERS: A continuing series of raids, reconstructions and downright theft within the music business." Malcolm McClaren sold the 'concept' of "this hardest of rhythms" to Ant who now gets royalties for 'composition'. As for the drummers as Toop sneers, "Royalties? Well, at least they're famous now, aren't they?"

Other articles include music that can be heard on Short Wave radio, an interview with Milford Graves, and an editorial on women's music by Caroline Scott called: "The Imperious Snatch".

To end what I began, **Collusion** is not only a good read and source, it's also original. *Subscription rates for the first three issues: £3.50, 15 Norcott Road, London, N.16 (UK).*



Collaborators John Tucker and Fred Gaysek of Keen Kino.

## KEEN

Keen Kino is a private artists' audio recording and music production facility. It is also the group name for Fred Gaysek and John Tucker's collaborative projects. They recently finished renovating their studio and plan to offer their audio services on a project-by-project collaborative basis. Tucker is an artist/musician/composer; Gaysek is a writer/artist. Their collaborations result in performance both live and for tape.

**FUSE:** What's the immediate history of this studio?

**John Tucker:** I moved from B.C. and worked within the Lansdowne Artists' Co-operative. There I met Fred. I had set up a four-track recording studio with Dave Porter. At the time I also worked with John Kaipers who had a four-track studio and we decided to combine the studios as Keen had moved in here in October 1980. By December we put together an eight-track facility that now has developed into this studio.

**FUSE:** Most if not all the instruments you have here are electronic, there's an assortment of interfunctioning keyboards and percussion. Where did the electronic interests come from?

**J.T.:** The recording process made me understand that acoustic instruments become electronic once on tape. My interests are in the sound itself rather than playing techniques so the instrumentation we use becomes highly compatible with the recording process. **FUSE:** And there's the language-liter-

ature interest . . .

**Fred Gaysek:** I got to a certain stage writing poetry where I didn't feel good: I wanted to use language off the page. It made sense for me to get speech back into the air live or on tape. So with John Kaipers' and Dave Porter's assistance and access to York's (University) studios I began working on tape. So my interests evolved into performance of text material rather than as Performance artist. Judith Doyle and myself had established a publishing company in 1978 called Rumour Publications. That had a productive life of about two years where we produced thirteen titles. Judith and I have done collaborative writing and performance together.

**FUSE:** So where's the integration?  
**F.G.:** It's still unresolved, although we are doing the performance later on this month. Previously we have used the music and the voice back-to-back. The performance we are doing at the Theatre Centre is where we will try to integrate the text with the sound. The integration is more one of theme where the language introduces a theme and specific narrative information. Together it enables a landscape to be produced without having to describe every detail. The speech and the sound will be both pre-recorded and live. The live sections will be charged and interactive hopefully to breakdown the distinction. Visually there are rear-projected colour fields and John's white-line drawings. The imagery is technical, urban and architectural . . . there seems to be a growing interest

thematically for people wanting to see work that deals with the society, with economics and particularly with ethics.

**FUSE:** How is the studio going to function?

**J.T.:** The set-up has been a long process in deciding how to provide a certain versatility. It's good for recording multi-track and working out structured ideas either for music or soundtracks for both film and videotape. This equipment for instance is more mainstream than say studio synthesizers. In particular it's suited to rhythmic sound composition. The studio is about 1,000 sq. ft. and has a comparatively large isolated sound booth. It's for our own work and apart from that primarily with artists and others whose projects interest us. We set it up to avoid commercial studio-time that we would have needed to give us comparative facilities for our work. We have to make ends meet but we are open to any projects that would allow both ourselves and others to learn from further collaborative experiences. We worked on the soundtrack for Judith Doyle's new films, worked with Kim Tomczak and the Boy's Brigade. A lot of people have shown interest in learning about the recording process and the use of the musical equipment we have. While we won't have a structured program we hope in some way to meet that interest. There needs to be some initial demystification so that the tools can be utilized by artists unfamiliar with recording studio applications. □

Robert Ballinger

# ear

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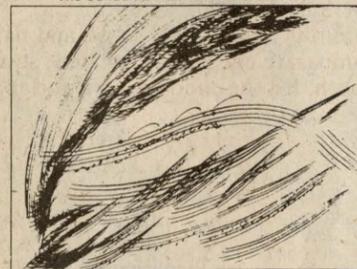
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Sarah Jenkins

## MUSICS AND FUNCTION Geography, place, topography, politics and the recording process.

CLIVE ROBERTSON

The recording process, as we now hear it, delivers more variables than are readily accessible. The shift in musical intention on the part of musicians is often hedged, due to a history of music being prematurely buried by generic description. The interviewer asks the 'innocent' question: "How would you define your music to those who had never heard it?"

Initially I wanted to write separately about the music of Hildegard Westerkamp and the Horizontal Vertical Band (Charles Morrow and Glen Velez) as I perceived that there could be some overlap in discussing the value of 'place' and 'geography' as a social device musicians were using to ground their work. Both, also, are connected through different but similar recording techniques. I am assuming that like the pervasive and necessary function of music as a form of social relationship there is too another, often ignored, social function — that being an identity with living space, neighbourhood, community and environment. The latter is what could be called 'topographic intent', which by definition means a detailed and accurate description of a place.

In a recent issue of *EAR* magazine (titled 'Music and Politics') a number of well-informed musicians made challenging, if automatically inconclusive, statements to the political issue(s). Before defining 'place' as it occurs in the music at hand I want to drop in part of the *EAR* discussion, if for no other reason than to expand the context. Daniel Goode wrote: "The language of our music at the present time is revolutionary. The behaviour of most of the creative musicians responsible for this amazing fact is on the other hand, variously conservative, cautious, self-aggrandizing, solipistic, naive, (and) world weary."

Gregory Sandow was more prescriptive saying: "Musicians who care about politics should be concerned about the politics of the music business. What good do your politics

do you if you don't apply them into your own life? . . . Joining in real political battle is harder than writing pieces with political titles or allegedly democratic procedures, but it does more good. If politically concerned musicians won't deal with injustice in their own field, how real can their politics be? . . . The music world is bourgeois, of course, and that includes the new music community. New music may not seem bourgeois because there isn't much money in it, but its pretty obviously more closely linked to the ruling classes than to ordinary people. . . . Avant-garde artists who get popular are faddy with the rich, like Robert Wilson is, not with the masses. . . . Our real society's outcasts, unemployed urban blacks, listen to disco, which with its elaborate expensive mixes, its fashion flash, and its big league profits can hardly be called music of the people."

Though out of order and context, what Sandow has to say is relevant to many musicians, including myself, who think politically but act musically on some tightrope of potential further alienation. It is, as we all know, harder than granite to chip away uncollectively into the dominant structures of production, marketing and distribution and so we tend to concern ourselves with what Sandow calls "allegedly democratic procedures." Whether he meant it or not, this includes not just forms of composition and musical collaboration but also making 'minor' improvements in the source of music, its intelligibility and its relevance to those who we expect to hear it. This should not be construed as solely a liberal, white dilemma. Political action and organizing is exactly what its meaning implies, whereas 'radical art' (both socially and formally) is somewhat less stringent and open to our inventiveness, idiosyncracies, etc. . . . Politically both must simultaneously exist in our artistic practice if we are, as we often say we are, committed to change. As many would agree, we cannot any longer be

satisfied with merely changing the product lines of musical consumer goods.

Hildegard Westerkamp records soundscape on tape and while she collects isolated urban sounds ("shaped and modulated by the surrounding landscape") she also, through the use of human voice and composition produces an explicit social work. Sometimes it's in the form of docu-sound (musical equivalent of docu-drama?) and often it's revealed within her lyrical music, such as *Fantasy for Horns* (1978) where topography and emotion find their unclimbed acoustic definition.

The Horizontal Vertical Band through entirely different recording means presents human topography by having the performers each move across a separate pair of stereo microphones. While both examples have different musical histories and intentions, they share a desire to articulate an occupational 'place' rather than 'psycho-space'. Recapturing and re-defining 'place' for most of us, who live in an urban environment, implies a political desire. This is in music more important when we understand that the experience of listening to music has become synonomous, for many, with the experience of listening to recorded music.

By 'psycho-space', specifically here, I am referring to that two-and-a-half dimensional phenomenon we are most familiar with in studio recordings. Whether it is an immobile string quartet or a multi-track recording of your favourite band, essentially we are given little or no environmental perspective. The context of the music has been abstracted and therefore through familiarity we are numbed into stereo submission. Books, films, newspapers and even television give us a sense of social context but recorded music, apart from recordings of live concerts, come at us from nowhere. Reverberation as it is used synthetically does not "become a room", but it is accepted as an effect.

