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WOMEN WARTIME WORKERS IN THE B.C. SHIPYARDS

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# FUSE

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## KENNETH COUTTS-SMITH 1929-1981

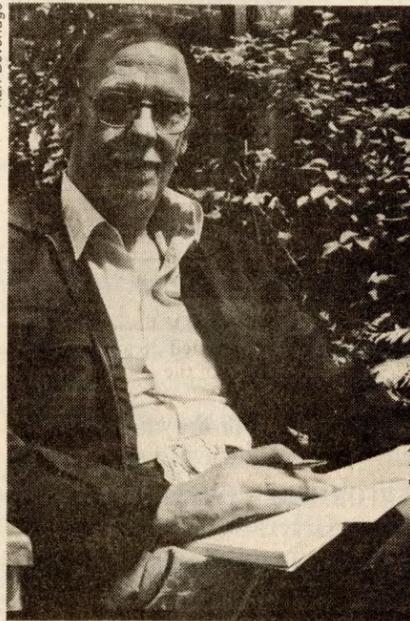
On Friday, September 4th 1981, Kenneth Coutts-Smith — artist, art and cultural historian — died in Princess Margaret Hospital, Toronto of lung cancer. As requested he was cremated in Toronto without a service. A wake was held in his memory and attended by close friends. Coutts-Smith's contribution to the development of socio-cultural criticism was appreciated by many artists, fellow critics, historians, publishers and curators in a number of countries. In Canada we were fortunate to have the services, talents, criticism and experience from an artist/writer whose work moved closer towards his socialist ideals.

Kenneth Coutts-Smith was born in September 1929 in Copenhagen. From 1950-52 as an art student he briefly studied with Leger and Szabo later working for Picasso as a potter's assistant. While developing his own painting he became sub-editor of *Truth* magazine, London in 1957. This was followed by working visits to Paris in 1959-60 and St. Ives, Cornwall in 1960-1. From 1962-65 Kenneth Coutts-Smith was manager of New Vision Centre Gallery, London during which time he began to seriously write criticism on a regular professional basis. From 1965-7 he was co-founder and Associate Editor of the British magazine *Art & Artists* where he wrote articles on Eastern European work, early Performance and Happenings and kinetic art. From 1964-9 he also freelanced for BBC Radio and Television both for the British and Polish Service.

1970 saw the publication of two books: *The Dream of Icarus, Art and Society in the Twentieth Century* (Hutchinson's, London and Braziller, New York) and *Dada* (Studio Vista/Dutton Pictureback, London and New York). Before his death Coutts-Smith finished editing a new book titled, *The Demise of the Avant-Garde* which has been submitted for publication. Other writings which were in preparation included a full-length study on Cultural Colonialism and a short book examining Australian Aboriginal Culture. Helen K. Wright is also preparing an anthology of his poetry, covering the last thirty years.

From 1967-80 Coutts-Smith taught at art colleges and universities. He taught history at Liverpool College of Art (1967-8) and the School of Architecture, Liverpool University (1967-8). He taught at Harrow College of Art, London from 1968-70 and then moved to Calgary where he was Assistant Professor of Art History, University of Calgary (1970-3) and Chairman of the Art History department (1972-3). In 1974-5 he was Associate Professor of Art History and Director of Exhibitions (Gallery One, One, One),

University of Manitoba, Winnipeg. In 1978-9 he taught semesters at the University of Guelph and York University, Toronto. From 1979-80 he was Associate Professor at the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, Halifax.



Karl Beveridge

Emigrating to Canada in 1970 Coutts-Smith lived and worked in Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax (becoming a citizen in 1979). Since 1963 he delivered many public lectures and papers at symposia and conferences. Of these some were: *Violence in Art: Cinematic Evidence* (ICA, London, 1964); *Technology and Modern Art* (St. Catherine's College, Oxford, England, 1965); *An Analysis of Yugoslavian Art, Specific Problems Facing the Artist in a Socialist Environment* (Belgrade Triennale of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, 1970); *The Demise of the Avant Garde* (public lecture series, University of Manitoba, 1974); *Theses on the Failure of Communication in the Plastic Arts* (A.I.C.A., Warsaw, Poland, 1975); *The Politics of Planning* ("Habitat", UN Non-Governmental Organizations' Conference on Human Settlement, Vancouver, 1976); *Regionalism and the Decline of the Metropolitan Art Center* (A.I.C.A. Canada, Toronto, 1977); *Myth of the Artist as Rebel and Hero* (in absentia, Caucus for Marxism and Art, College of Art Association, New York, 1978); *The Political Content of Mainstream Contemporary Art* (Joint UAAC/AICA, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1979); and *Post-Bourgeois Ideology and Visual Culture*

(Nuevas Formas da Participacion Social de las Artes Visuales, National University of Mexico, Mexico City, 1979).

In 1980 Kenneth Coutts-Smith became the first Canadian to hold the lectureship at the Power Institute of Fine Art, Sydney, Australia. Coutts-Smith's 1980 Power Lecture, *The Demise of the Avant-Garde* was repeated in eight other Australian and five other New Zealand cities. During his stay in both countries he gave a further eighteen lectures and did more field-research into both Aboriginal Tribal and Transitional art and studies on cultural colonialism. (In 1975 Coutts-Smith was commissioned by the Research Institute of Northern Canada on behalf of the Métis Association of the Northwest Territories to write a report on Métis history researched from the files of the Hudson's Bay Company. Later in 1979 he also researched Inuit art at Baker Lake, N.W.T.) Since 1952 Coutts-Smith had over three hundred articles published in journals, newspapers and magazines. His most recent writing has been published in *Fuse* (see below), *Praxis* (*Post-Bourgeois Ideology and Visual Culture*, late 1981), *Vie des Arts* (*Australian Aboriginal Art*, December 1981) and *Impressions* (*Dadaism: a socio-cultural approach*; October 1981). His eleventh one-man show (since 1952) titled *Mediations on a Landscape* was shown at *Eye Level Gallery*, Halifax (1981) and will travel widely in the next few years.

Kenneth Coutts-Smith's later critical writings appeared in *Black Phoenix* (England), *Praxis* (California) and *Fuse*. In 1979 he was appointed Contributing Editor to *Centerfold* (now *Fuse*) and Advisory Editor to *Praxis*. Articles appearing in *Centerfold/Fuse* were: *Crow Dog, Spiritual Revival and Corporate Repression* (August 1981); *Labour Struggle, a History of De-Development in the Maritimes* (March-April 1981); *Soup* (May 1980); *CBC's "Riel" - Media Genocide* (July 1979); *Censorship in Art, A Different Pot of Paint Thrown in the Face of the Public?* (April-May 1979); *Black Phoenix: Third World Perspective or Art and Culture* (March 1979); *Art and Social Transformation* (August 1978 - also guest editor of this issue).

Kenneth Coutts-Smith was a member of C.A.R. (Canadian Artists Representation), Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art, British Society of Aesthetics, College Art Association of America, and University Art Association of Canada.

Much of his final work done from April 1981 was made possible by generous assistance from the Canada Council. □

## CRTC AND PAY-TV Will a few Canadians get the go-ahead to realise their own American dreams?

A number of what could be considered to be important social and cultural issues facing Canada are dealt with outside of the given democratic process in government-initiated hearings and commissioned studies. Out of this a new class of citizen has emerged known as the *intervener*. To be qualified, such person or persons must have a wire service for a brain, find enough free time to research the sometimes unresearchable, have the ability to write fluently and in bulk, possess a hot temper but a cool voice, and last if not least be messenger of specific information or experience that will make the recipients stay awake. (For ongoing students of Canadian history the 'intervener' of the Eighties has replaced the 'animateur' of the early Seventies.)

Apart from that which has been called the Constitution, we have witnessed in recent months: the end of the MacDonald Commission (on RCMP and government wrongdoings); the Kent Commission (on newspaper monopoly ownership and its resulting editorial influence); the Applebaum-Hébert Study (on future federal cultural policy) and now the CRTC's (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission) PAY-TV license hearings. Unless there are a few diligent journalists among us (who so far have failed to appear), I have yet to hear of anybody who can claim that analytically they have managed to corner all of these political balls into one pocket.

The CRTC, as most of us know, has been pushed, shoved and dragged into holding the current PAY-TV license hearings. In April 1980, appearing before the Canadian Association of Broadcasters Convention, the new chairman of the CRTC, John Meisel, and Francis Fox, federal Minister of Communications addressed the theme, "The New Frontier". Meisel was reported as saying that he would place socio-cultural goals before particular economic goals. On the same occasion, Francis Fox suggested that the role of the public broadcasting sector might be to keep Canada Canadian while the role of the private sector might be to keep Canadians in Canada. As the *Broadcaster* put it (May 1980, Vol 39 No. 5), "Meisel wants to preserve the cultural identity of Canada and Fox wants to keep the broadcaster economically healthy."

### Licensing a political crisis?

Well as we have seen it happen, the initial application ambush came, so to speak, in an unlit narrow alleyway complete with

goons and glistening knives; the gang of communications entrepreneurs who had already filled their pockets from cable or broadcast license interests were to return to the scene of the crime. Once the rumble was on all sorts of more 'civilised' folks came rushing to hear what the noise was and while they were available decided they too should take the riches and re-distribute them to the poor. The CRTC is governed by the Broadcasting Act which requires the regulatory body to "safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada." (Such loose words could of course be misused to support the wishes of any potential dictator).

From the 52 PAY-TV license applications, the CRTC selected 28 and though I have not seen some of the applications for regional licenses, all of the national (federal) license applications are lacking in any vision that could change the functional



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direction of television. My own bias and only interest in television is in its democratic development and the cultural/political value possible if new programming was based upon a socially representational model. Mass culture, as we Canadians know it, is essentially the remnants of an enforced American dream, enforced to the point of becoming a debilitating nightmare. I also think that there is good reason to believe that corporate culture will potentially spark off a socio-political conflict that could be seen as the second stage of a popular rejection of late capitalism as portrayed and heroised through mass entertainment in general and television in particular. While the so-called "cultural revolution" of the Sixties was commodified and satirised, the film, music and television industries as a result have become less auspicious both for cultural producers and for the 'educated' audience. If the mass media is to be used to further mask and

misinform us of our economic concerns, so our entertainment will be less entertaining. It is not inconceivable therefore that what we choose *not* to do with our television could by itself catalyse a widespread political crisis. The only minority that should *not* have its hand in controlling a further expansion of the Canadian television service just happens to be the very minority that most likely will hold such control: the business and would-be business sector.

### The vital question: What's to be produced?

There is within the current PAY-TV debate a struggle for significant guarantees of employment for both Canadian film and television workers. However I suggest that it cannot be a simple exchange of wages given and private profits respected. The value of an expanded Canadian television production industry hinges completely on one factor: what is going to be produced? If this is not a concern — if it is only a make-work vision — then perhaps we should (as producers) insist on the development of a less hypocritical, less morally corrupt industrial base. If the product that we assist in, give our experience and knowledge to, is culturally useless and moribund, why pretend that the work itself is within the cultural sphere?

The CCF (Council of Canadian Film-makers) is itself an umbrella organization representing 8,000 writers, actors, technicians and production personnel working in the English Canadian film industry, whose organization members (and their memberships) would be the first to benefit from the increased volume of production which is anticipated from any form of PAY-TV. The CCF submitted an intervention to the PAY-TV license hearings. Beginning their research and analysis into PAY-TV in 1974, the CCF has produced a number of thoughtful documents. In discussing the structural failures of Canadian television the CCF states: "this structural failure arises largely from the fact that private Canadian television has been built with borrowed tools: American assumptions, technology, program formats, market mechanisms and, along with them, the programming they were designed to depend on. As a consequence, Canadian television has a delivery capacity that it doesn't have the means to program domestically; a debilitating conflict between financial and social purposes which has created the system's hostility to its own content; and a single system policy which cable has made fiction."

Section 3 of the Broadcast Act as quoted earlier also states that the Canadian broadcasting system should be varied, comprehensive, have high standards and Canadian creative resources. It's interesting to note that it doesn't use the word "entertainment", something which the PAY-TV applicants fail to notice in their rush to appease the CRTC. None of these same applicants are willing, in their licence applications, to display any integrity that might lead them to state that entertainment must be subservient to our culture and not, as we have known it, exactly the reverse. What we have known as popular or mass culture is not a fixed model that will eternally be gagged, bound and tied to the marketplace. It is only our allegiance to this historically temporary state of affairs that paralyses our future vision.

### Few licenses revoked

The CRTC announced (April 1981) that it would judge applicants on the basis of three factors: 1) percentage of schedules devoted to domestic productions; 2) the number of Canadian programmes acquired; and 3) the percentage of revenues spent on domestic material. The CRTC, which has revoked only four licenses since 1968, has barely a chance in a million of making any of the licensees live up to their meagre promises once a license(s) is granted. Without considerable precautions (which the CRTC shows by delaying decisions) PAY-TV could join banks and oil companies in the saloon bar where no government agency dares to enter.