'Stereo' is a recording device that originally allowed 'positioning' and 'layering' (yes it's an 'air-style') of recorded sources. Though a development of perceptual illusion, stereo recording and mixing is not much of a leap — particularly with music that has little or no environmental bias — meaning: allowing the listener to be conscious to identify sound to her/his immediate surroundings.

Veteran recording engineers who have produced records in both mono and stereo are particularly vocal about the disappearance of 'live' music,<sup>3</sup> (meaning the tendency to separately record instruments and the removal of all natural acoustics during the recording).

The re-introduction of 'place' is more than the mere identification of a room in which a recording occurs, as I think is evident in the following examples.

The Horizontal Vertical Band's music extends the normal recording practice of 'live' music. Each musician is constantly moving across and around the static microphones. This mobility is often based on the rhythmic structure of the music (and its content) and also allows each performer to control the recorded dynamics of their instruments by moving into, or away from, the microphones. Simultaneously they have control over the stereo 'mix' for, in

monitoring themselves they can hear where they appear on the stereo (left/centre/right) axis. The name of the band is derived from this playing/recording technique. Morrow moves horizontally across a pair of stereo microphones. Velez moves up and down (vertically) again between two microphones. On their recent self-released, direct-to-disc album (**Horizontal Vertical Band**) Velez also uses a third pair of stereo microphones. The H/V Band's music is acoustic, improvisational and ritualistic. The instruments include voice (chanting), trumpet, ocarina, ship's bell, jewsharp, and an array of hand-percussion instruments including Brazilian, Uzbek and South Indian

tambourines, an Irish frame drum and an east coastal stringed drum. For the most part the album creates a delicate, naturally acoustic, space that is compatible with the serious anthropological nature of the music.

Since 1957 Charles Morrow has been composing, organizing and catalysing community-based musics. He has scored film-music, collaborated with bands Vanilla Fudge and The Rascals, and authored many celebratory public events. Over a long time period he has studied and performed North American Indian chants as well as researching and practising vocal musics from many other cultures. Working with percussionist Velez, their music is dramatic but simple. To some degree without their devised performing/recording technique their recorded music would make less 'sense'. The sound appears 'mapped' rather than being an ethnically-derived reproduction. Inuit throat singers or Blackfoot drumming singers carry their environmental acoustics (and therefore the 'genetics' of their culture) in their throats and fingers. The H/V Band's work does not have the same source advantage. Luckily the American melting pot didn't boil itself dry and Morrow and Velez add as much protein as they can. Morrow recently wrote for **EAR** magazine: "Style in my mind, has very little to do with quality. As far as I know no style has ever insured the value of anything written in it. The perfect fit, between what is music and how it is music, creates the spark."

Hildegard Westerkamp's music is accessible mainly through concerts and lately through collaborative installations. The CBC commissioned **A Walk Through The City** (1981) and **Under The Flightpath** (1981) which together with **Fantasy for Horns** were broadcast early last year. Westerkamp lives in Vancouver and has been working on environmental compositions since at least 1973 when she joined the World Soundscape Project,<sup>4</sup> then lead by R. Murray Schafer. In 1979 she produced a seven month series for Vancouver's Radio Co-op (CFRO) "taking listeners to places of acoustic interest, with the intent of sensitizing the community at large to the soundscape." Westerkamp has a far more developed understanding of the potential social and political practice of soundscape than Schafer.<sup>5</sup> This is clearly evident in her work. In 1978 Westerkamp assembled the first version of **Fantasy for Horns**, a composite tape that orchestrates trainhorns, boathorns, factory horns

and an alphorn. She has written: "Horns are interesting because they rise above any ambience, even that of large cities. They are soundmarks that give a place its character and give us, often subliminally, a sense of place." This work is also striking particularly when it is compared with more better known music, e.g. Brian Eno's **Ambient Musics**. **Fantasy for Horns** is mixed from field stereo recordings that are technically impossible for any privileged studio to reproduce. The horns in the work sustain and decay in a natural acoustic soup that has to be heard to be believed. It makes the most enriched, enhanced and processed synthesizer pale in comparison. Westerkamp says of her work, "to me as a composer it is important to speak to the audience with material that is known. I want to use instruments that are known — in the sense that folk music deals with known material."

**A Walk Through The City** (1981) is, in part, a social interpretation of Vancouver as it exists. We hear urban sound: traffic, carhorns, brake squeals, pinball machines, people's voices. We hear street alcoholics apologizing before the microphone; we hear drunken songs. In programme notes for the piece, Westerkamp writes of "perceptual shifts between acoustic reality and our own acoustic imagination." **A Walk Through The City** also contains a child singing and a poem written and read by Norbert Ruebsaat. The poem was recorded in the studio and mixed in with the soundscape. Ruebsaat's voice adds another human component, the poem charges the "acoustic imagination". The voice in comparison with the voices on the street is theatrical when it screams: "Somewhere a man is carving himself, to death, for food."

In her interview with Westerkamp (see **Musicworks** No. 15, 1981) Donna Zapf acknowledges that, "in Westerkamp's composition, both referential and acoustic meanings of sounds are dynamically present. The environmental reference provides the composer with a means of expressing the political framework of her composition, as well as providing the listener, again as part of the composer's intention with easier access to the composition."

Unfortunately while Westerkamp is successful in taking us back along a path than through enculturation we screen out (environmental sound). **A Walk Through The City** compositionally also expects us to accept as 'natural' the proven inaccessible forms of traditional musique concrete. Or

simpler, if an urban environment already includes peoples' voices and conversation is there any clarity in further loading the bases with 'external human components'?

**Under the Flightpath** is a composition which documents interviews with Vancouver residents who live and sleep in close proximity with near-constant exposure to the sound of jet engines. Westerkamp here deals with as Zapf describes, "human adaptability as it becomes passive with its unconscious acceptance of an unacceptable situation." The work is not a straight documentary as Westerkamp again utilizes her sensitivity and subtlety in composing the sound materials.

Both Westerkamp, the Horizontal Vertical Band and others are attempting to counter the narrow boundaries of what has become the social relationship between musician/composer and the listener. Though it's hardly a conclusion, Donna Zapf draws attention to the opportunity by saying: "Musicians, usually concerned with the details of their art, an art which in any case seems illusively detached from the world, ignore the political context and implication of their work. There is a tendency to see music as intersecting with society only in the formality of the concert space, radio broadcast or gramophone recording." □

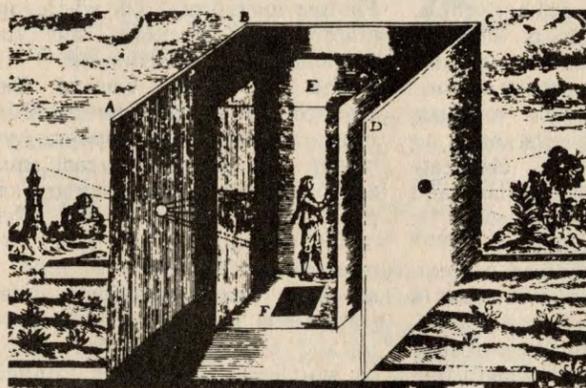
#### Footnotes

1. In earlier drafts I did include Jon Hassell's recent work which presents a more utopian view of 'place'. Given that this was intended to be a short review it proved difficult to deal adequately with the material.
2. A more complete view of Westerkamp's work can be found in the Donna Zapf interview in **Musicworks**, West Coast Issue No.15, 1981. Hearing her work almost by accident last summer prompted this piece.
3. See copies of 'Modern Recording' for regular interviews with veteran engineers.
4. A re-appraisal of World Soundscape Project can also be found in **Musicworks** No.15.
5. Westerkamp interviews Schafer about his project 'Music for Wilderness Lake' in **Musicworks**, No.15.
6. An important work of Westerkamp's I don't discuss is **Cordillera** (1981), a collaboration with Norbert Ruebsaat as it would expand the limited scope of this article.

**The Horizontal Vertical Band's direct-to-disc album is available from Other Media 365 West End Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10024. (\$10) Hildegard Westerkamp's work will hopefully be presented in Toronto later this year. Any correspondence can be passed on through FUSE. EAR and MUSICWORKS are advertised elsewhere in this issue.**

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## A TIME TO RISE

### A film which is used to mobilize support and to organize farmworkers.

The European 'Peace Movement' represents a bizarre assortment of competing forces, but how did a Canadian short about the formation of a trade union become a part of that movement?

**A Time To Rise** received little official attention when it played at the 1981 Montreal and Toronto International film festivals, as is usual in Canada for a film that is overtly political. But the film won the Silver Dove at the 24th International Short and Documentary Film Festival in Leipzig, East Germany. The theme of the Festival was "Peace."

**A Time To Rise** is a product more of the Canadian political scene than of the film industry. Filmmakers Jim Monroe and Anand Patwardhan met in Montreal during a film festival and decided to work together based both on their own past work and a mutual interest in a newly developing farmworker's union.

Monro and Patwardhan approached the National Film Board to finance their project. Their concept was to create a film which could be used as both an organising tool for and a history of the Canadian Farmworker's Union which was about to be formed by berry pickers who were on the move in B.C.'s Lower Fraser Valley. This concept seems to be working; the CFU shows the film to farmworkers, as well as to other trade unions and the general public, to mobilize support. The NFB on the other hand who now distribute the English version, did so only after an uphill battle which delayed the film's completion. The NFB hesitated not so much out of political conservatism, but claimed they had to be convinced that Monro and Patwardhan had the ability to realise their project despite their past experience.

Monro's last film, **For 20c a Day**, is an intrinsically fascinating account, taken mainly from archival material, of Canadian workers organising in the labour camps of the 1930's. Monro's work was sponsored by the trade union movement in B.C.. The sight of thousands of determined and organised workers of many nationalities, marching on Ottawa, makes you



Children work alongside their parents in the fields.

wonder how we got where we are today. **A Time To Rise** is a 1980s' reflection of the same social forces. You don't walk away from it and say how terrible things were in those days. It's happening now.

#### Why do immigrants become farmworkers?

**A Time To Rise** is one of those few films that reveals what life is like for an immigrant community in Canada. The participants, from B.C.'s East Indian community, tell their own story about their working lives and why they need a union. The reason why these people have little choice but to do farmwork is never far below the surface. This is the same community that was marooned in the Burrard Inlet on the Kamagata Maru in 1914 and then shipped back to their deaths in the Bay of Bengal; the same people who were prohibited by law from working in the mines and mills, who were denied the right to vote until after the Second World War, and who now suffer the terror and insults of the likes of the Ku Klux Klan. The fact that the majority of farmworkers in the Lower Fraser Valley are East Indian and Chinese is objective proof of our society's racism.

Monro and Patwardhan wanted to

make a film that would have a social use. Patwardhan explains; "I do not see myself as a filmmaker. I see making films as a part of my political work." Both the film's politics and its style can be traced back through Patwardhan's earlier work and through the ideological development of Indian progressive politics, both in India and within the East Indian community in Canada. Cesar Chavez's Indian stereotype was shattered when he came to help celebrate the founding of the CFU in April, 1980. Beef curry was the main course — CFU members were not Gandhian-style vegetarians. Patwardhan admits that his political formation was heavily influenced by Gandhian non-violence and later Chavez's North American adaptation. He spent a year as a United Farm Worker volunteer in California. Patwardhan's first Indian film, **Waves of Revolution**, is a documentary shot during and as a part of the "J.P. Movement" in Bihar. Patwardhan caught the brutally violent response of Indira Ghandi's security forces to the Gandhian movement which lead to her infamous "Emergency".

Patwardhan started making another film, **Prisoners of Conscience**, during the Emergency and completed it two years later after Indira's

electoral defeat. The title is not used in the sense of Amnesty International's term. It is about Indian revolutionaries whose consciences forced them to take action and who became the tortured prisoners of a reactionary state. The best shots are those that were taken surreptitiously. Patwardhan entered a prison on the pretext of being part of a crew who were on location to shoot another Bombay-style romantic musical comedy. Similar tactics were used in **A Time To Rise**. The growers wouldn't talk to Patwardhan because he was East Indian. Monro interviewed growers on the pretext of doing a film about agriculture. The growers' views on unionization, decidedly negative, were clipped out and the rest of the conversations were thrown in the trash can.

Patwardhan proposes to use **A Time To Rise** as part of his political work in Bombay upon his return later in the year. An Indian audience will discover what life is really like for the community in Canada.

The founding of the CFU reflects the political development of the West Coast East Indian community. The attention of the progressive forces within the community is shifting from a blind preoccupation with the problems of the homeland to the community's immediate need to fight racism and exploitation in their work ghettos. As has happened with other immigrant groups, East Indians now demand the same rights that Canadian workers were shown to have fought for in **For 20c a Day**.

#### In the fields

"White people don't do it", explains Pritam Kaur in the film as she prepares for another dawn to dusk day in the fields. Pritam demystifies the alienation which surrounds the farmworker's life. She came to Vancouver from the Punjab five years ago. She finds herself and her son living in poverty. They work in the same berry fields because there is nowhere else for them to work. For her there is no choice. White people don't work from dawn to dusk in the hot sun without drinking water for \$1.50 an hour. White people aren't exploited by labour contractors. When Pritam gets laid off, she cannot get U.I.C. When the fields get sprayed, Pritam is back picking before the pesticide has even settled. Because there is no daycare the children are left on their own. An East Indian baby drowned in a bucket of drinking water in a shack that farmworkers call home. A family cannot

live on what one worker can pick, so the children and the old people work alongside their parents. A grower gives his explanation: "The mothers get to know their children a lot better out there in the fields."

Monro and Patwardhan began shooting at the founding convention of the CFU on April 6, 1980. Cesar Chavez arrived later that month, with some advice to the growers: "Negotiate with the Canadian Farmworkers Union. You may have a lot of money, but we have a lot of time." The Jensens didn't take Chavez's advice. Jensen has been shut down since the CFU struck his mushroom farm a year ago.

Jensen's Mushroom Farm was the CFU's first certified bargaining unit. Close to half the work force is white. The fact that they are in the same union has shown the East Indian community that the problems, or at least the solution to the problem, is one of class as well as colour. Other completely white units have followed, and organising has begun in Ontario where only a small fraction of the province's 70,000 farmworkers are East Indian.

On the night of the union's celebration of their first certification, staff member Sarwan Boal was the victim of a Vancouver-style 'Paki-bashing'. From his hospital bed, Boal recounts how he would have been killed had not some white Jensen workers intervened. The political point is made without sermonizing.

Chavez is shown in a private discussion with CFU President Raj Chouhan. Cesar confesses that because of the UFW boycott, the price of lettuce went up by 1/8th of a cent. But he argues that if that is the cost of the right to decent wages and working conditions and to human dignity, then the consumer will have to pay it. But food prices do not depend on the price of farm labour. Chouhan blames food corporations and agribusiness for high food prices.

Marchers urge farmworkers to join them at CFU rally.



#### Who controls food prices?

In the film a man in the street, an Italian consumer who happens also to be a worker, points to a Safeway sign to identify both where his food dollars go and who controls the system that determines the prices. A militant Chouhan shows the union's determination not to be co-opted into the same system.

Pritam Kaur gave Monro and Patwardhan their philosophical punch-line: "What will the future bring?" Then she gave them the scene that turned their documentary into a drama.

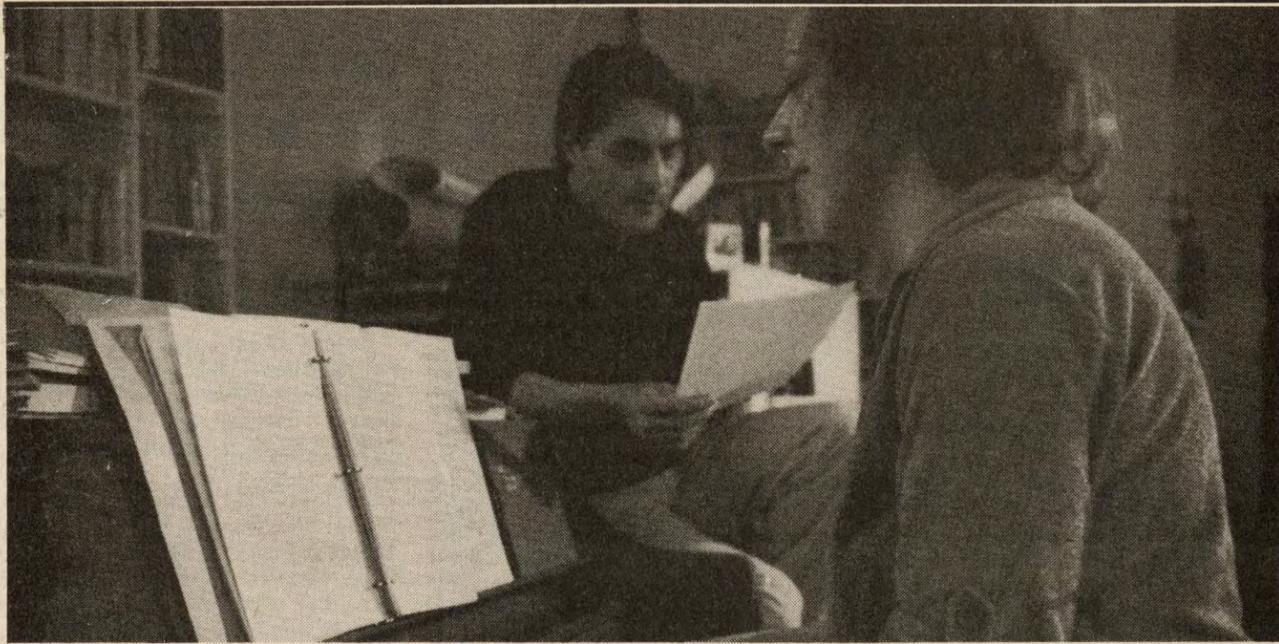
The union had organised a march of its supporters near Abbotsford. They wanted to make the CFU known to the berry pickers. It was a festive-like occasion with the demonstrators dancing and chanting to the insistent beat of Punjabi drums. Suddenly Pritam Kaur came running out of one of the fields to join the demonstrators, leading a group of thirty workers behind her. She takes over the demonstration the way she takes over the film. She tells the audience that the struggle is real.