The fact that there are (with one exception) no relevant choices among the twelve federal license applicants is, to a large degree, due to who the applicants are. There is also among the twelve, one applicant who is applying under a *universal* mode — which means that the additional PAY-TV service will be mandatory for every cable subscriber at a projected cost of \$2.50 per month. This is *Tele-Canada*, also the only federal applicant that is incorporated as a non-profit company. The other nine license applicants have opted for a *discretionary* model, where cable subscribers have the option to rent the service for a projected \$12-14 per month. The CRTC's 1978 Background Paper on Universal Pay Television dismissed the optional model, saying that all discretionary proposals were inconsistent with the objectives of the Broadcasting Act and concluding that: "The universal system should be considered if governments conclude that by Statute it should be mandatory for all cable subscribers to contribute to the financing of Canadian programming to ensure that Canadian objectives are achieved." However the CRTC this year reversed its decision and requested PAY-TV applications based upon the discretionary model. Whatever caused this change of political mind it has in effect lessened the possibility for Canadian content on PAY-TV as well as making it much tougher for the future dis-

cretionary licensee, in terms of financial viability. Again the CCF in its intervention outlined the economic realities of the Canadian television market... "1) that the market is small and its resources limited; 2) that the population is scattered creating inevitably large distribution costs; 3) that the market is neither linguistically or socially homogenous and must support costly dual language and regional programming; and 4) it is always cheaper to import than produce entertainment programming."

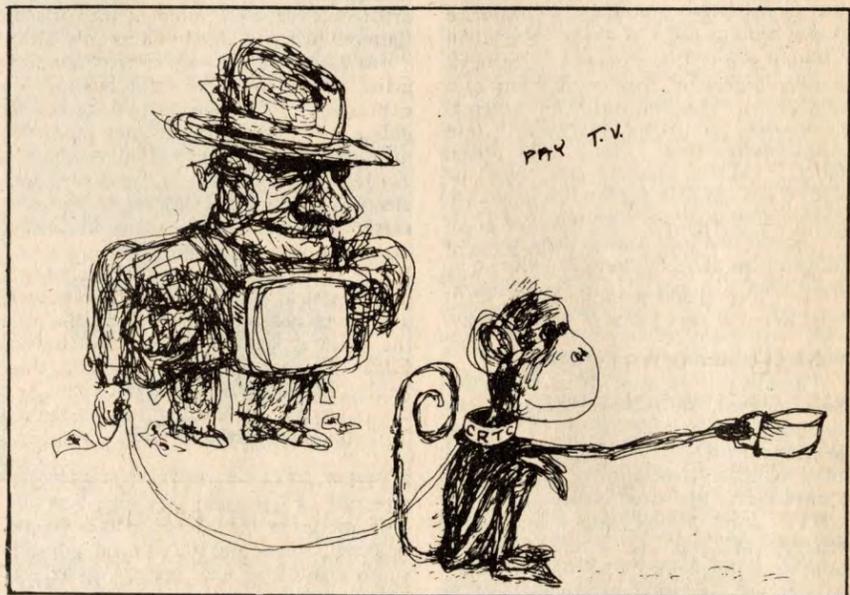
Adding to the mystery of the CRTC's PAY-TV model switch, the CCF also draws attention to the CRTC's March, 1981 CROP Inc. survey which indicated that only 15 per cent were likely to subscribe to discretionary PAY-TV — more if it had Canadian content than if it was predominantly American. The NFB also commissioned a CROP survey at about the same time in which 42 per cent of the respondents said they would prefer a universal system over a discretionary system, 8 per cent said they would prefer the discretionary system. (41 per cent of the respondents said they were not interested in any form of PAY Television.)

The twelve applicants probably tell us

### Applicants from the Canadian Establishment

*Astra-Tel*, from Montreal is backed with money from the Bronfmans, is controlled by the publisher of *TV Guide* magazine and *Astra Bellevue* (a film and TV production company and distributor in Canada for U.S. product). Next to be rejected should be *CTVA Communications Corporation*. In this instance, it's the Eatons, the Bassetts and their broadcasting network, CTV. *CTVA* should be followed by *Showplace Communications Inc.*, that contains within its ranks *Argus Corporation* and *Conrad Black*. Next comes the *Canadian Premiere Television Network Ltd.*, whose board members include those who already control 80 per cent of the Canadian cable TV market. (Remember cable? They're the people who sold you hot air balloons at inflated prices.) So after clearing the most obvious monopolists, who's left.

*Aim Pay-TV Corporation*, *CBR Sports Communications Ltd.*, and *Q Channel* are lightweight applicants largely from the industrial independent production community whose ideas of PAY-TV are



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something that we already know, although their organizations add evidence to the Canadian monopolist picture. It's a mixture of old Canadian Establishment, former federal cabinet ministers, broadcasters, producers, cable operators and arts agency administrators. There is among the applicants a wide range of conflicts of interest that is remarkable for both its intrigue and complexity. Some applications come from spin-offs of existing broadcasting enterprises that themselves are riddled with broken public promises, while others (from the Canadian Establishment) are looking for potential empire-expanding possibilities. The latter proposals should be the first to be refused.

not-so-subtle copies of the American model.

This leaves *Tele-Canada*; *Performance*, *The Canadian Entertainment Network*; *LAMB*; *First Choice* and, for comparison, *Premiere*. *First Choice* describe themselves as being "an entertainment venture, pursuing a philosophy of an outward looking Canada, deeply rooted at home." Their management includes ex-CBC, CTV, CITY-TV, NFB producers, executives, etc., with the addition of a producer of "high quality specials for U.S. television." *First Choice* is decidedly slick with phrases like "(we are) repatriating the box office." And it is basically a movie channel. *Performance* is managed by Jack

McAndrew, former head of CBC Variety and former Liberal Secretary of State Hugh Faulkner sits on the board of directors. *LAMB* (Lively Arts Market Builders) also calling itself the C-Channel (Culture) is an interesting combination of cultural administrators, big business, and a surprising lack of vision considering its own self-billing. *LAMB* is managed by former *Saturday Night* publisher Edgar Cowan and includes on its board Arthur Gelber, who is currently chairman of the Ontario Arts Council, and Louis Applebaum, former Director of the OAC and currently Chairman of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee. (Applebaum's shares in *LAMB* are being held in trust.) *LAMB*'s board also includes G. Hamilton Southam and Wilson Southam, both of whom sit on the board of Southam Inc., which in turn owns 32.8 per cent of all English language newspapers in Canada and is co-owner of Infomart. Infomart is the biggest producer of data for storage in Telidon memories, and the biggest operator of Telidon data systems in the world. Southam Inc. also controls 30 per cent of the voting shares in Selkirk Communications, itself a television, radio and cable conglomerate. Also on *LAMB*'s board is Michael Cowpland, co-founder of Mitel Corporation (electronic telecommunications equipment); Maurice Strong former head of CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency); Douglas Fullerton, former chairman of a number of corporations and original Treasurer of the Canada Council; and Howard Beck, Q.C., one of several legal advisors and author of texts on law, acquisitions, and mergers. (no comment). Accusing such people of having conflicts of interest is tantamount to accusing them of drinking coffee for breakfast — it's a way of life. Cultural and economic interests fit hand in glove, they know of no other way.

### LAMB — what gets lost in the shuffle?

What is more interesting by implication is the 'Ontario Arts Council influence' in at least advising this applicant. What have Messrs Applebaum and Gelber learned that they could transform into a public cultural TV service? The answer is either not very much or we must imagine that their involvement in the planning was minimal. *LAMB* is proposing, in part, something similar to the CBC-2 concept with an emphasis on the performing arts: ballet, opera, music and dance. It is rumoured that *LAMB* played its part in ensuring that the CBC-2 license application was squashed. Given what *LAMB* is proposing, is it much different than the policy of the Ontario Arts Council with regard to its understanding of technological culture?

In its submission to the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee (*LAMB* shareholder Arthur Gelber talking to *LAMB* shareholder-in-trust Louis Applebaum) the OAC outlined five (what it termed) "Convictions". The fourth in this list was

"The Role of Technology" which stated: "Home audiences will order to their taste live and recorded performances, demonstrations, workshops, and master classes. Initiatives must be taken now to ensure that Canadian artists can supply the demands of this electronic bazaar. Unless our productions are packaged and available, we will be crowded out." The irony of these words is worthy of a Shakespearean soliloquy. The OAC's section on technology was followed by their fifth conviction titled, "Lost Opportunities"; "If this should happen (if we fail to package) we will all lose. The Canadian artist will be deprived of a powerful medium of expression. Canadian arts will be shut out of a prosperous burgeoning market. Canadians will be cut off from the bridging sounds, images and ideas of their own arts. And Canada will have lost an excellent opportunity to showcase her talents to the world."

The connection to the *LAMB* proposal is roughly this: the marketplace is already (by implication) defining and predicting what 'culture' is allowed to pass through its hands. It's not the audience, the consumers, but the sellers who have decided what is to be made available. The OAC conviction, like *LAMB*'s conviction, is supposed to merit the support of the artist because for a moment the artist is flattered by name, and by name only. Does *LAMB* have plans to offer, "the Canadian artist access to a powerful medium of expression" for the artist him/herself to define and control what they wish the medium to do for them? Or is it merely that *LAMB* packages the artist like some electronic tourist attraction? Indeed one ever-present problem for Canadian artists (as is the case elsewhere) is distribution. But if artists can only exist as a package, modified to abide by the intentions of such a package then again they will lose the 'art', the cultural significance, in the shuffle. Edgar Cowan doesn't understand this, neither it seems does Arthur Gelber, nor Louis Applebaum and the Southam's probably don't care one way or another.

### Premiere — what's good for the marketplace . . .

Which brings me back to Moses Znaimer and *Premiere*. In film and theatre flattery still goes a long way. Success and recognition are still formidable baits, fame and stardom continue to have their glimmering adolescent appeal. Much of PAY-TV's common projected content growth revolves around the injection of Canadian drama. While there is undoubtedly good theatre in Canada's regions, entrepreneurs, of whom Moses Znaimer is a prime example, are basing their drama projections on the pitiful, audience pleasing, contentless, issueless disaster that passes for Canadian mainstage theatre. Such 'drama' can also be found in much Canadian not-quite-a documentary, not-quite-a-docudrama, not-quite-a-feature film. (There are also excellent independent Canadian films that would not sit well in

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any of the projected PAY-TV cultural packages.)

Znaimer, founder of CITY-TV, has been miscast as the "new wonderboy" among the 12 applicants. And like many of the other potential PAY-TV license holders, he too earlier this year appeared before the Applebaum-Hebert Committee. He managed to spend some twenty minutes expounding on his theory of "marketplace-appropriate Nationalism" while failing to make any statement that even vaguely suggested an understanding of Canadian cultural work that falls outside of the industrial machinery. Znaimer probably doesn't believe that there is any cultural conflict in the Canadianisation of the Hollywood model; no doubt it's part of the "national pride". It's a strange theory but it's widely held in this country's golden triangle that if the leaders of the 'lively arts' get backing from the business sector to take control of television and then market and package the products — in the manner and in the image of our neighbours to the south — not only will they be holding the essence of what they call "Canadian culture" in their hands but also they will have saved us from having to suffer entertainment dumping from the U.S.. If we asked you to compare these two resulting products side by side, testing them in whatever way you see fit, could you come back next week and tell us, in your own words, what is the difference?

Postscript: The TeleCanada proposal for a license is the only serious application that even meets the basic requirements of both the Broadcasting Act and our own future interests. Though TeleCanada is not specific enough in its details of projected programming and still lacks sufficient input from (among others) the cultural community, it remains by far the best out of an inadequate series of applications. I am somewhat opposed to its intention to have co-production relationships with either the CBC or the NFB, as both in the last decade have been insensitive and hostile to the collaborative work of independent filmmakers and video producers — particularly those who have wanted to present 'controversial' artistic, social, or political materials.

While many applicants argue self-righteously that they are not going to duplicate already existing broadcast services, is it in the public interest for public affairs programmes to remain in the Bay Street biased hands of the Bassetts, (CTV) or between the stiff upper lips of the English CBC-TV service? Must we still put up with the middle-management-class views on the news from Global and the disc-jockey consumer splutter that emanates from CITY-TV? Doesn't anybody in this monopolistic Grade 11 country give a damn? Of course there are many, but obviously not enough yet to force the CRTC to start revoking instead of granting new licenses. □



## Rattling the Chains

Recommended reading for all media artists and cultural producers who have not yet found it is the **Royal Commission on Newspapers** written by Tom Kent, Borden Spears and Laurent Picard, published by Ministry of Supply and Services Canada available at your local government bookstore (doesn't that constitute a monopoly?).

The report is a well-written, well researched documentation of newspaper monopolies. Some of the material collected will be available separately outside of this 296-page volume, for example next month two more of the thirty-three research studies will be released, at which time we will find out whether individual journalists both in English Canada and Quebec agree or disagree with the public views of their publishers and editors. The **Globe and Mail** has been vigorously shaking the Kent Commission Report like a lobotomised dog with the proverbial slipper in its mouth. Though the noise from newspaper publishers died down recently, the **Globe** isn't letting go.