The film begins and ends at 5 a.m. The alienation expressed in the film's opening sound-track (an A.M. radio show) is replaced at the end by music that came from the struggle. The title song was written by one of Patwardhan's 'Prisoners of Conscience', a blind Punjabi poet who has spent much of his adult life in Indira Ghandi's torture chambers. "Workers and peasants, sharpen your instruments, the harvest is near."

The instrument to be sharpened is, of course, the union. □

Frank Luce is a lawyer living in Toronto and member of the Law Union.

courtesy NFB



Filmmaker Derek May interviews Toronto artist Vera Frenkel.

## OFF THE WALL

### In his study of the Toronto 'art scene', May has omitted the social process.

#### Off The Wall

Derek May, director  
Produced and distributed by the National Film Board of Canada, P.O. Box 6100, Montreal, Quebec H3C 3H5, 1981, 55 minutes.

**My ebony eyes is coming to me, From out of the skies on Flight 12-0-3 "Ebony Eyes", Everly Bros.**

It's not difficult to fault Derek May's new film *Off the Wall*, his NFB-produced 'anthology' of the Toronto art scene, circa 1980-1. The film is being promoted as being, "elusive and subtle, full of hints and nuance, the film circles around, under and through its subject," which is a fair description. The "elusive circling", we are initially made to believe through gallery dealer Jack Pollock's Churchillian words ("never before in the history of man has art been so desired and so confusing") is a flight into the fog. Once the viewer is told that he/she is confused, with license in glove, the film soars off into the white screen.

May is a personal filmmaker (he "sketches" with film) which in the past has produced courageous results. Shot in his Montreal home *Mother Tongue* (NFB, 1979) is a 'home-movie' portrait

of his family: his Québécois wife, himself, and two French-speaking children. May is the Cockney-generated husband and father showing himself under true Anglophone tension. It is close enough to be considered both an objective and unflattering portrait. His wife, by occupation an actress, delivers unscripted cutting lines like: "I'm tired of speaking English! When I say I'm tired . . . I mean my mouth hurts, my tongue is tired, my lips ache." Perhaps unintentionally, perhaps not in *Mother Tongue*, May made himself into the meat for a sandwich with the English NFB and hostile French critics playing the part of the submarine.

Derek May directed, wrote the script and read the narration for *Off the Wall*. As an investigation he had the time, the camera and, for research, he had the access. He understands the differences between art and product, between corporate and private; he can identify the 'fools', the 'bastards' and the mythological 'saints' and he objectively leaves the audience to draw their own conclusions from his own subjective structure.

*Off the Wall* features Arnold Edinborough (Canadian Business &

the Arts) — the man who hates art but loves the power and attention which art delivers. It also stars Jack Pollock as the 'generous' fool, various examples of public art, the AGO, Art's Sake Inc. (an artists' co-operative), drawing classes at the Ontario College of Art, a concrete Roman bath, Toronto rooftops at night, sundry live geese and a few unexplained dead fish. The 'Torontonian' music that cements these frames together is the sound librarian's favourite: Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 32. The artists featured are Mendelson Joe, Vera Frenkel, David Buchan, Billy the Kid, Collette Whiten, General Idea, and the Artists's Jazz Band.

#### Artist as "endangered species"?

In *Off the Wall*, May's narrative style is an exaggerated swagger similar to that found in the more intimate and closed-circuit language of many artists' videotapes. Close to the beginning and at the end of his film he reads: "You have just graduated; you are an endangered species. The bars are open, the Toronto art world is open. You are almost a good invest-

ment. Success is no longer the kiss of death. The banks are waiting to be decorated." Taken away from its immediate context (Toronto) — wherever the film will be seen — these words don't mean very much and what they can mean is incomplete. In the initial sequence of a 1st year drawing class at the Ontario College of Art, May describes the class's model George Rathwell. "He has watched the fashions come and go, he has survived all the bloody-isms of thirty years including a few of his own." In Toronto? What "bloody-isms"? The scuffle over abstract or colour field paintings? Conceptual art perhaps? Or the low-key tiffs over video and performance? Whatever it is Toronto has never been an international hotbed for anything that deserves such excitement as "bloody-isms". What dates *Off the Wall* or the notion of art that the film represents is its 'concern' for the de-materialization of the object, tossed around by its opponents as 'conceptual art'.

The film does have its polarizations but they are not taken far enough to show which various elements conflict and why. Too many players are missing. We are shown artists, we hear the words of one dealer, and one business-liaison representative. The two managers are allowed to voice their opinion of the artists and the artists are allowed to focus on themselves as personalities and philosophers. By omitting critics and historians, funding agency officers, artist organization spokespeople and the viewing audience, we are made aware of the poles without any essential analysis.

#### Where's the night life?

The artists are shown isolated from each other, which though it may be a good general metaphor for Toronto, the view is specifically false. David Buchan works with General Idea who exhibits in the same space as Collette Whiten. All of them know and have connections with Vera Frenkel. Could it not have been possible occasionally to spin these lives together as they really occur? Given what the artists say, with the exception of Mendelson Joe, Vera Frenkel and General Idea, the uninitiated viewer is given too little to go on. Many of the artists are identified through stereotype descriptions and a few are allowed to struggle to their own defence. Collette Whiten isn't. About her we hear: "(her work) has been called morbid, funereal and sadistic . . . (Whiten) has said of her

work, 'It's a way of being intimately involved with my friends'. Case closed. Mendelson Joe, folk artist and musician is re-accused by the filmmaker of being a professional bohemian. "I'm not a bohemian Derek," the artist replies, adding, "the eccentric (bohemian?) is the guy that drives the Lincoln Continental." Joe then tells the filmmaker that if your daytime life is happy the rest of your life will be good. The filmmaker then asks, "How's your night life?" The artist foils, "You mean when I'm asleep?" But what about night life, those artists *must* be weird all the time. Apart from the neon signs on Yonge Street, we hear about those bars where artists and art students play but we don't see any. Except we are taken to the Cabana Room, a legitimate spot but there's no-one there but David Buchan performing for the camera. Where's the real thing, why not show Buchan with his audience? We see a mechanical cybernetic structure built for a party-event by Billy the Kid. Earnestly, Billy explains how it works, but we don't see it work at the party. We hear Edinborough describe such work as a con-game and yet we never see the social events to refute his blathering. We do see General Idea perform within the tight control of their own package transplanted into May's film.

And we don't see any 'contemporary' work process. We do see an artist/student looking at his painting — we are shown how an artist contemplates and with the help of Beethoven the narrative charges the poesy with a little tea and sympathy. "It's very unlikely that anyone else will stand in front of this canvas with the same sense of involvement. It will be covered by tomorrow's inspiration or tomorrow's doubt. Such is the legacy of the recent past." What about the present, after all isn't this film attempting to challenge what its audience perceives art to be about? Where are the artist spaces, the production facilities, the photographers, the filmmakers? Where are the issues, the artists' conferences? Where is feminism, where are the politics and where is the implied sex?

Derek May recently said that a confrontation of issues head-on might make for a good personal essay but a boring film. Spinning the coin I'd rather call for a boring film than for a document that aims to please by attempting to be "always entertaining". There are at least five possible good films initiated in this film, but as the fog continues we are left waiting for any one of them to land. □

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# SOLIDARITY

## Persky's book on Poland's trade-union movement immerses itself too far in history-in-the-making.

At the Lenin Shipyard  
Poland and the Rise of the  
Solidarity Trade Union  
Stan Persky  
New Star Books, Vancouver  
253pp. illus.