On October 12th the **Globe** reported that James Fleming, Minister of State for Multiculturalism is to be the recipient of post-Kent Commission government research teams. These include an inter-departmental committee, a special task force of the Privy Council Office and two civil service groups. A.J. Darling, chairman of the mini-probe says (according to the **Globe**) that they are "in effect, double-checking some commission positions. "We have not accepted all the arguments in this report as being the definitive ones", he (Darling) said." So apparently the federal government does not like what it has received and is making

'editorial corrections', or the business sector once again is standing up and shouting "we're mad as hell, and we're not going to take it anymore." Thomas Kent and working journalists deserve a better response, the **Globe and Mail** should stop making a fool of itself. The fact that Thompson newspapers were severely chastised for being more interested in profits than in journalism is no excuse for their attempts to re-write the findings of the Commission in their favour. □

## The New Underdogs

In a move best categorized as Beating Us At Our Own Game, United Technologies placed a full-page ad in the latest issue of **Columbia Journalism Review** which, in effect, declared businessmen to be the new 'oppressed minority'. The ad quoted from a study, "Crooks, Conmen and Clowns: Businessmen in TV Entertainment", done by The Media Institute ("a Washington-based research organization that seeks to improve the level and quality of media

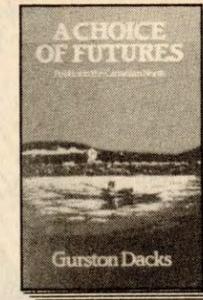


coverage of business and economic affairs"). Using their advertising dollars to chide "floppy-necked quiche nibblers who dream up network series" for their flagrant misrepresentation of businessmen, United Technologies was particularly miffed to find that "only 3 per cent of TV business people behave in ways that are socially and economically productive." Well, there's the rub I guess. Not only were businessmen portrayed as crooks, they weren't even given credit for doing what they do best — make profits. Now United Technologies

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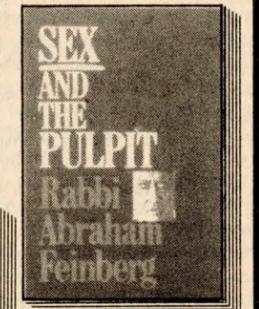
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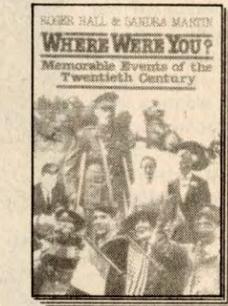
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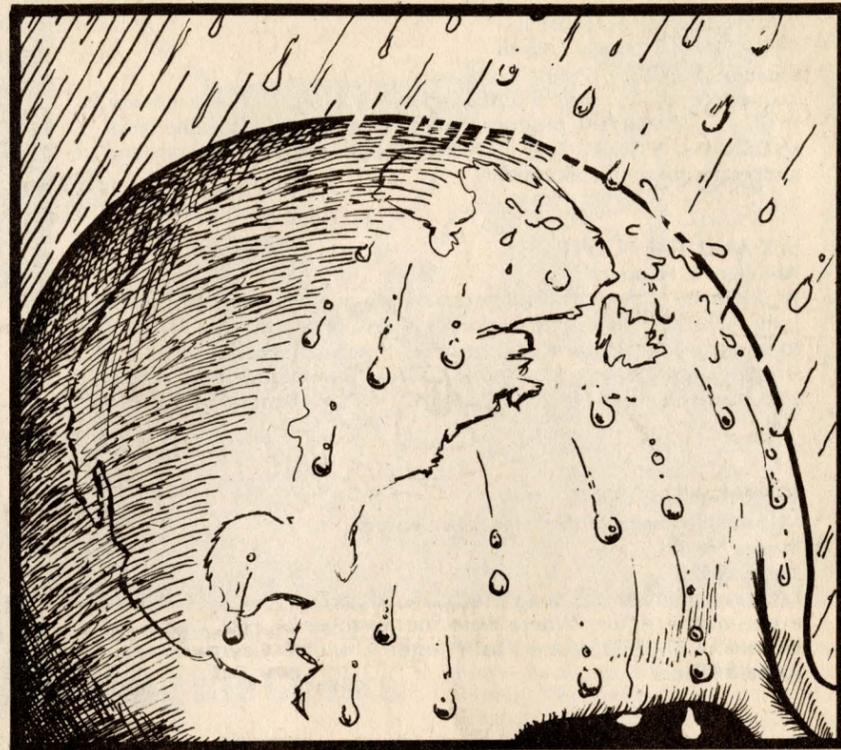
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— coming in 54th on the 1980 *Forbes* Profits 500 list with net profits of 393.4 million dollars, up 20.8 per cent over 1979 — thinks that's just not fair, darnnit, and they're not above a little old-fashioned finger wagging in the direction of TV writers. The ad concludes with an admonition to those "creative artists (who) look down on the commercial sector" to consider two things: first, that broadcast networks themselves are run by businessmen and second, that "programs denigrating business are supported by advertising dollars from — you guessed it — business." We couldn't have said it better ourselves.

One conjecture on the future of television: if this ad is a precursor of yet another pressure group's assault on TV content and if the business interests link arms (and boycotts) with the Moral Majority's current campaign, we may see a new era of programming where not only is Mom in the kitchen and Dad at the office, but the kids are both enrolled at Business College — a scenario where virtue doesn't just triumph — it pays. □



Brian Raycroft

## Never Too Late

In 1978 the CRTC decided that it was time to gauge public and private sector reaction to its Canadian Content Regulations. These regulations must be followed by all TV operations licensed by the CRTC. Percentages set and now in existence are 60 per cent Canadian content for daytime television (6 a.m. to noon), 50 percent for prime-time private network television and 60 percent for prime-time CBC-TV. An information officer for the CRTC told FUSE that the decision to look into amendments occurred in 1978 when it was realised that "not many Canadians watched Canadian programming."

In the last three years there have been 187 written submissions on the subject from the broadcast industry, cultural and arts organizations, organized labour, advertisers and the interested public. The submissions loosely fall into five groupings which advise 1) maintaining existing regulations, 2) strengthening existing regulations, 3) de-regulation — letting the marketplace decide what should be seen, 4) replacing the quota system with a points-system based on audience reach, etc. . . and 5) other related issues.

With a clear intention of coming to a decision the CRTC has announced that a series of invited interveners will appear before them in Hull, Quebec, beginning December 1st, 1981.

Though the deadline for submissions is long past, the CRTC no doubt would be interested in hearing your views. It's never too late.

Send material to CRTC (Canadian Content Regulations), Ottawa, Ont. K1A 0N2. □

## Acid Rain: We Could've Had a V-8

The most acidic rainfall in the United States — a pH of 1.4 in Wheeling, W.Va. — surpasses that of lemon juice (pH 2.2) and comes out only slightly less acidic than battery acid (at a pH of 1.0). While considerably better at a pH of 3.5, the average February 1979 rainfall of Toronto still proved more acidic than tomato juice (pH 4.3). All this comes from a new survey of the problem in the Sept. 14 *Chemical And Engineering News*.

Most fish species die at a pH of 4.5 to 5, which explains why so many Northeast lakes are dead or in jeopardy. Natural

buffers in area soils tend to neutralize acidity, so area waterways don't necessarily match the pH of their rain. But the neutralizing capacity in some regions is being taxed so that areas encompassed by low-pH rains are increasing.

The average pH of rain in 1979 was 4.2 for northern Pennsylvania, western New York and lower Ontario, Canada. A region with rainfall averaging 4.4 radiates from that zone to include most of upper and western Maine, all of New England and upper New Jersey, with a lower eastern boundary running diagonally from western Maryland to eastern Texas. Its western bounds cut north diagonally across Arkansas, along eastern Missouri, western Illinois and the western side of Lake Michigan. □

(reprinted with permission from *Science News*, Vol. 120, No. 13, Sept. 26, 1981)

## Censory Perceptions

FAVAC (Film and Video Against Censorship) a coalition of producers, exhibitors and distributors has been working towards favourable changes in Ontario's Theatres Act (see FUSE May/June, August/September 1981). One major non-member of FAVAC has been Toronto's Festival of Festivals. At a press conference during this year's international film festival (September 11th-20th) FUSE asked director Wayne Clarkson why he was being quoted outside of Ontario (see *BlowUp*, Montreal) as opposing prior censorship and yet his private deals with the Censor

Board continue. (One of the Festival's legal team is Bill McMurtry, brother of the Ontario Attorney General). Clarkson denied that the Festival's deals would be in opposition to FAVAC's objectives; "anyway," he said, "it's a business".

Meanwhile FAVAC demonstrated outside a Festival screening on Saturday, September 19th and circulated petitions against prior censorship. Moving through the theatre line, Ric Amis, a spokesperson for FAVAC reported 99 per cent favourable response to FAVAC's demands. The coalition, working with their legal advisors, are now preparing additional amendments to the Theatres Act which will be delivered to Opposition House members and government assistant Ministers within the provincial legislature.

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UAS. 9.81.MC

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CHOP

AND PEOPLE POINT THE FINGER AND SAY THE RCMP SHOULDNT BREAK THE LAW



BEND

SO THEY'RE MAKING US CIVILIANS, CIVILIANS CAN BREAK THE LAW AL CAPONE WAS A CIVILIAN



WELCOME TO SUNNY EL SALVADORE IM ADMINISTERING THE LAND REFORM PROGRAM



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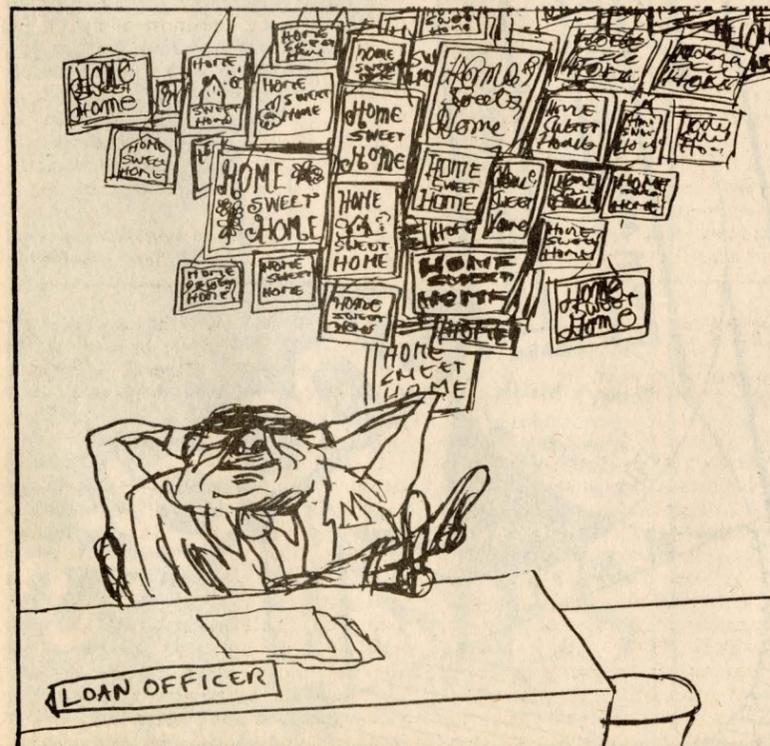


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AS MINISTER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS I SUPPORT NATIVE RIGHTS, BUT WE MUST REMEMBER THAT THERE ARE THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS TO CONSIDER, LIKE THE RIGHTS OF OIL COMPANIES AND FISH



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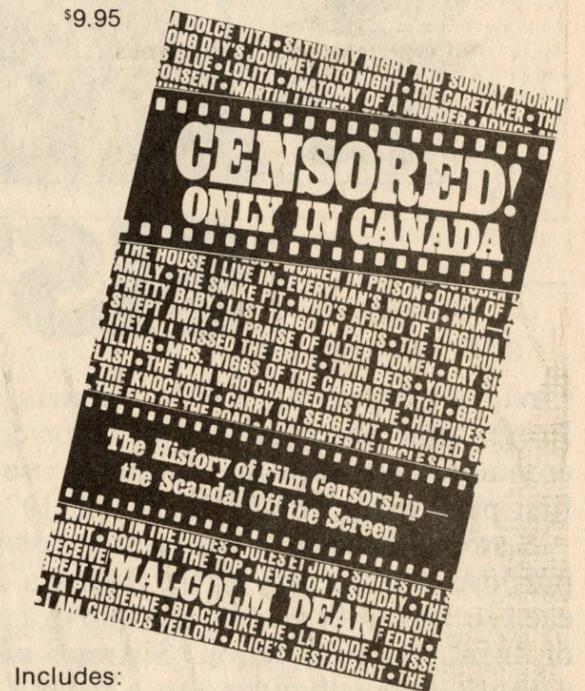
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# SISTREN

First employed as street cleaners under the Jamaican government's Impact Programme and then trained as teachers' aides, Sistren collected together around a common interest in drama and its use for social change. The group, thirteen women, first performed publicly in April, 1977, at the Workers' Week Concert in Kingston.

Sistren's theatre is energetic, fast-paced, humorous yet never loses its analytic purpose — for every effect there's a cause. Whether presented in workshop, where each scene is followed by a group discussion with the audience, or in the full spectacle of theatrical production, Sistren's work gives voice to the experience of poverty without ever submitting to a feeling of powerlessness. It is theatre of action with workshops turning into group problem-solving sessions and major productions becoming complete acts of cultural reclamation.

The women of Sistren are: Beverly Elliott, Cerene Stephenson, Beverly Hanson, Jasmin Smith, Rebecca Knowles, Jerline Todd, Vivette Lewis, Lillian Foster, Lorna Burrell, May Thompson and Lana Finikin. The musicians performing with the group are: Mackie Burnette, Joy Erskine and Winston Bell. Costumes designed by Betti Campbell who also co-ordinates Sistren's Textile Project. Along with a workshop production of *Domestick*, Sistren's *QPH* was performed for the first time in North America in Toronto, September 21-27. *QPH* was directed by Hertencer Lindsay and *Domestick* was directed by Honor Ford-Smith, who has guided Sistren from a part-time drama group in 1977 to a full-time theatre collective in 1981.