Eighteen days in August of 1980 focused world attention upon Poland as it had not been since the Nazi's preamble to the Second World War. In the situation of a deteriorating national economy inextricably linked with the world-wide general contraction of productive growth and a shift in balance-of-trade mass deficits, the working class of Poland struck for independent, self-governing trade unions. In those few days beneath a powerful red-and-white graphic symbol of aspiration ten million people became *Solidarnosc*, Solidarity. The awesome rhetoric of freedom had taken on the daring of the word about to become substance.

Author Stan Persky, a teacher of sociology and political science at Northwest College, Terrace B.C.,

travelled to Poland in the spring of 1981. Confounded by his students apathy toward the issues and piqued by the desire to see for himself what was happening he spent three weeks there. In that time he concentrated his attention upon the Gdansk region and specifically the Lenin Shipyard where he interviewed participants in the events of the founding of the Solidarity union.

Out of that experience he brought away an anecdotal interpretation of the history about the signing of the unprecedented Gdansk agreement and the faith that he would reproduce the truth, as one veteran shipyard worker had admonished him, in "(t)he very simple words of a worker." He was asked, "that people talk about Poland as it truly is. Because the people of Poland don't deserve to be talked about in a bad way. What we hear from abroad, the shipyard worker said, "is that people think we Poles don't want to work, and that we want Saturdays off even though we're in debt. It's not true that we only want Saturdays off because we're lazy

people." Most importantly he was told, "we have to know for what and for whom we're working. We have to be sure that our work won't be wasted. We want to work for ourselves."

With the homely force of that intention in the foreground, the "professional reader", as Persky calls us, is faced with the prospect of an album of sketches, a prologue to history, and unfortunately, in the unfolding of martial law in Poland just after publication, what now appears to be a load of excuses for rushing a 'topical' story into print.

But bad timing is one thing: conceding to style over content and analysis to provide for popular accessibility is another. Sometimes it washes depending on the grace and leftward tactfulness of the critic. Sometimes it doesn't.

### Making Political Hay

Perhaps it is too easy to second guess the past performance of writers and commentators upon Solidarity with

General Wojciech Jaruzelski's "military council for national salvation" presently in power. Yet what did I learn about the Polish struggle and big-time East/West politics from reading *At The Lenin Shipyard* that might have suggested Jaruzelski's successful use of military might and dictatorship? Without reading between the lines precious damn little I'm afraid. Nobody, including Persky or, to his credit this time, the Solidarity leadership itself even seems to have doped-out the loyalty of the Polish army.

While the Soviets may squirm for the moment at the impolitic dominance of the army over the Party, both the Russian communists and the U.S. have been making political hay at the expense of the Polish working class' astoundingly romantic grab for power. It is no trivial matter that the situation in the country continually poses a question of spheres of influence, balance-of-power. Crisis management seems perpetually at the edge of collapse. The interests here have possibly more to do with the nature of global suicide than with one nation's freedom. When left liberals can see that not even 10 million people can be allowed the scope to upset the world appletart perhaps they will get over simply trying to milk public sentiment from very complicated and potentially globe hazarding tensions.

From the outset however, Persky determined to "novelize" his story. His mandate was to speak to workers and intellectuals in the West about the Solidarity struggle as he saw it in very ordinary language. After all, living history can be a series of pictures of, though sensibly short of steaming samovars, early morning trolley rides and pamphlet drops if required. Creatively reconstructed debates and dialogues interspersed with dates and events presumably can have a ring of truth about them. The point finally comes up though that too much is being given up to simple description as a methodological device. The popularization falls down where the story becomes tentative, too much like sequel stirring. The last chapter has more substance per line than all the earlier chapters have per paragraph.

The consequent questions for investigation with much less curious demure in a more leisurely attended book are contained still within the premise and much of the material of this one. In the rise of the Solidarity union why, for instance, did the intellectuals come to dominate the discussions that produced the final

agreement? Obviously the influence of the Catholic church is important but it needs to be more adequately flushed out in the 'deeper' book. That the Western banks hold the country's economy hostage can be expanded upon even in ordinary language. Such information might prove useful to explain for whom the shipyard worker was working.

Surely we should also know what is built in the Lenin Shipyard. Whether nuclear-dealing subs for the Warsaw Pact or inoffensive fishing factories are produced in the works has bearing upon the facts of the matter if not the humanistic sentiments. We ought not to be allowed to hide from the contradictions forever.

### Better to produce a principled polemic

There are questions as well about the official-line, Party use and misuse of ordinary language and subsequent conceptual appropriation and thought manipulation that are touched upon in this book but are sadly unelaborated. And what about the loyalty of the Polish army? It can readily and equally be asked of Persky what he exasperatingly asked of his belaboured students: What about Poland?

Yes, what of it? The garbled news out of that troubled country since martial law was imposed gives little hope to the resurrection of Solidarity. The image of a savagely squelched union can set forever the view that the fix was in.

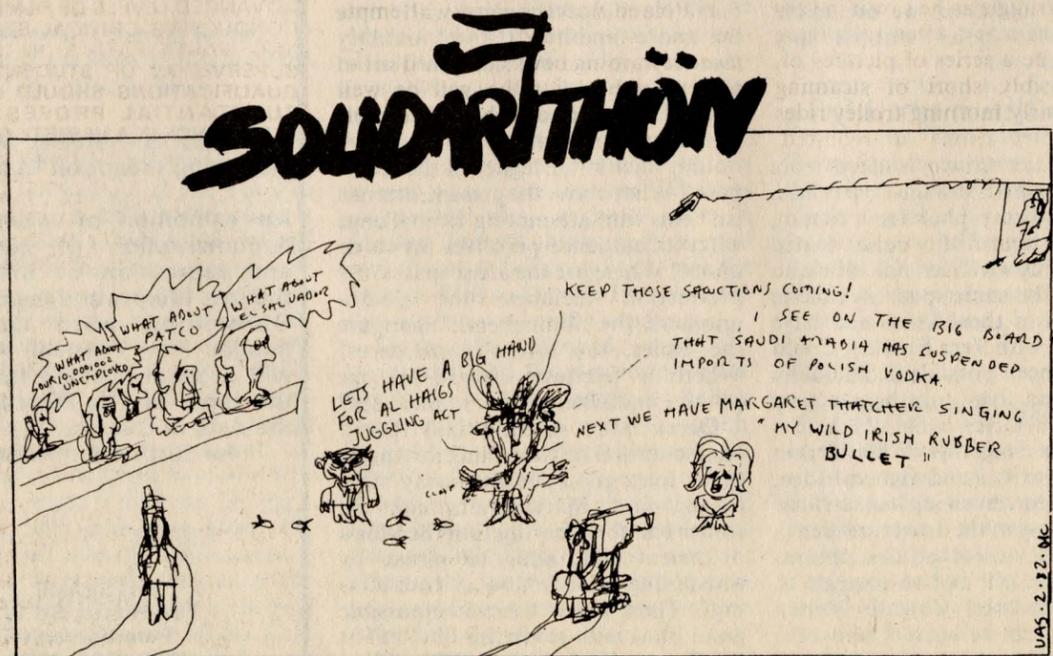
If Poland watcher Persky attempts the more ambitious and probably more rewarding book contained in the present publication he will be well advised to avoid credibility scrambling assertions such as: "(t)he major victory of the Polish working class in 1980 was the creation of permanent institutions of representation independent of the Polish "workers" state." That kind of gaffe is less likely to happen when expedience is sacrificed to reflection and a respect for entrenched power. The 'golly awful splendour' of history in the making could use a bit of cynicism. The leftist author if he's ideologically sharp will see that detailed storytelling no matter how humble of purpose is less objective where human affairs are concerned than is principled polemic. A further effort in that consideration won't be remaindered as *At The Lenin Shipyard* is very deservedly apt to be. Bob Reid is a writer living in Toronto. He last wrote "Twilite's Last Gleaming" in *FUSE*, Vol. 5 #2

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We are attempting to persuade the Canadian Library Association to index *FUSE*. As you may know Canadian periodicals are not automatically indexed. To assist us in obtaining this essential service please write a brief recommendation outlining your particular use of the magazine. *FUSE* has been self-indexed for the last five years but our source materials and analysis have insufficient research visibility. What our writers give deserves to be taken. Seriously. Send your letters to INDEX, Fuse Magazine, 615 Clinton, Toronto M6G 2Z8 (by May 1st 1982, please)

### FILM POSITION

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY EXPECTS TO MAKE A VISITING FACULTY APPOINTMENT IN FILM PRODUCTION AT THE RANK OF ASSISTANT PROFESSOR. THIS POSITION INVOLVES TEACHING AT THE INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED LEVELS OF FILMMAKING, CONDUCTING CRITICAL SEMINARS, AND PARTICIPATING IN FACULTY SUPERVISION OF STUDENT FILMS. QUALIFICATIONS SHOULD INCLUDE SUBSTANTIAL PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE IN A VARIETY OF FILMIC GENRES (I.E., DOCUMENTARY, DRAMATIC, FILM ART), A DEMONSTRATED ABILITY TO TEACH THE CRAFT OF FILM AT ALL LEVELS, AND SOME FAMILIARITY WITH CONTEMPORARY FILM THEORY AND CRITICISM. CANDIDATES SHOULD BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT FACULTY RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FINE AND PERFORMING ARTS DEPARTMENT, DUTIES TO BEGIN SEPTEMBER 1, 1982. PREFERENCE WILL BE GIVEN TO CANDIDATES ELIGIBLE FOR EMPLOYMENT IN CANADA AT THE TIME OF APPLICATION. LETTERS OF APPLICATION, A COMPLETE CURRICULUM VITAE, AND NAMES OF THREE REFEREES SHOULD BE RECEIVED BY FEBRUARY 28, 1982, AND SHOULD BE SENT TO: PROFESSOR GRANT STRATE, DIRECTOR, CENTRE FOR THE ARTS, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, BURNABY, B.C., CANADA V5A 1S6.