Photos, captions, editorial assistance by Isobel Harry

There exists among the women of the Caribbean a need for naming of experience and a need for communal support of that process. In the past, silence has surrounded our experience. We have not been named in literature or in history. The discovery through dialogue, through encounter with others, of the possibilities of our power can help us to shape the forces which, at present, still shape us.

Dialogue creates reflection, which in turn creates analysis. Through analysis one moves from being object to becoming subject, from victim to creator. One is able to identify the problems which surround one's experience, objectives, to come forward from the margins of society, to intervene in reality.

Only through supportive exchange is this possible. Only in a special environment is it possible to move forward from the perception of oneself as passive, as separate from the totality of whole experience and to develop the confidence in oneself to act on one's own wisdom. By creating for ourselves our own institutions of leisure and discussion, our own sense of teamwork and bonding, we insure the confident functioning of our womanhood in a world that we have named.

## The situation of women in Jamaica

Currently in Jamaica, 15.7 per cent of the men are unemployed as against 37.7 per cent of the women; 70 per cent of women between 17 and 24 are out of work and these are women with children. 68 per cent of employed women are doing very low status forms of wage work and are earning under the minimum wage. This situation is bad enough, but add this to the fact that one third of women are heads of household (I think this is a very conservative estimate) and the gravity of the picture emerges. Women dominate the service sector and many work as domestic servants — without access to unions or even labour associations. There tends to be a lower level of union activity in small factories exploiting women's work such as garment and textile factories, which as late as 1972 were paying wages of \$7 - 10 per week.

Additionally, the level of broadbased autonomous organisation of women around questions or problems of direct concern to them is low. Most of the women's organizations are based on social welfare concerns aimed at further domesticating women. Handicraft and domestic schemes exist, offering little chance for the analysis of whose interests these schemes serve. Much of the problem is complicated by the fact that the subordination of women has not been seen as an issue serious enough to warrant raising embarrassing questions about domestic servants or sexual harassment, for example. Often, the participation of women in the so-called "informal sector" of the economy and their work in farming and seasonal wage work is cited as



evidence of the 'emancipated' Jamaican woman. This blind spot has meant that much of the basic information about the condition of working class women simply does not exist.

We have to put all our educational resources into resolving these problems if women are to have a future that is at all positive. At the same time, the resolving of these issues, or even the fact that they exist, should not obscure our awareness of the fact that women as a sex/class have a particular relationship to the past and present. The issues for us then, (and for women in much of the Third World), are how to create a balance between the solutions to the class questions we face, while at the same time dealing with the specificity of women's oppression in what is still a sexist society; and how to create a new society without losing touch with the particular needs of women.

Historically, unlike women in Europe and North America, Caribbean women have not participated in a struggle for emancipation as a class. The social gains which the women of the region have made, accompanied the national movements for increased sovereignty and greater social justice. Although women made important gains in the areas of legislation between 1972 and 1980, these do not deal with the material bases or the root questions of control of reproduction and control of production — or the difficult problem of the sexual division of labour. Maternity leave and minimum wage were important pieces of legislation — but in a situation where women do not do and cannot get work which is considered to be equal — an equal pay for equal work law is a bit like putting a band-aid on a cancer.

Also, Jamaica is still defining its cultural identity. The process of building confidence in traditions is an important one. It is one in which women have played an important part. The preserving of African tradition through the last 300

years has, to a great extent, been facilitated by women. It is they who have kept alive and communicated the customs of an uprooted people — much of this legacy has until recently been denied by the wider society and has been submerged beneath the official character of the country. Its emergence into the open requires different methods of communication than those which survived in the past. It demands a re-examination of the past, with all its taboos and restrictions in the language of the *Present*. It requires that women, hitherto the preservers, become the authors.

## A drama-in-education project

The experience of Sistren (meaning sisters), a theatre collective for working class women, in forming and creating a workplace for women, is a useful case study. Drama is without question, an effective means of breaking silence, of stimulating discussion, of posing problems and experimenting with their solutions. Drama here, is by definition different from theatre. Drama is an exploratory process which uses games and role play and narration to bring about self discovery, "to bring out what (people) already know but don't yet know they know." As Dorothy Heathcote, the English educator has demonstrated: "Drama is not something special, but rather a technique most ordinary people regularly employ as a way of coping with new or unsettling experience."

1. The process of conscientization is fully described in Paulo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, 1970.
2. "PNP Women's Movement Political Education Programme", 1980, pp. 17-18.
3. Dorothy Heathcote: *Drama as a Learning Medium*, Betty Jane Wagner, National Education Association, 1976, p. 13.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

## SISTREN

The process of rehearsing oneself into a significant situation beforehand is an example of this. "In drama, students live 'in advance of themselves' as it were: they face challenge and crisis in imagination before they find themselves overwhelmed by it in real life. They gain the feeling of mastery over events, the sense that they are equal to life . . ."

Theatre, on the other hand, is an artistic product. It is the process of shaping discoveries and presenting them to an audience. The emphasis here is on presentation, on performance, on the expertise of the actors and the production team.

### The process of naming

Sistren's is a collective/co-operative structure within which its members educate themselves through drama, and later, through theatre, share their experiences with others. It is a small group of women exploring their understanding through drama, naming it, and presenting that naming in a product — theatre. The active relationship between the investigative base (drama workshops) and the more objective completed statement (theatre) give the educational process a tangible goal. The theatre presentations help to motivate the women in the group to continue their work. The drama workshops aim at a constant process of consciousness raising. The production of plays necessitates the training of the women in a particular professional skill (acting). A group like Sistren need not choose theatre as the end product of its educational process. The drama can be used for consciousness-raising and skill training in any field, because it offers a way of approaching and investigating problems.

The educational process in Sistren addresses itself to the problems of the people in the company, as they represent women from the labouring poor. It introduces these problems back into the wider society for discussion, for analysis, for solution. It suggests alternatives. Both drama and theatre provide a public forum for the voices of poor women. This is a part of the process of awakening which must take place if changes in the system which create these problems are to occur.

Sistren's programme consists of workshops taken and performances given. Workshops include both research work and special skill workshops in movement, silk screen printing and general education. Performances include both workshops in Drama for Problem-solving which are presented to community organizations and

women's groups around the country and major productions which are presented commercially, usually composed from group experience, research and improvisation. Four have been presented since 1977: **Bellywoman Bangarang**, **Bandooloo Version**, **Nanah Yah** and **QPH** (Queenie, Pearlle and Hopie).

### Giving women opportunities to organize

The ideas about adult education behind the work of Sistren have developed gradually and have stretched themselves as the group's ideas of its identity and its role grew. The work began spontaneously in 1977, the result of a climate of reform and increased worker participation in all areas of the life in the country at that time.

All thirteen members of Sistren were urban street cleaners in the Emergency Employment Programme (Impact Programme) of the Jamaican Government. Later they were selected for training as teacher aides in a programme for women organized by the Women's Bureau and the Council for Voluntary Social Services, a program much criticised by middle class interests in Jamaica. There were approximately 10,000 women employed by this special employment programme and although their jobs were unquestionably low status the programme offered a chance to women to organize around their own concerns.

This coincided with the start of the U.N. World Decade of Women which resulted in Women's Bureaus being set up all over the Third World. The effectiveness of these government-led initiatives toward "development, equality and peace" for women depended on the over-all political context — in whose interests governments were acting on and whose they were protecting. In Jamaica in 1977, the context was one of mild socialism. For the first time in the lives of many of us, people from the labouring poor were analysing, making demands and being openly critical of the forces holding them back. So when the Women's Bureau at that time selected some of the women in the special employment programme for training as teacher-aides there was a feeling of optimism.

These are some of the reasons why Sistren spoke to me as they did in 1977, when I first met them in an old broken down schoolhouse in Swallowfield. The group had expressed an interest in drama and sought a director from the Jamaica School of Drama. We met to discuss the performance they wanted to do for a Workers' Week concert. I asked them

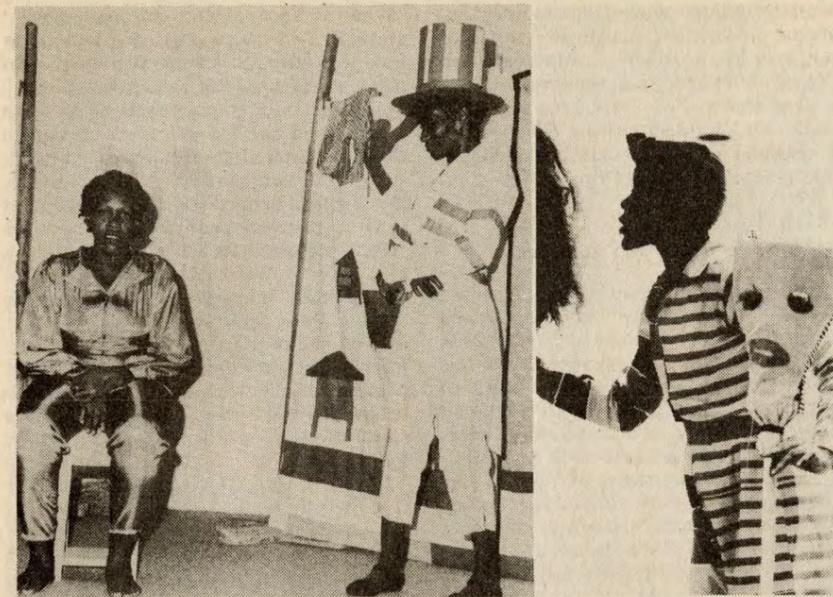
"What do you want to do a play about?" and they said "We want to do plays about how we suffer as women. We want to do plays about how the men treat us bad." Somehow, the employment programme had offered them a chance to recognize that they shared something in common. Two years later, in a film about Sistren, Bev Hanson defined the commonality: "In the first place we are all impact workers. . . . In the second place all of us live in the ghetto . . ." Sistren's consciousness has always been of themselves as *representatives* of working class women. So when we met for the first time, I asked them to tell me how they suffered as women and this began an exchange of experience, which resulted in our first piece, **Downpression Get a Blow**.

### Research workshop 1979-80

The research workshop in reading skills was set up as a solution to the problem of the lack of formal education not only within the group, but also within the society. The workshop had as its objective the creating of dramatic exercises which would teach comprehension and reading skills and develop the critical consciousness of the student. This was the first research workshop in which Sistren participated. It attempted to balance skills with a consciousness of class and gender.

The history of the workshop is briefly this. During the group's first major production **Bellywoman Bangarang** the women were asked to script scenes they had created from their own experiences. At this point, I learned that some of the women in the project had more developed reading skills than others. These actresses were able to help others script their scenes and by the end of the production, interest in reading about their personal experiences motivated many to practice their new skills. By the time we got to our second major production everyone could read their own script.

The research workshop investigated what took place in this process more carefully. In workshop, a wide range of work was done. Physical exercises were based on the shape of the letters. Kalesthenics were developed based on the alphabet and, in one case, a dance created from the spelling of the letters of words. Rhythmic sounds and games accompanied these so that letters and sounds are identified. Writing exercises were linked to exercises in conflict resolution, personal awareness and group development. A great many of the exercises have been developed from Augusto Boal's method of



Technically, the workshop productions are simple — geared to smaller audiences, smaller spaces and always initiating participation. Props, are often common objects — brooms, hats, sheets — inviting a you-can-do-this-too response. The dialogue is earthy, never didactic, even when moving from the experiences of individuals to comments on the general condition of women. In place of the theatrical power of their larger productions, **Domestick** (above) is an intimate form of communication.

problem solving skits. In these, the group develops to a climax a skit on a particular theme. They then stop and ask the rest of the group how the problem should be solved. After a discussion, the solution is enacted.

Reading exercises were often taken from the newspaper. The study of articles in the paper and their accompanying pictures is another example of the type of exercise the group used. After looking at a picture, the women acted out what went before and after the moment captured in the scene. They then read, in character, the newspaper report, and commented on its truthfulness in discussion.

The results of these workshops were

6. An excellent account of Boal's experience in people's theatre is given in his book **The Theatre of the Oppressed**. Pluto Press (London), 1979.

## SISTREN

understand most of, but do not speak. It is the official language of the country and they must learn it if they are to understand the world view of its speakers, if they are not to remain isolated. They must learn it if they are to communicate their needs and demands to the powerful. But for Sistren as for many other women it remains a second language.

### Creating plays: The use of folk forms

The use of the creole language in workshop and performance is only one method of using the cultural tradition of the Caribbean. Sistren's first two major productions were created from forms suggested by the oral and ritual traditions of the country. This tradition, African in origin, is by its nature far more participatory than that of a literary tradition. It evokes a communal response from both audience and actor. The images and symbols contained within the ritual tradition evoke immediate responses from the audience, because they come loaded with overtones from past and present. They echo in the subconscious of the viewer. Dramatic forms originating from ritual demand a supportive relationship between audience and actor. In ritual, the viewer must help the possessed in his or her journey through a reality of the spirit. In workshop the passive participant must be prepared to be drawn in to support the actress who is making discoveries through the medium of drama.