Union Art Service

## BOOKING OFF

### Lack of imagination and insight spoils collaborative projects.



BOOKS BY ARTISTS  
TIM GUEST • GERMANO CELANT

**Performance Text(e)s & Documents**  
Chantal Pontbriand, editor  
Proceedings of the conference Multi-disciplinary Aspects of Performance: Postmodernism. *Parachute* (Montreal) 1981, 237 pp. paper

**Books By Artists**  
Tim Guest, editor  
Art Metropole (Toronto) 136 pp., paper, \$12.00.

All are available from Art Metropole, 217 Richmond St. West, Toronto, Canada.

Neither of these books deserve to be ignored. I say this because once such projects (and each book is more than just another publication) get their share of promotional notices they tend to become part of our forgettable history while also serving as foundations upon which other projects get initiated.

Each of these books has more than one story to tell because their production has taken place and been supported on the basis that they will represent some form of community desire to have articulated in print both what work is and what it is about. In different ways and to differing degrees,

each book comes complete with its own set of stories around what was intended as a common project and what finally was produced. Outside of their intent, possibly they do suggest some forum for discussing the direction and aims of certain aspects of Canadian artistic activity, namely performance, artists' books, artist publishing and the current function of conferences.

**Performance Text(e)s & Documents** is edited by Chantal Pontbriand and published by *Parachute* magazine, a bi-lingual quarterly of which Pontbriand is also the editor. *Parachute* wears its editorial policy openly on its sleeve. Based upon American and European traditions of minimalism in music, performance and visual art, its requisite Canadian content though not as intensely demarcated, often falls within what could be called stable 'international' trends. This new book extends a conference **Multidisciplinary Aspects of Performance: Postmodernism**, which took place in Montreal in October, 1980. In addition, the book documents a series of performances that followed the conference itself. Though close in time and place, the possible forum that could have taken place between artists and critics was non-existent. The book is a well produced, thorough document containing abstracts of the papers published, and apparently is being well-received.

In style, substance and personnel *Parachute's* recent Performance Series/Conference follows somewhat the pedigree of their 1977 event, **03 23 03**, which was billed as an "international encounter of art and artists". As we mature or streamline, what appears changed is that the "encountering" is no longer necessary.

A begging question: why should critics with theories of their own to create (and be proud of) agree to attend any conference and freewheel their analysis hawking 'free' advice and telephone numbers? Added to this malarky we also know that artists and more particularly art critics (some

would prefer 'historians') are largely uncritical of where or for what purpose they will read or enact their latest work. For very practical reasons artists and free-lance art critics treat such occasions as one source for making up their precarious and split self-income. That said, practitioners and theoreticians need each other, somewhat; and there is surely room and time for debate: artists are often brighter than their work, and in the flesh, critics are often more valuable than their papers.

#### Live debate missing

It is true that **Performance Text(e)s & Documents** allows us to read the latest thoughts of some nineteen critics, six of whom reside in Canada and have some idea of how to articulate their immediate environment. Some essays were inspired by the topic "postmodernism", others blatantly ignored. It. Bruce Barber in a paper titled "The Function of Performance in Post-Modern Culture: A Critique" refers to the treatment of performance in the mass media (*Life*, *Maclean's*, CBC's "Morningside") asks questions of the media that could be used unintentionally as comments about the conference. He says, "There was no real attempt at providing a survey of performance work(s); no insights given as to why these forms of production exist, nor how they relate to cultural production generally or of their efficacy, worth or value as art works." There are of course many more basic questions that could be asked that would not be too pedestrian for a conference of this nature, given the lack of live debate that we continue to experience.

I am struck with how little the second half of the book — the documentation of the performances — establishes its connection with the first half of the book — the essays by critics. Of the fifteen artists featured (four live and work in Canada), most share something basic in common. That 'something' is relative simplicity. In contrast to the statements by most

of the critics, Max Dean, Tom Sherman, Colin Campbell, Laurie Anderson and others tell us something that we can understand as being concrete. We may not agree or sympathize or even be interested but they are definitely not lost in the 'time-freeze' of postmodernism.

#### Performance — is it just 'between friends'?

It seems, though I could be wrong, that the intensified study of language, behaviour and media as *general* observations will not get us any closer to any understanding of why artists continue to produce work in spite, and often in ignorance, of what critical theories follow or parallel their actions. No matter how much time is taken getting the chronology or the terminology 'right' it still seems to bear little relationship to what is done and why. If, and it's not a small *if*, performance as it has developed from 1919 (when a Futurist exile put up a tent and hung rags and other tactile objects, invited his audience to come at night and then chased them through the tent labyrinth on a motorcycle)\* has had a *social* function, visible to more than close friends, then the discussion will go nowhere unless we begin to discuss the practice as it relates to its immediate society. This does not deny nor denounce the need for the 'larger picture', historical or otherwise.

Serious painting, serious sculpture, serious music has, if we read the literature, been beaten to death by academics marching behind their flags of scholarly righteousness. Critics, curators, patrons and unfortunately some artists sniff that stuff out like glue, only to reel back not knowing where they are or what they should do next. Hence the commodification of 'postmodernism' and the pseudo-excitement of all being together, edgy on the edge. If you want to read the latest travelogue (of the dog and sled team Benjamin Buchloh and Michael Asher) in Buchloh's epic paper "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture" then **Performance Text(e)s** is worth its weight. On a less self-grand scale, essays that are worth reading include: "The Singer or the Song" by John Howell, "Performance Hic et Hunc" by Thierry de Duve, "In-Competence and Performance" by George Rocque, and the piece already mentioned by Bruce Barber. In connection with what

\* Dick Higgins suggests this as the first Happening in *Postface*, Something Else Press, 1964.

I said at the beginning (of precedents) it's hard to justify repeating this type of event in Canada unless there is some major overhaul of what it is supposed to do and for whom. "International recognition" is too much of an abstraction at the best of times and in connection with some performance that is struggling to deal with region, class and gender it is patently absurd.

**Books by Artists** is the third in a series of monographs published by Art Metropole, the Toronto-based facility that distributes artists' books, videotapes and houses a sizeable archive of related materials. As the series proceeds from **Video by Artists** (1976) and **Performance by Artists** (1979) to the current book, the subject matter to be published is placed in an increasingly advantageous position — allowing, if desired, some revealing historical overview.

**Books by Artists** is substantially thinner than its predecessors, containing only two essays between which are sandwiched a section titled "Documentation" which illustrates some fifty-eight examples of artists' books, each photo being accompanied by generous photo captions. This new book also has doubled as a catalogue for a major touring exhibition of the same name curated by Tim Guest, and supported by National Museums of Canada. The result is a fair catalogue but an inadequate volume on what is now an established historical phenomenon, namely, books by artists.

Both essays are overviews from sympathetic critics. Guest's appears first and is too similar in style and substance to the much earlier essay "Book as Artwork 1960-72", a reprint of Germano Celant's article written in 1973. The names on the cover of this book imply that both Italian art critic Celant and Guest are co-editors of this book and as such the marketability of the book leans somewhat heavily on Mr. Celant's international reputation.

Though Guest traditionally states in his Preface: "(the book) makes no attempt to be a conclusive definition or a complete survey" it also can be said that it is somewhat dry and lacking in information if we compare it to, as just one example, the special Artists' Book issue of *Art-Rite* (No. 14 Winter 1976/7), which kicks off with no less than fifty succulent statements on artists' books from producers, critics and distributors. I haven't bothered to count how many books *Art-Rite* surveys but it also attempts to categorize (no less provisionally), and

in addition slaps and fondles, reminisces and laughs, argues and rejects, capturing much of the spirit and a lot of the substance of what artists' books have been about. In comparison **Books by Artists** demonstrates the sombre effects of over-institutionalisation, undoubtedly hoping to appeal to the library and educational market.

#### Artists discover books

Several years ago I remember being confronted by a Vancouver writer and small literary press worker on the needless self-protective rhetoric of the term 'artists' books'. Given that small press history preceded the bulk of artists' books I didn't easily dismiss the criticism. Richard Kostelanetz put it this way: "As someone who made books before he made 'art', I feel gratified if not amused by 'artists' discovering the virtue of books — that they are cheap to make and distribute, that they are portable, that they are spatially economic (measured by intrinsic volume) and that they are infinitely replicable . . . My major quarrel with the category of 'artists' books' is that it defines work by who did it rather than the nature of the work itself. The term thus becomes an extension of the unfortunate community custom of defining an 'artist' by his or her own initial professional ambition or worse, his or her undergraduate major. Artistic categories should define work, rather than people, and the work at hand is *books* and book-related multiples, no matter who did them."

Because **Books by Artists** is short on essays and hence viewpoints, the book tends to inflate the phenomenon and unconsciously idealise it. Which is not to dismiss Germano Celant's contribution, though its chronological approach suggests some form of inclusivity that could be challenged. Fortunately Celant's essay ends in 1972 at which time the proliferation of artists' books was so great that few, if any, artists, critics, or collectors could claim more than a stylistic overview. (Critics like Celant, and he is far from alone, largely concern themselves with 'heroic' periods of artistic development and to some degree like surfers enjoy riding on the crests of waves.)

The selection of works in the show, and therefore the book, is likewise disappointing and arbitrary — though it could be said that Art Metropole's tastes prevail. Including the recently published **A Book Working**, though a warm promotional gesture is somewhat silly considering the

## BOOKING OFF

hundreds of books that have been omitted. Mitchelangelo's book is missing, so is Jerry Dreva's 'sperm-filled' book, Alison Knowles or Beveridge and Conde's *It's Still Privileged Art* — the list is endless. There are no books from Eastern Europe, nothing from Japan to name just two geographical areas that have produced unique indigenous contributions to the artist book form. If the intention was to show within the documentation examples of variety there is too much repetition in the choice. A lot of artists like Beuys, Acconci, Burden, Anderson and Warhol seem included as much for the marketability of the book itself as for their contribution to the genre.

Guest in his introductory essay re-emphasises what I suggest has been a problem of terminology. He writes: "To begin with, artists' books can be described as those books which have been produced by artists, distinct from other kinds of art publishing in that they're not tied to the conventions of literature or of illustration. The principle theory of artists' books is that instead of being about art they're books that are intended as artworks themselves."

"Like a cat approaching a Christmas present . . ."

Ted Castle (at the time Director of

TVRT Press) has been one of many producers offering self-criticism which Art Metropole's book lacks. He said: "The terrible thing about artists' books is that it contains all the radical flaws of the concepts of art, artist and book. . . . Ever being on the lookout for new forms and on the lookout against banality, artists approach books warily, like a cat approaching a Christmas present, and once having gotten into it we seem to produce books like a dog produces dogshit, carefully depositing our books in certain places at the requisite moment for souvenirs. One of the problems of artists' books is that they are too easy to do. Another problem is that they are only taken seriously if the artist works primarily in other ways. . . . Many artists have a horror of literature, to which the concept book is indebted. Not always, but frequently, artists are people who have either been intimidated by books or who have despised books."

Guest's essay serves to iron out many wrinkles in the experience of producing artists' books. He says: "Uniqueness is exchanged for numbers in an attempt to reach a different or wider audience, to make art more accessible and so more effective." The relative drop in the production of artists' books suggests that such books are no more an

effective vehicle for wider dissemination than many other art forms. In fact it could be said that unless costs of production are already written off that producing artists' books today requires regular doses of blind optimism. But perhaps a statement that more adequately describes the needs of both the producer and the 'reader' would be this by artist Daniel Buren: "I am interested in books when their purpose or interest fits with my interest, or when they teach me something or rectify some wrong concept I had, or look beautiful, or make no sense, or are extremely well done, no matter which is the classification or profession of the author. In connection with that, the majority of artists' books are meaningless."

What finally disappoints about this new book on artists' books is that even though it is meant as an introduction it is totally unambitious and adds virtually nothing to what already has been said about artists' books. It doesn't even do a very good job of synthesising existing materials. History can never be attractive or effective while it lacks such basic inspiration. I am not so sure how objective books like this one can be but external editorships would seem the wisest and most productive move for future Art Metropole publications. □

## LISA STEELE

## CHANGELESS CHANNELS

### As video artists clean up their act, they're losing more than just the rough edges.

#### Four Videotapes

*Prime Cuts* by Paul Wong, *Wonder Woman* by Dara Birnbaum, *O Superman* by Laurie Anderson and *Remnants From the Beginning of the Period of Destruction* by Alan Sondheim.

Screened at ARC (Art/Culture Resource Centre), Toronto, January 18, 1982.

(Wong, Birnbaum and Sondheim tapes distributed by Art Metropole, Toronto. Anderson's tape available from The Kitchen, New York.)

It has long been promised — or threatened, depending upon your point of view — that video, even artists' video, will find a 'market'. Pay TV and cable and home buyer have been lurking in the background, with Betamax in tow, money to spend and endless hours to fill. In this advancing future, artists, it would seem, have only to wrestle the twin Hydras of "accessibility" and "technical quality" into submission and they too will be able to use their own tapes like money cards in the Green Machine of

consumer video.

Tired of playing Cinderella at the television ball, artists have taken to heart the problem of technical quality. Artist-run access centres are upgrading their equipment and expanding their repertoire of possible production techniques and many independent producers are availing themselves of the services of commercial post-production video houses to clean up the rough edges of their work. It's good-bye glitches and hello slow-mo in the 'new' artists' video. Colour is



Production still from Paul Wong's *Prime Cuts*.

locked in as tight as the cargo door of the Space Shuttle and sophisticated multi-tracked sound that begs for playback on at-home stereos is the current state of the art.

Accessibility, however, is another matter. Making one's work accessible involves a reading of the audience and a choice of content and presentation. A recent evening of videotapes at Art/Culture Resource Centre (ARC) suggests a crisis of accessibility. Perhaps it was just an unfortunate combination, but three of the four tapes presented, while definitely not filler material, were uncomfortably close to visual fast-food.

### I move, therefore I am

Paul Wong's *Prime Cuts* (1981) — the title a play on the meat-market style of self-presentation as well as a reference to his editing — answers the question: How much leisure time is too much? The tape is occupied by a group of average-looking young people who appear to have unlimited amounts of free time to fill, which they do relentlessly. They bike, sail, picnic, work out, swim and even sleep with purposeful concentration. They are perfect embodiments of capitalism's advanced state where even the exertion of human energy is capable of being harnessed and commodified into a saleable product complete with the necessary accessories. They are what they do and they do nothing.

As Wong has detached this group from any economic determinates, they are productive only in the sense that they move. (Implicitly, of course, they also buy, surrounded as they are by their site specific apparel and all the appropriate gadgetry for their many activities.) As individuals each is perfectly anonymous, perfectly sexless; culturally and socially they are

eunuchs.

While *Prime Cuts* may sound like *Darling* for the 1980s, it isn't. The tape lacks any ironic edge, any bite, existing instead within a nauseating neutrality. It neither criticizes this sterile manifestation of consumer/ad culture nor condones it but simply represents it. And given the dominion over imagery which advertising already exercises on our planet, further representation or homage from artists seems like the last thing called for now.

### Let the Force be with you

Laurie Anderson's videotape of her hit single "O Superman" hardly qualifies as an independent production. It was produced by her record company, Warner Brothers, and looks it. Anderson, whose work often makes art out of gimmicks, can't perform the same transformation in this tape. Restricted by the small screen and the short time period of the tape, *O Superman* presents itself like a cross between a new-wave makeup ad and a test tape for a post-production house. It's got everything but video's kitchen sink: super-impositions, parts which are captioned for the deaf, phony smoke, phony snow, back-lighting on spikey hair, even a radiating star-burst light in her mouth at one point. At times in her live performances, Anderson is able to convince an audience of her sincerity, even when the piece itself smells like snake-oil. She does this with will power and the force of her own presence because if there's one thing Anderson has, it's presence, at least in person. On this tape, however, the combination of eyeliner and camera-angle conspire to turn her into a Keane painting — very much the Big Eyed Girl in *Black Leather*. Anderson would have been

## CHANGELESS CHANNELS

wiser to have removed herself entirely from this piece of video-promotion and illustrated her simple song about power and military madness in the U.S. with something other than herself. And artists could take a lesson also. Often it is not the complexity or sophistication of our messages and intent which is perverted when it enters the 'big leagues' but instead a parody is created due to the very simplicity and directness of the original statement, as neither of these qualities is particularly of value in the marketplace at the present time.