Oral literature and music are a particularly important part of the cultural experience of the women in Sistren. Stories, songs for all occasions, riddles, rhymes and proverbs are among some of the forms which are still used very actively. Oral literature, as Ruth Finnegan has pointed out, has certain techniques built into its structure, which demand the attention of the listeners. These devices include onomatopoeia, repetition of a phrase or expression, questions and songs. Proverbs and riddles depend on metaphors from daily life and the listener's knowledge of folk heroes and heroines to make subtle comments on the life around us.

**Bellywoman Bangarang**, the group's first major production, was developed using a method almost completely based on folk traditions. In the beginning, each member of the group was asked to go into the centre of a circle and sing a folk song from her childhood. She was asked to keep singing until the song evoked either an action or an incident in her memory. When this happened she was to tell the story or act it out. Observers were required to look for ways in which they could identify with her story. If anyone felt that the experience being described aroused a memory of a similar experience in her own life she joined in by telling her story or by linking, through action, her experience to the one which had been acted out. From these simple exercises the theme of teenage pregnancy and the rites of passage from girlhood to adulthood emerged.

By translating their work into English, the women create an equal relationship between their idiom and the language of the powerful. It is a language which they

recorded by the members of Sistren and some of the scenes scripted. All writing was done in creole, since the creole language is the women's main medium of communication. The creole was then translated into English. Writing in dialect, with its improvised spelling and immediate flavour, the women learned to write a form of English which had previously been considered "bad, coarse and vulgar". In fact, Jamaican Creole is a variation of English with its own strict rules of grammar, a language which retains much of the Twi construction of its creators. By writing a language which had hitherto been that of a non-literate people, the women broke silence.

5. In discussing the work of Sistren, I want to stress that what I am writing here are my words. I write "my words" because I want to make clear that my way of working with Sistren is conditioned by my own position on certain issues, by my own class background and by my skills in theatre. All women are oppressed, but we experienced that oppression differently in both extent and form. To ignore the difference between the actresses who make up Sistren and myself is to pass over the important question of class as it affects relations between women. Second, my position on certain questions has changed in three years or so of work with the collective as outside influences on our work has altered or become stronger and as the women in Sistren have studied and taught me more about their situation. Together we evolved certain techniques which I am writing now, here-without them — in words they would not use. These techniques are not necessarily the same that Sistren would use if they were working on their own or with another director. What I describe has grown out of the conflicts, mistakes and solutions to problems of the last years' work. They cannot be randomly applied because they are aimed at bringing about a certain process and a certain end. That end is a greater consciousness of the conditions facing women in the Caribbean. That end is the possibility of changing the structure which creates those conditions.

## The game structure

The wealth of information which emerged demanded to be structured around dramatic images suitable to the theme. We chose to use folk games. The entire narrative structure of **Bellywoman Bangarang** finally rested on the structure of the games and on the resolution of the conflict in the game structure. Most games have a metaphorical content and often suggest a line of narrative action based on the game's objective. An example of this is the game "Bull in the Pen". Here the main player stands in the centre of a circle of people whose arms are linked. She asks, by touching each arm, what the pen is made of. She then has to try and break out of it. Dramatically this game can be used in several ways. In **Bellywoman** it functioned as a means of commenting on a scene which had gone before. The pen became the situation itself and the arms of the players symbolized the problems of the situation. The players then try to improvise a means of breaking out of the pen.

Riddles and proverbs were another form of oral literature used in **Bellywoman**, they were used as a means of stimulating the audience to think about taboo areas of experience. The riddles introduced themes that the audience were afraid to deal with openly, or unused to dealing with at all.

Menstruation and illness during pregnancy were dealt with like this. The riddles were presented to the audience as choreopoems. The audience had to figure out the answers.

The structures of riddles and proverbs also help to evoke and suggest structures for group poems, which, if they have enough emphasis on word play and rhythm, communicate with great immediacy to an audience. These kinds of poems connect to the audience's background in ritual chanting and rhythmic bible reading. The content of the poem, or choral statement juxtaposed with the anticipated content of the familiar form arouses a questioning interest on the part of the viewer. Poetry like this does not have the connotations of abstraction which it carries in many other societies. It is an extremely direct way of reaching an audience through conscious use of rhythm. The use of other forms of oral and ritual tradition such as choruses, and storytelling has informed our work in a continuous way. The use of craftwork is also beginning to be an important part of the group's total programme.

## Life de-mystified

The process of working in drama for women involves the creating of a community in which some of the hidden or

taboo subjects about women can be exposed and the audience confronted with them. As such, drama is not a reflection of life but a de-mystification of it, by the full exploration of these realities. Sistren brings to the public the voices of women from the labouring poor and in so doing helps to pressure for change. By confronting what has been considered indecent, irrelevant or accepted, we have begun to make a recorded refusal of ways in which our lives have been thwarted and restricted. We have begun to refuse the forces behind those ways.

Methods and techniques are not very important. It is where they take you that matters. What becomes of the work is determined by the content and the consciousness one brings to the theme. Work of this kind can perpetuate oppressive structures as well as it can help to change them. The form is only important in so far as it structures and analyses the content and in so far as it leads to new understandings, new knowledge and new collective action. □

Honor Ford-Smith, an actress and tutor at the Jamaica School of Drama, has worked with Sistren since 1977, setting up the original training programme at the Drama School and directing productions and workshops.

LISA STEELE

## SISTREN'S QPH

### Building a collective history, this is theatre which engages through ritual and humour

When the poor die, they exit in numbers not in name; fifty-four on a ferry in Calcutta, seventy-six on a bus in Mexico City, one hundred and twelve in a monsoon in Southeast Asia. Reading about these human disasters, it would seem that poverty itself places people — often in large groups — directly in the path of inevitable doom. This kind of group death frequently makes the news reports but seldom warrants individual obituaries. I assume (I hope not unfairly) that one of the Sistren collective's intentions in producing **QPH (Queenie, Pearlie and Hopie)** was to reverse these priorities — to provide obituaries for women whose deaths had been previously uncommemorated.

The event that **QPH** is based upon occurred May 20, 1980, when one hundred and sixty-seven women died in a fire that swept through the women's ward of the Kingston Alms House. Shortly after, Sistren began work on **QPH**, their fourth major production. Of itself, **QPH** is an important work which defines and gives voice to the struggles of poor women while existing within a popular format —

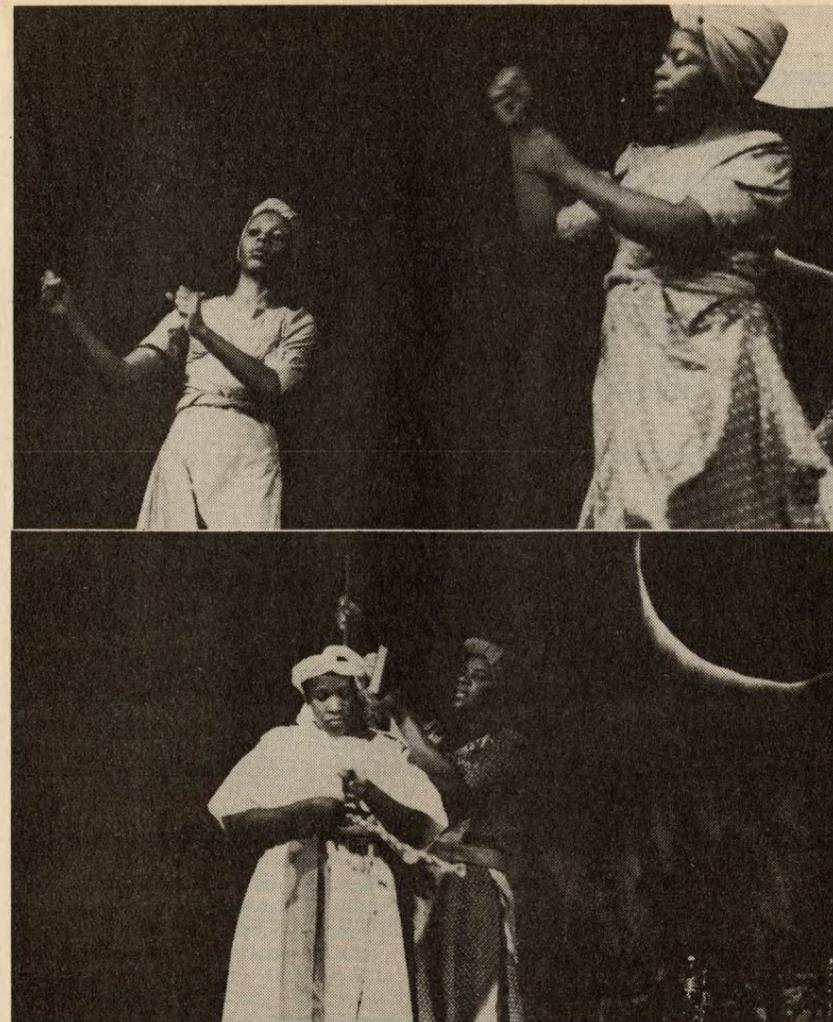
theatre. But in view of the "official" response to the fire at the Alms House, the play's existence becomes even more vital: a year-long inquest finally determined that there was no criminal responsibility in the deaths, despite evidence of overcrowding, a sub-standard building and possible negligence on the part of staff. So for the 167 women who died, **QPH** is their only memorial.

But the play is no ordinary memorial. It is not a structure cast in stone meant to receive wreaths and tears on anniversary days and then promptly be forgotten for the rest of the year, because **QPH** is a memorial not to the deaths but to the lives of the Alms House women. For in Sistren's view, it is not just the fire which is the tragedy of the women's lives, but the fact that they were in the Alms House in the first place. This is the primary focus of **QPH**, as one by one we are introduced to the three main characters and unravel the threads of their lives which brought them all together in the Alms House on the night of the fire.

First there's the beleaguered Hopie, loyal

domestic servant to Cousin Sissy and her family for the last 30 years, who's been given her walking papers. The family is moving — "re-locating" — and her services won't be necessary anymore. And while Sissy frets over her personal toilette, screeching and coaxing Hopie on to ever more menial tasks of service, Hopie is left to contemplate her future. This, according to Sissy, is really a very simple matter: since marriage is out (who would want Hopie at her age anyway? Sissy muses with her characteristic sensitivity), it's a good thing Hopie does domestic work because there's always a demand for that kind of thing — you know, she says, "two children and only a little light housework." Hopie, needless to say, does not connect with this mythical 'position' and ends up begging on the street, a cast-off after a lifetime of service, who can't even write her own name.

Next there's Pearlie, the bride-to-be of the consulate's son ("a good catch"). She's suffering from what at first appears to be bad case of pre-nuptial jitters. "Pearlie," her mother chides, "why are you lying



In **QPH**, Sistren all wear versions of the housedress worn by the poor women of Jamaica — whether housewives or housekeepers. The dress is made of synthetic stretch fabric, shaped on vague 'princess' lines, ending just below the knee. Sistren's colours are grey; around their heads are tied red bandannas. This head covering not only emphasizes the natural solidarity of the women, it also represents the red of defiance. These simple costumes unify the dancing movement used to divide each scene. Sistren's body movements are witness to female strength: hip swaying, circular undulations, arms encircling, forever comforting in a healing ritual of soothing forms — Movements which make whole the fragmented, victimized existences which must be endured.

down in your expensive dress?" Pearlie has pains. Where? "All over, Mommy." After much wheedling and cajoling, Mommy finally learns the truth. The 17-year-old Pearlie has given in to the gardener and she's pregnant. Outraged, Mommy lets the "expensive dress" and her good name take precedence and Pearlie is banished from the family. We see Pearlie later in her life, plying her trade with a sailor in a waterfront bar, getting drunk and getting rolled. The scene ends with Pearlie shouting, "I've paid my dues to society. Now I want a free ride — to the Alms House."

And finally there's Queenie whose line of work is preacher-woman in a clapping church. We see her urging the congregation to salvation, warning them of "the fire next time". But after the service ends, we find that Queenie is no more secure in her position than Hopie or Pearlie. It seems that her congregation is less than

pleased with her. They send a delegation to complain. First they are not that confident being led by a woman; they wonder if she's "qualified". They want the Bishop (away on "religious" business) to return. They accuse Queenie and the Bishop of "fornication", further evidence of her unsuitability as spiritual leader. Of course, the Bishop's qualifications aren't blemished by this accusation, the implication being that male "fornication" is one thing, but female "fornication" is out of the question. So Queenie is removed from her calling. We see her later, struggling to provide food for her children, being told that her house is directly in the path of a proposed building site and will soon be demolished. The scene closes with Queenie asking her friend to care for her small daughter Faith, because now she too must go to the Alms House.

What this litany of broken dreams and severed promises, split families and grave misfortunes does not convey about Sis-

tren's **QPH** is the tough humour which informs the entire production. And it is the humour which, in the end, provides the key to Sistren's analysis of their chosen material. This humour, carried in the dialogue as it races along, often at a seemingly impossible speed, reproduces speech patterns as accurately as a recording, and along the way ruthlessly exposes the bitter oppression, degradation and humiliation which these women and all others like them endure, day by endless day. Catastrophe piling upon catastrophe. An example: when we first meet Hopie, she is being berated by an increasingly angered Aunt Vantie (Sissy's mother). Hopie, in Aunt Vantie's eyes, can do nothing right. "Stand up, girl, you're always slouching!" exhorts Auntie, and Hopie vainly tries to comply, only to infuriate Auntie more. Finally, driven to physical violence simply by Hopie's existence, Auntie begins to beat Hopie with a garment that Hopie had been pressing and the ever meek Hopie, trying to ward off blows more likely to stun a fly than an adult human, whines, falls and rolls around on the ground, whimpering. In **QPH** Hopie's humiliation is funny — bitterly funny. It is a scene which could have been played in high tragic relief, but this would have violated Sistren's doctrine of engagement. For their work to be successful, it must engage those currently in the circumstances which Sistren themselves have experienced — and not just call up pity and hand-wringing from those outside of the poverty and oppression.

Along with the humour, **QPH** employs another active method of engagement — powerful ritual. The entire structure of the play is woven within an **Etu** ritual. **Etu** is a celebration of the dead. African in origin, which is currently practiced only in western Jamaica. The participants are usually female. There is singing, dancing and feasting, as each dancer, in turn, is "shawled" by the Queen of the ritual, freeing her to express her family's song and dance patterns. In **QPH**, the **Etu** encloses each scene until the end when, after the fire, the **Etu** dancers become old women, performing the final rites over their dead sisters and Queenie delivers the denouement: "Women have the key to the future because they hold the secrets to the past." The question here is what does Sistren mean by "the past"? On reflection it would seem that they are referring not only to a collective past which is contained in matriarchal rituals such as **Etu**, but to individualized histories also. And this is the ferocious strength and integrity of **QPH**. Ritual is used not as another panacea which, like colonialism or capitalism, ultimately abandons the individual, but instead is used as a connecting thread, linking individual with individual and past with present. So when Queenie speaks of "the past", she is not only seeking women's cultural roots, she is urging women who now live in oppression to remember their own lives. And in remembering, analysis becomes possible, and with analysis, the real struggle can begin.

# Jonnie Rankin

Revealing the unrecorded past of women in trade unions through the experience of one worker.

In 1979, the Women's Labour History Project (Sara Diamond) began a series of oral history interviews with women activists in the 1930s and '40s. Presently these interviews are being developed into a book which will be published by Press Gang, a women's press in Vancouver. As well, Diamond has compiled a bibliography of women's labour history research sources in the provinces, also to be published by Press Gang, and is working on video productions on women's history and union involvement in the shipyards and wood industry.

Reclaiming our history as trade unionists is of immediate value to the current generation of working women if we are to build on past victories and not reproduce past mistakes. To this end, the Women's Labour History project began three years ago with the goal of documenting the history of B.C.'s labour women.

Nowhere in English Canada has the labour movement played such a visible role in shaping the political consciousness of the population as in British Columbia. Although much of the written labour history of the province represents these many individuals involved in the masculine personae, the reality is quite different. Women not only shared in the basic union and political struggles but lived through and contributed a different range of experiences than those of their male co-workers. Women were instrumental in organizing community support for strikes and unions, in fighting for housing, water health and school facilities through their union auxiliaries and unions, in organizing waitresses and domestic workers, in resisting sexual harassment on the job, in distributing illegal birth control, beginning childcare centres for the children of working women, organizing government workers, in resisting lay-offs and their own return to the kitchen after the war, in fighting to establish equal pay and later, job opportunities for both sexes and all races in the wood industry.

Despite women's many activities, the labour movement as a whole too often failed to adequately back up the women organizing in its midst. Male leaderships were at times threatened by vocal women. There was a lack of clarity as to women's legitimacy within the labour force in more conservative quarters. Women who played a central role in keeping their union on its feet often found themselves without

adequate time to push for "women's issues", as such.

## Women's invisible past

After spending many hours on documentary research into women's unionism in B.C., it became clear that it was necessary to return to the source for this history — to the women who shaped the events and processes. There were two reasons for this. Women were too often invisible in government, union and press documents, which reflected an official version of reality, often not encompassing the full range of activities of women even when they were mentioned. There was a hierarchy of concerns in relation to women's issues. For example, although Vancouver waitresses, who represent a permanent sector of working women, were very involved in organizing themselves during the war period, the newspapers focused almost exclusively on the entry of women into traditionally "male" jobs in industry and their probable (and generally hoped for) exodus after the war.

Documents tended to reduce the complex processes inside labour organizations to local and executive meetings, strike votes and debates between union and government officials. The daily experience of maintaining a trade union (especially in the days before dues check-offs and closed shops were established), the ways in which activists' consciousness developed and changed with conditions and participation in their union, could only be explored through discussions with the women themselves. The daily reality of women — the delicate balancing of home responsibilities, work and union activity; the conflicts, appeasements and shared struggles with husbands and children — appeared occasionally in the union press but emerged more fully in women's responses to concrete questions about their family life.

## In the shipyards

This interview features Jonnie Rankin, a union activist in B.C.'s wartime shipbuilding industry. By 1943, 1500 women worked as passergirls, welders, rivet heaters and in plate and bolt shops in the shipyards.\*

\*In this part of the ship building process the heaterboy heated the rivets and passed them to the buckler who threw them up to the passergirl who in turn passed them to the riveter.

Women entering these jobs confronted hostility from male co-workers. As the end of the war neared, male opinion on the women's right to remain in the industry's labour force divided into two camps: more conservative union leaders and rank and filers feared that women's presence in the industrial labour force would result in unemployment for veterans and themselves; progressive unionists argued that women had won equal pay and the right to equal job opportunities through their participation in the war effort. By 1944 shipbuilding contracts had fallen off. Massive lay-offs left women as well as the majority of men unemployed, concluding the debate.

The character of shipyard unionism changed during the war. Initially, the small labour force was organized into craft unions according to trade. Men were hired on as apprentices through the union, becoming journeymen at the completion of their training. Craft unions functioned as job trusts, excluding unskilled workers from the labour force. The expansion of the workforce, direct hiring through the National Selective Service and shipyard personnel offices and the introduction of unskilled and semi-skilled workers into the production process disoriented the craft union leadership. Young progressive unionists in the Boilermakers Union pressed for the federation of all of the trades and the unskilled into one industry-wide union. Women gravitated towards the Boilermakers union where they could participate equally. Not only did the craft leadership resist their loss of control in the yards but the Canadian Congress of Labour placed Boilermakers under trusteeship in order to break the extensive influence of its Communist (Labour Progressive Party) leadership. Nonetheless, a Federation did emerge by the end of the war.

Mrs. Rankin worked in the Burrard yards as a burner and a passergirl. She wrote a women's column for *Main Deck*, the Boilermakers' paper. She later worked as a waitress and organized for the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union Local 28. After the war, she reported for *The People*, the Labour Progressive Party's paper. She then moved on to staff an International Woodworkers of America hiring hall. During the war years she worked on the creation of a community childcare centre and participated as an actress with the Labour Arts Guild. Mrs. Rankin presently resides in Vancouver.



**Jonnie Rankin:** At that time my name was Ottewell. I was married to Jack Ottewell, and I had three small children and I was about 25 years old in 1943 when women started going into the yards. I went in the shipyards because I needed the money. My husband and I were really sort of separating; we had one of those crazy teenage marriages and he didn't make much money, and I guess I needed a job and that's the first type of jobs that anybody saw for ten years was war — we got into the war industries. I went in with the second group of women that were hired in the Burrard drydocks.

**Sara Diamond:** It was obviously a big change for women to be in those kinds of industries.

**J.R.:** I think they needed our labour power that's all and it wasn't like a women's lib hiring, and so you start working and so they opened up but there was quite a lot of controversy from some of the men to work with the women, they had a terrible struggle with some of them. But we were hired anyway and we worked through.

**S.D.:** How was it advertised that there were jobs there for women, and how did they do the hiring? Was it through the union or how was it?

**J.R.:** Well, we just hired out in the hiring hall, I don't know. There was a woman who was the head of hiring women, did the interviewing and sort of had that department. There were two of them, but one in particular was quite a nice woman, and we just went in and were interviewed and they put us in different departments where they needed help and I got put in the sheet metal department at first.

**S.D.:** So, did you kind of go in there because you figured you would make good wages?

**J.R.:** No, there wasn't any choice. About good wages, I made 55 cents an hour and that was the minimum wage and that was what we were paid. No, we didn't have choice you see, what we had as wages. People came from all over the prairies (to work in the shipyards) because it was work.

**S.D.:** It was after the Depression . . .

**J.R.:** That's what brought it on. When they started producing for war, there was work, suddenly there was all this money for industry after the Depression when nobody worked any place, hardly. No, it's just that I got a chance of getting a job.

**S.D.:** So, how many women were there?

**J.R.:** Oh, I have no idea. Can't remember, there were a lot of us anyways, there must have been a thousand of us in there, it seemed like it.

**S.D.:** And were the women hired in groups?

**J.R.:** Yeah, we hired through this lady that I was telling you about, we went into a special office, and hired through there. And were assigned to different departments, wherever they needed so many women.

**S.D.:** What kind of training was there?

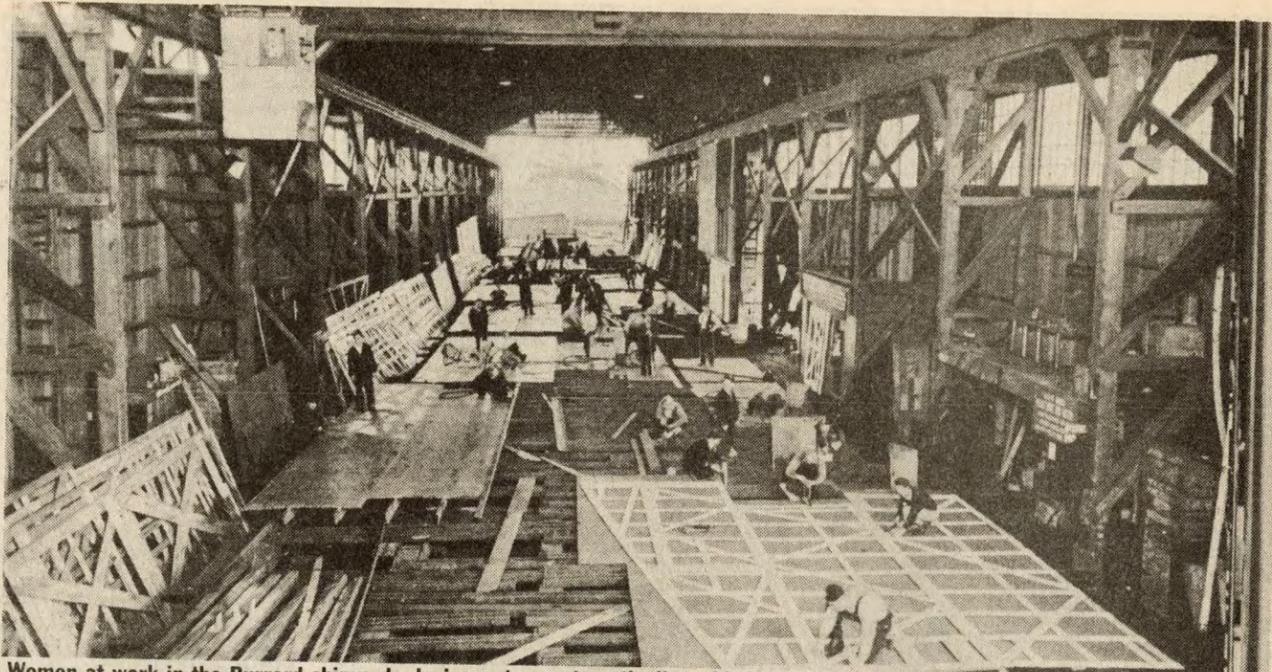
## "A different world then"

**J.R.:** No training, you just went in. If you'd been in the Depression and never worked, and then started raising kids at seventeen like I did, it was an entirely different world believe me when I went in the shipyards (laughs). I didn't know, none of us knew anything, half the men didn't either. We just worked. I was put out in the water on the boats right away. My job was with the sheet metal. First I worked with a fellow that was called Frank. He used to be embarrassed because my nickname's

Jonnie. We worked below the riveters and we used to put the cowvents (airshafts) in. He was a real old-fashioned sheet metal worker, a mechanic; very nice old guy and accepted women and was nice, so all the riveters used to say "Frankie and Jonnie" and he used to die over it, but he was a nice man. Then I got shifted over to Kenny Sherry, a Cockney. He told me a hundred times that he was born within the sound of the bells. He was a cute little guy but he didn't like to work with women; he was really snorty when I came up. And I said, well, here I am; you can take it or leave it. So we used to argue all the time about politics . . . neither one of us knew a damn thing. But I liked Kenny because he was temperamental, he was more suitable to me, we'd work hard one time and not the next. He put me on job — we worked out on the water and we had to hammer these screens around the cowvents then hammer things around them, and I couldn't hammer. I hammered my hand and mashed up the screen . . . I finally threw it across the deck. And he should have fired me, but he was an amateur psychologist so he said, "I understand your personality", so he had me all over the yard, burning (scrap) and I was all over the place. He was very nice.

**S.D.:** How was the work organized: was it an apprenticeship structure, like working with one guy?

**J.R.:** No. Most of us were just labourers. Women that were welders did go to training, you know, but I never went to that one. They had six weeks training, whatever the training was and a lot of them were welders, they did light welding and they took training. And I don't remember if there was any apprenticeship, but there might have been. I don't think any woman



Women at work in the Burrard shipyards: laying out an automatically welded deck panel on the skids of the prefabrication shop.

was ever an apprentice; they might have had boy apprentices because it was a craft union, and that's their system. But I don't think any women were apprentices.