### Sex for kids

Dara Birnbaum's *Wonder Woman* (1980) combines two elements which she has used in several tapes: a quick, repeat-edit of off-air television material followed by a line-by-line character generated text of a disco song. The material in both cases is the comic-book character *Wonder Woman*. Over and over we see Lynda Carter (WW) in her cute little stars-and-stripes outfit enter a clearing in the woods, twirl and give off a ball of special effects "energy". She is *Wonder Woman*, she is *Wonder Woman* and Birnbaum's editing only further celebrates this cultural mutation rather than answering any of the questions about why we, as a people, need this kind of child-like representation of sexuality from our heroes — sexuality which is viewed as an out-of-body explosion rather than a physical experience for anyone. Surely at this point we know that television is a repressive structure, presenting imagery geared specifically to the 13 to 16 year old viewers — those whose desires are active but who can't yet drive — a truly captive audience. It seems an unnecessary indulgence for artists to further extend this imagery even with tongues planted firmly in cheek.

At the end of Birnbaum's tape, the lyrics of the disco tune "Wonder Woman" roll by. And nasty lyrics they are. "Get us out from under . . . Wonder Woman" chant the girl singers, and finally "I want to shake thy wonder maker." The fear of woman's power and sex is so naked in this song that it is transformed into service, which of course is, culturally and socially and politically where our power still 'belongs'. The inclusion of this is the only comment offered by Birnbaum and any analysis is entirely dependent upon the viewer's predisposed attitudes, but anything more direct would have no doubt bordered too closely on feminist analysis for

## CHANGELESS CHANNELS

Birnbaum's taste.

### An honest confusion

Alan Sondheim's *Remnants From the Beginning of the Period of Destruction* (1977) perhaps because it was made earlier than the other works presented on this evening, didn't concern itself very directly with questions of "accessibility". Unself-consciously naive, neurotic and obsessional, it was the one tape which was definitely located somewhere other than in the vacuum of mass media imagery. It was located very definitely within an individual's fears about the future. Combining found footage of very early cartoons, roving home-movies of a post-natural disaster, landscape, newsreel shots of a young Richard Nixon boarding a train and stumbling on the steps as he does so, and an animated mobious strip, Sondheim links all these parts into *Remnants*... with a connecting voice-over, which he reads with quiet, earnest dedication even at the most absurd times — as when he 'interprets' the cartoon, which, he claims, was found in the aftermath of whatever disaster has occurred. Gradually, the action depicted — a goofy horse clomping around — gives way to interpretation of the scratch on the film as Sondheim-the-searcher ferrets ceaselessly for 'meaning' in cultural artifacts. What happened? What's happening? he questions. Always confused, he's never cynical. His fears are human: "large scale terror . . . devastation" as well as completely personally obsessional — his fixation on an apparent assassination attempt made on the "pseudo-Nixon", who, post-Holocaust, has risen from the past like a recurring nightmare.

*Remnants* . . . is too structurally dense and convoluted to ever be "accessible" in any sense and this of course is neither heroic nor necessary. But in contrast to the more recent tapes of Wong, Birnbaum and Anderson, it seems curiously honest in its critique of social actions and in its embodiment of the fear of probable destruction of life as we know it.

At this point in the development of independently produced video works, it does not seem necessary to hide behind a cynical and neutral attitude toward the culture. Criticism need not be hidden or masked in look-alike products which promise analysis and offer only repetition of already-existing values. Having rejected the methodology of the 'counter-culture' need not mean a rejection of the ideals.

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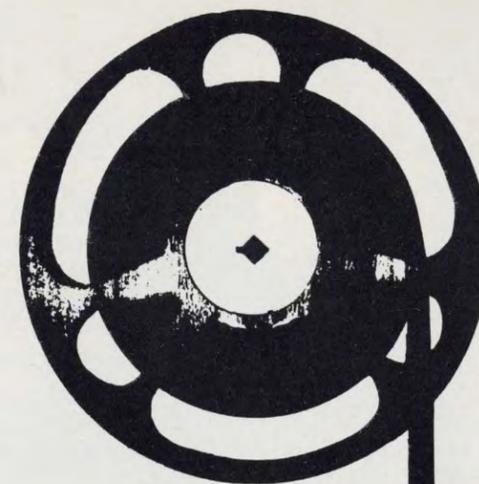
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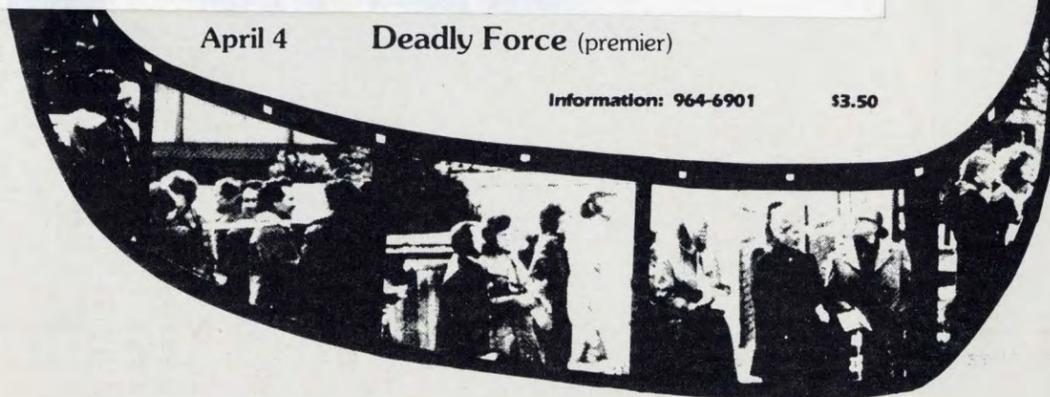
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## CHANGELESS CHANNELS

Birnbaum's taste.

### An honest confusion

Alan Sondheim's *Remnants From the Beginning of the Period of Destruction* (1977) perhaps because it was made earlier than the other works presented on this evening, didn't concern itself very directly with questions of "accessibility". Unself-consciously naive, neurotic and obsessive, it was the one tape which was definitely located somewhere other than in the vacuum of mass media imagery. It was located very definitely within an individual's fears about the future. Combining found footage of very early cartoons, roving home-movies of a post-natural disaster, landscape, newsreel shots of a young Richard Nixon boarding a train and stumbling on the steps...

so, and an animated mob Sondheim links all these *Remnants*... with a connective over, which he reads with earnest dedication even at absurd times — as when pret's the cartoon, which, was found in the aftermath of whatever disaster has. Gradually, the action departs from the way to interpretation of the film as Sondheim-the ferrets ceaselessly for 'm cultural artifacts. What's happening? he Always confused, he's never His fears are human: "the terror... devastation" completely personally obsessed with his fixation on an apparent Nixon", who, post-Holocaust risen from the past like a nightmare.

*Remnants*... is too dense and convoluted to be "accessible" in any sense a course is neither heroic nor But in contrast to the more recent tapes of Wong, Birnbaum and Anderson, it seems curiously honest in its critique of social actions and in its embodiment of the fear of probable destruction of life as we know it.

At this point in the development of independently produced video works, it does not seem necessary to hide behind a cynical and neutral attitude toward the culture. Criticism need not be hidden or masked in look-alike products which promise analysis and offer only repetition of already-existing values. Having rejected the methodology of the 'counter-culture' need not mean a rejection of the ideals.

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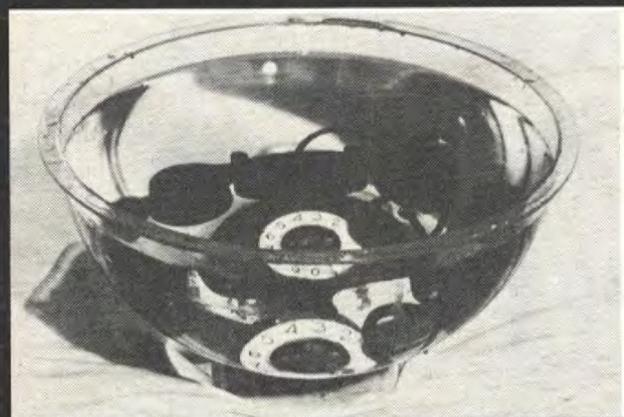


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