**S.D:** Do you think that was because they didn't see the women working permanently in the industry?

**J.R:** Oh, yeah, yeah, they didn't see it. I was in that Sheet Metal Workers Union and they had to bring us in the union and we had to pay a dollar or something, and we had voice but no vote in that union.

**S.D:** How did they explain that to you?

**J.R:** That was just their rule, we complained about it. A lot of the workers felt that it was wrong, but that's the rule of that craft union.

When I worked with Kenny, we used to play tricks on each other. He was a hard worker but he didn't ask anybody to do anything that he wouldn't do. A lot of men would ask you to lift their 80 lb. tool kit because you're supposed to be a helper. I remember, one kid, Johnny something, his name was, he was young, he said "Pick it up", I said, "I'm not gonna pick it up, I'm not strong enough". And he said, "What're ya workin' for?" and I said, "You just get a jitney" (a truck used to transport workers on the job site). We had some real fights with some of them. Some of those girls tried to lug it, they thought they had to, but I was one of the fiery ones — I didn't. I just told them off. But Kenny never did that, he never asked us to do anything that he wouldn't do, and he never asked us to do things that we weren't physically capable of. But I was quite slim then, and we used to have these long cowvents, those are long tubes, they used to shove me down in there and bucked up small rivets, they're just little light rivets, with a little dolly they put on me, and I'd buck up inside, and then they'd haul me out again. So, one time, you know, they played a trick on me.

Everybody ate their lunch, and they sat there and threw me a cigarette in the vent. I sat in that vent all lunch hour yelling at them. So the next day Kenny was having his damned tea that he always used to have, so I got the welders to weld his lunchkit on the deck and he came for his tea and there he sat for his lunch hour — it was a half-hour that we had. So, he never left me in there again.

### Minding the children

When I got a job on the yard, I had a lady come and live with me, to look after my children, a Mrs. Stewart, and that's how I could work there. She had been working in Shaughnessy as a maid and she had a room downstairs. She got fifty dollars a month and her board. She said, "Jonnie, if you can get a job in the yards, I'll come and live with you for twenty-five dollars a month", because with me she was like part of the family. So that's how I could go, and she kept house and looked after my children for me.

**S.D:** There was no childcare at all then?

**J.R:** No, there wasn't. We were the first ones to start it, that was one of the things I wrote about (in **Main Deck**), and the things we got upset about, and the things everyone worried about: what to do with the kids.

**S.D:** How did you organize childcare?

**J.R:** Well, we didn't organize it, but we tried to. We worked at it, yeah, we worked at it. We were the first at that time, because that was a tremendous problem for us. And sometimes we had relatives, and sometimes the kids would just be left, you know, indiscriminately around, or they had to worry about when they came after school. I was fortunate that I had Mrs. Stewart come, otherwise, I just couldn't have gone. My boys were about 4, 5 and 6 — something like that anyways. Danny

was in school, so he must have been 6 or 7. But they were little. I had three in a row; I had three by the time I was 21, which I don't recommend for anybody, and then the Depression. Childcare was a big problem, and it was talked about all the time, because women worry all the time.

And I was on a committee, and I don't remember the name of the committee because it was too long ago, but on the committee that started Strathcona Day Nursery. That was the only one we had in Vancouver at the time down here on Powell and Cordoba. Later there was one in the West End too, in the community centre there. But they weren't started until after the War. We had been petitioning the government. We had Dorothy Steeves, (MLA for B.C. at the time) and she was a CCF (Cooperation Commonwealth Federation, the predecessor of the NDP) at that time, working with us. We had many committees, coming and going and petitioning and sending letters and delegations to the city hall and to Victoria to get funded for a daycare. But we didn't get it until after the War, and it was a terrible problem for women so women had to quit even though they badly needed the money. But they just couldn't leave the children.

And it's still a problem, it's almost bigger now because these little daycares have started all around, and then this government has cut off the funding for them. It costs women more to put the kid in the daycare than go to work. It's still a terrible problem. They talk about women having all this independence and careers. Somebody has to raise the kids, you can be brilliant, you still can't let the kid die. And there's very few women who are gonna take on that role, while the woman works. It's still your main job, and it's always been my main job, I always had to raise kids. But at that time I had Mrs. Stewart. When she left me — toward the end



Women found employment during wartime in the sheet metal shop at the shipyards.

when I was working as a passergirl, catching rivets at another shipyard — I got another lady, a Norwegian lady called Bobbi. She wasn't as good a housekeeper, but she was sweet with the kids. And I didn't care anyways; I was big and strong and could do it all. It didn't matter to me, I could do it at night, and do the shopping. As long as she was good with the kids I didn't care about anything else. So I was fortunate.

**S.D:** It must have been really difficult for women working at that kind of industrial job . . .

### A real education

**J.R:** I didn't feel tired; it was a whole education to me to go in those yards. I was about 25 years old and I had known nothing but, you know, just going to school or raising children, or struggling in a Depression. And I had already a lot of feelings, you know, about society. You don't live like that without getting a good idea that something was wrong someplace, and I . . . I was pretty left, too left, left-left you know . . . I hadn't related things together (as a strategy). When I went in the yards, it was just a whole total education to me because I had so many men talking to me about the struggles, the old Wobblies talked to me, then the organizers that were working and those that had helped organize the union, they started forming a union. And right at the very first the Marine-workers were trying to form a Federation and I got the idea of the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) and industrial unions, and the importance of it. In those two years I got more of an education than you could get in three

colleges or universities; and understanding society, and understanding people.

**S.D:** You talked about getting an education in the shipyards, did the guys talk to the women a lot?

**J.R:** All the time. And we were in there, as soon as we went in we were accepted and pals. It was an education to them too — the ones that fought against it, like my little Kenny Sherry, when I got yellow jaundice and I had to leave Kenny cause I was quite sick. And, I said to him — I had tears in my eyes — now look Sherry, here you were the one that didn't want to work with women and you're crying when I leave. He says, "Well, Jonnie, in a million years you'll never make a mechanic, but you're more fun than anybody, so . . ." Then I went. No, no. We were very much accepted after they got used to the idea and they liked to work with women, and everybody learned something; it was an education. Women learned because we had to; you're so dependent all your life on the man's salary. It was a tremendous thing to earn your own money. And a lot of marriages broke up over it because she wasn't going to go back and ask any more. Many other ones were better because the man understood and she was more of a partner, so it was actually more than theory at that time. Besides being unemployed, men really controlled the purse strings and most families and women really had to beg for their cash; I did. I was supposed to be begging, I had a husband like that. But you never went back to that. Never. And when we used to get on those old street cars, we used to be filthy dirty. I worked in the deep tanks when I was a riveter and I was slimey. I used to hang off the back of the streetcar,

wouldn't even let me sit down on it. He'd say, "I can't understand why you like to do this". They couldn't understand that besides earning the money we were sort of buying back our self-respect. And that's something none of those men really understood, and I don't think they understand it today.

No, I didn't mind how dirty it was and how rough it was. I just felt great, and when I first was a passergirl going up that shell . . . my first day and they shoved this bucket in my hand and started throwing hot rivets at me. I was just terrified, absolutely terrified and I saw everybody else doing it and I thought "Oh God, you know I'll never make this", and the heaterboy — they pitched with 2 tongs, they pitched the rivets, and some of them are so good that they can lay them in that bucket, right up, I don't know how many feet, as high as this house, I don't know how many feet; it was high. This kid starts throwing to my face to scare me, and he sure did, and he scraped my cheek with this hot rivet, and I was down the ladder and after him, I was gonna kill him, you know, I thought I was scarred for life. And he ran. Anyways, they took me to the first-aid and they said, no, it's a surface burn, it will go away, so that kid kept out of my way for a long time. Then the riveter that I was working with said, "Jonnie, if you can't go up there don't worry about it because a lot of people can't and we'll get another job for you in the yard". He says, "You try it, but . . . if you're nervous, don't do it". Well, I went up and I was terrified, but I did it because I just couldn't go down again and face everybody. I stood it out and hung on to the bucket — you work with a bucket — and the next day I went up and I felt a little better and all of a sudden I wasn't afraid at all. And the bucket showed me how to catch, how to move my bucket, and I got so fast at it and so good at it that I was one of the first called when I walked in the yard, and that was the highest egoism I ever had, I would work any place.

### On piecework

But I did a wrong thing there too you see, how you learn! I used to like to work fast, and sometimes you'd work 2 passers and sometimes the other passer wouldn't show up, and I'd say, "Oh, I'll do it", because I was pretty fast, and I worked two passers, and then, they had this big thing going on, which at that time I didn't understand at all. They used to work for piecework, the riveters' gangs, the whole gang worked that way. Well the head guy, if he was in favour or he got the job, he'd get the whole surface, and he'd make quite a bit of money. And then some other person would do the pick-up, that's the rivets that's missed, and they'd maybe do 50 rivets and he'd do 5,000 or something, so they wanted to put it on wages, and not piecework, and I never did understand about piecework, until I went to the union. That was my first union meeting, I was at the Marine and Boilermakers Union, at that time, we'd changed unions and we could vote. In that

## JONNIE RANKIN

union, I had a vote. And, it was a much more progressive union, and not a craft union. And so I went to vote for piecework because I wanted to work fast up the shell, but boy, I tell you, I sat through the meeting, it was a Saturday and Sunday, and I went back on Sunday and I listened and I had a real education because some of those fellows that worked on heavy construction and had bad arms they told about piecework. They told about the profits the company made out of you, they told about everything, and so then I went out and I fought against piecework ever since, you know. Because I didn't know, but I went to all the meetings, and I sat right through them and listened and I was told how they formed the union, the basis of the union, and how they fought for and how hard they worked to keep this union and how they were fighting against piecework and contract work of any kind, and that we should have part of the profit of the whole, and not cut each other. And so on, and so on. So I don't know, so in 2 days I probably learned more than I'd learned in 20 years, someplace else. So I went out and fought hard against piecework, and that's why I'm sorry they lost the **Main Deck** because at that time there was a lot written in the **Main Deck** about it, we were having a real struggle. And we never did win it completely, because there were so many small craft unions. It was a series of small craft unions at that time . . . Machinists, this, that, everything, every department was a different union. And they tried to form a Federation and I don't think they ever really made it. But it should have been.

**S.D:** How did you move from one union to another?

**J.R:** Oh, I just transferred, they always transferred you. You had to be a member of the union to work. And at that time you didn't stand in line, they needed your labour, so you automatically signed in on whichever union was in the department you were working in. They had to take you. **S.D:** In that period of time during the War there were some real struggles going on among different unions; among the labour federation, the CCL and the Boilermakers. Were you involved in any of that?

## Industrial unions vs. craft unions

**J.R:** I wasn't involved personally, but I was involved in talking about it and reading about it and arguing about it, because the Boilermakers Union wanted to form a Federation — the question of industrial unions against craft unions. And at that time the dream was to industrialize — and the CIO was at that time before they affiliated, from the girls in the office right down to the riveter — it would have been one industrial union, instead of all those little craft unions. Some of those were old, old unionists, and they felt that they were . . . it was hurting their jurisdiction, and they had some things on their side too, that it was an industry that they were working

within, it was quite complicated, and I don't remember all the ins and outs of their discussion now, I don't know how I can, it was 35 years ago. But oh yeah, we talked about it, and we argued this way and that way, and for the first time started thinking about it for the first time in our life, you know, but I certainly wasn't involved ever. I was never a shop steward, I just worked and had my little column. I just loved working in the shipyards because I met everybody and to me it was a release from being almost servitude to a marriage which was no good and too young and ready to go.



**Jonnie Rankin, shipyard worker, organizer labour activist and writer.**

**S.D:** What were the other women like who worked there? Were most of them in the same position as you: they came into the yards needing money and they . . .

**J.R:** Yeah, that's it, most people worked because they needed a job. Mostly they were just people, and they were from all over. You know, people could start getting their stove fixed. I fixed my kitchen. I lived in this awful kitchen with the clothes dripping over my head, and I finally got enough money to remodel my kitchen and I talked about this damn kitchen every day where we used to have coffee in the Sugar Bowl, a little place in North Vancouver. And every day I bored everybody to death about this kitchen. Thank God (for) this kitchen that I was rebuilding and I had some money, and even on those wages in those days, it was a wage, and I know one fella, was an oldtime leftwinger, called me bourgeois, I didn't even know what bourgeois meant but I didn't like the sound of it.

**S.D:** Because you were fixing your kitchen?

**J.R:** Because I was fixing my kitchen. And I really went after him, I said, "I work for this money, I live in that kitchen and I cook and I have a right to a nice kitchen." Then he was always telling me about, this is a funny thing, about the Soviet women. The Soviet women as far as he was concerned

was always in love with a tank as far as I could see. The Soviet women this, and the Soviet women that. And I used to wear these awful overalls, and so I used to put a big ribbon over the top of my hat, because it was more feminine, and so he used to call me frivolous because I wore this ribbon, bow, on my hat. And to sort of doll up this overall a little bit — I was only 25 years old, and I didn't feel like any man just because I was working. So anyways, he was always telling me about Soviet women fighting on the Front, which they did and organizing the factories and everything else, but they were never frivolous according to him. **S.D:** They did not wear ribbons on their hats.

## Meeting Soviet women: Giving lessons in the pincurl

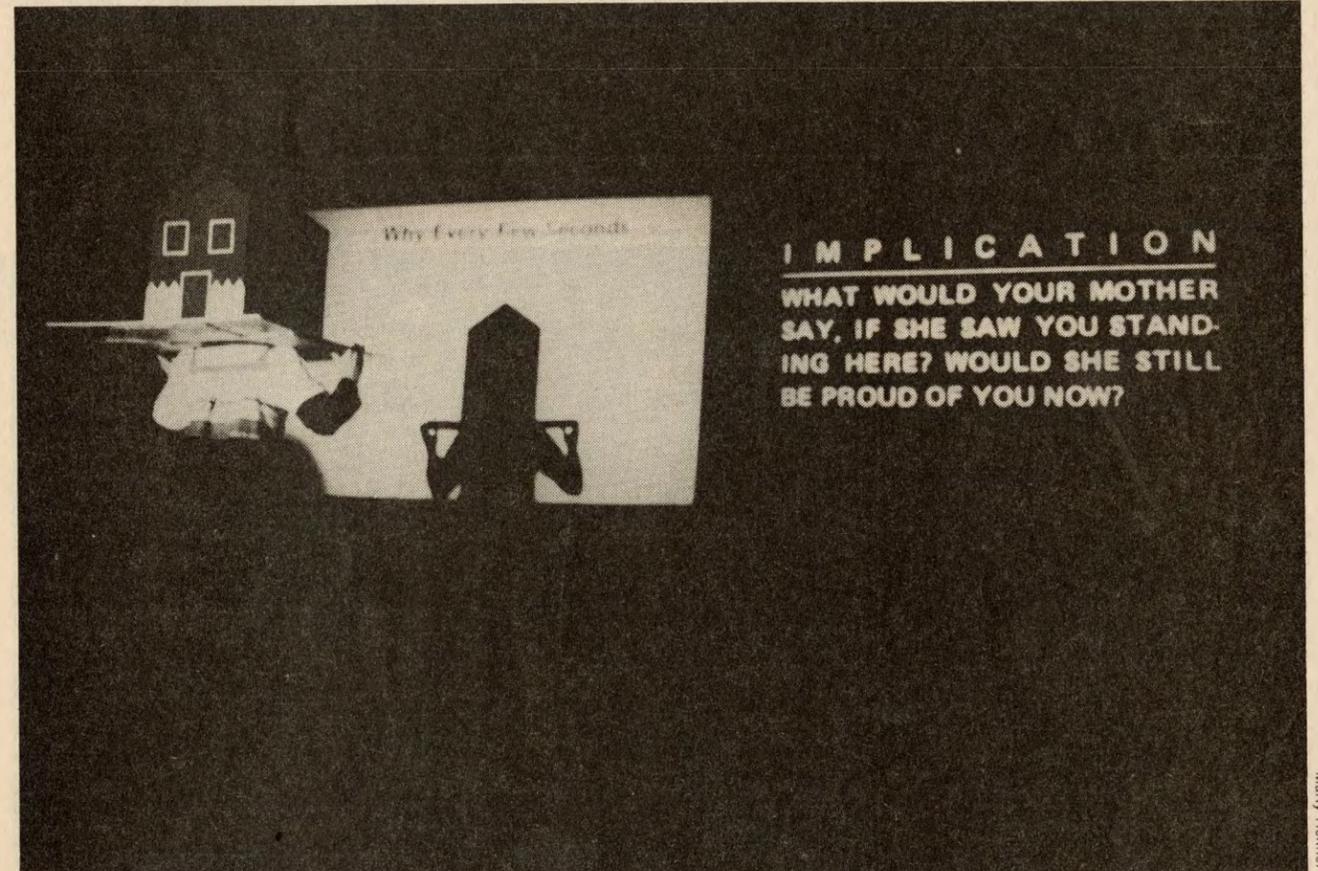
**J.R:** No, no, no. No, no. They were much more dedicated than I was. And they were . . . and kitchens were immaterial. So one day, we were all standing there and they bring in a Soviet ship. They had dug this thing up from out of the North Sea, and the whole crew was bringing it in, there was a lot of women on this boat. And we were, I guess, maybe six or eight feet apart. We were all hanging onto the decks staring at each other. We were on our side and they're on their side. Everybody's staring at each other and all of a sudden the women would come up and they'd all have these fancy kerchiefs, suddenly putting them on their hair and I said, "Do you notice the fancy kerchiefs comin' up on deck on women's hair?" I said, "Maybe they aren't so much in love with the tanks after all."

And when I was down in the ladies' toilet I used to go punch in and finish my hair and dressing. And, I was taking pincurls out of my hair, with bobbie pins, and this woman was there, about 4 or 5 of this Soviet crew were down there and they were watching me and they kind of had perms but they looked frizzy; they weren't set. So she asked me, this woman knew a few words of English, and I said, "Bobbie pin", and I showed her the one curl I knew how to make. So we went at lunchtime and I was giving them lessons on the pincurl and it turned out that this woman was the doctor on the ship. She learned English quite well and I used to talk to her a lot about things, and I asked her one day about the children, there were a lot of children on this boat, and she said — it was '43 or '44 at that time — that there were so many bombings that they just had to pick up the children, the orphans, and put them on farms, or behind the Urals, or on boats, or anywhere where they could keep them until they could find places for them, they just . . . they just picked up the kids and put them through the convoys on the boats and so on. They had a school there, she was a really fine woman, and she learned English pretty well in the time she was there. And we got quite friendly with them, back and forth, with our boats so close. □

## LISA LIEBMANN and TONY WHITFIELD

# LA/LONDON LAB

## The long-distance symbiosis didn't materialize, and in the end what remained were the differences.



Linda Nishio's performance "A Good House is Hard to Find"

A series of performances, installations, videotapes, films and discussions by southern Californian and London-based women artists; Franklin Furnace, N.Y.C.; March 1981

We'll Think of a Title When We Meet, L.A./London Lab was the heading used to advertise Franklin Furnace's ambitious March program. Despite the optimism that heading conveyed, for many reasons, no title was ever found. That search, metaphorically, became a functional element for the entire event.

A little background: In 1979 the Guggenheim Museum mounted an exhibition entitled **British Art Now** (for "British Art . . ." read official culture of the Empire; for ". . . Now" read recently economically sanctioned, good investment.) No works

by women were included. Responding to this, British artist Susan Hiller and Martha Wilson (director of Franklin Furnace) began discussions which (with the added input of Suzanne Lacy) resulted in the L.A./London Lab. Over a three week period more than two dozen works by 18 artists were presented. Hiller and Lacy accepted the roles of curators, choosing artists based in London and L.A., respectively.

While the series focused primarily on women's performance, related installations, documentation, films and video were also included. In addition periodic panels/discussion groups provided fragmentary insights into the issues that were shaping the private (and often first) dialogues among the artists themselves. Feminism, politics, economics, cultural

heritages, work conditions were obvious points of departure. Accordingly, linguistic nuances became pivotal. Syntax proved to be as varied as the nominally cohesive device of spoken English permitted and as crucial to mutual understanding as the differing cultural realities it reflects. Critics were also part of this apparatus — Moira Roth (L.A.) serving as occasional interpreter with Caryn Faure Walker as her London based counterpart.

## A binary construction

In a sense, Franklin Furnace in particular and New York in general served as moderator, or more precisely, rapt observer for the L.A./London Lab. Unlike **British Art Now** at the Guggenheim, the base upon which this series was built and

from which it was most readily approached by both participants and viewers, was fundamentally a binary, if faulty, construction: L.A. vs. London. London vs. L.A. Nevertheless, in organizing the L.A./London Lab an underlying assumption appears to have been the latent existence of certain undefined parallels which, once revealed would allow for future "networking." One speculates that "networking," something of a buzzword during discussions, was perceived to mean a state of grace encompassing waves of ideological exchange, mutual support and eventual collaboration — in short, long-distance symbiosis. For the New York viewer, whose perceptions were often enough labeled alien to both groups, such symbiosis seemed doubtful if not doomed. For those who saw a single evening of performance in which, as was the general rule, one British work was pitted against one L.A. work, oddly drawn comparisons

were inevitable.

For those who saw a few evenings, those comparisons began to illuminate divergent modes of esthetic and philosophical responses specific to L.A., London or New York. For those, like ourselves, who saw the majority of the program, the multiplicity of viewpoints evidenced by the artists in each group, the qualitative distinctions among the works they produced and the presence of an edgy, generally sympathetic, but equally opinionated audience produced an event so open-ended as to be impeded, if not plagued by aborted dialogues and poorly posed rhetorical questions (inherent in the works and voiced by their makers). Such questioning ranged from the startlingly simplistic to the dialectical. Out of all of this, what became most clear were the differences — perceptual, linguistic, cultural, esthetic — that proved to be, at this time, too wide for any bond other than

respect, or any promise for future interaction beyond that of alliances born out of natural, not intellectual, empathy.

Ironically, considering the exhibition that acted as its catalyst, the L.A./London Lab was funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Arts Council of Great Britain. This attempt to clear a few communications channels within the "global village" turned, out of necessity, to the support of governmental machinery. Similarly, schisms between ideology and compromised reality demanded reckoning with throughout the series. What follows are edited answers to a list of written questions which we mailed to Susan Hiller and Suzanne Lacy at the series' end. Our intention was to elicit responses which would elaborate upon, or demonstrate those elements that were difficult to reconcile, as well as express two perspectives on the value of the New York meeting. □

## INTERVIEWS: Susan Hiller and Suzanne Lacy

*What were the criteria you used in choosing artists for the L.A./London series at the Franklin Furnace?*

**Susan Hiller:** I selected work of high quality by artists who are aware of the power of art to make connections denied or masked by ideology and who have, over the years, made an intervention into public life by examining the implications of their ambiguous placement as women within 'language' and 'culture.'

These artists have made the connections that transform negative internalizations into positive expression. Most of them have been politically active, but none has, to my way of thinking, made the mistake of substituting rhetoric for art. They share an awareness that locates their work socially, politically, and sexually, while representing a number of strands within the women's movement rather than a single theoretical position. I had this in mind from the start, intending to show the rich variety of content-oriented work being done by women artists in Britain, work virtually unknown in the U.S. As a result, though not intentionally, the selection can be seen as a kind of survey of first-generation British feminist performance art, or as an introduction to "third-area" work coming out of several different, politicized, collective working situations. *With hindsight, would those criteria be somewhat different if you had to choose again?*

**S.H.:** Perhaps at this point I would think of adding one or two additional artists to round out the notion of a first-generation survey. I was pleased that so much



Martha Rosler (left), Susan Hiller (right foreground) and Suzanne Lacy (insert)

diversity could be encompassed under the heading we chose ("London-based artists" rather than "English artists"). We had English, Irish, American, Welsh, and Scots voices, and this came about as a result of my initial criteria rather than as an end in itself.

*How does it appear to you that the socialist concept in British life and American thought has informed the presentation of much of the work that we saw? (Please be as specific as you can.)*

**S.H.:** Perhaps it is fruitful to link all this to some specific 'socialist concept,' but I think it is more important to understand the

radical implication of a contemporary art practice that draws strength and meaning from an explicit recognition of its origins in collective experience.

I've often said that women have a privileged access to certain subversive insights. Women do not begin to make art unless they have something to say; because this something has not been said, it is potentially explosive as far as the dominant interests are concerned. Whether the work attacks, head-on, issues like male violence against women, or whether it subtly undermines the "obvious" in detecting class or gender bias,

it always closes the gap between "experience" (ours) and "reality" (theirs). This sense of seeing how our work affects the world in which we live; this sense of learning along with others from its effect; this sense of seeing one's own subjectivity as part of a larger socio-historical complexity, connects the practice of all the artists who were at Franklin Furnace.

Working collaboratively may be an approach to the reform of art practice (or it may not be — this point is often asserted but rarely dissected), and certainly members of both communities of artists have long experience of this. I could cite the work coming out of years of collaboration in the Women's Workshop of the Artists' Union (London) or Women's House\* (L.A.) as examples. Yet I certainly would not want to see this remarkable tradition used to denigrate the contribution, courage, skill, and talent of individual artists. There are good reasons why a group model doesn't always work for art practice, and why some of the most effective work we saw in New York was made by artists who follow individualistic paths.

What has emerged in both communities, clearly, has been a recognition of the need for active, supporting social structures. What has also emerged is a clear understanding of the degree to which institutional contradictions must be exposed in order to obliterate the lie of art's autonomy, its 'freedom' from social, political, and economic issues.

In Britain, we have "socialist" institutions that are as repressive as capitalist ones; we have "socialist" art bureaucrats representing all known left-wing factions who are as misogynist as their predecessors, though more skilled at packaging their bias; we have "socialist" artists whose work hangs at the Tate Gallery; we have "socialist" critics, male and female, who are as authoritarian and hierarchial as any other critics writing for vested interests. Basically we have "socialism" used as a justification for self-interest at all levels, which leads me to the conclusion that it is premature to read "socialist concept" into the presentation of anybody's work — this is where we must always be specific, and not resort to easy answers.

*How have regional identities (linguistic heritages, political/historical and social traditions) informed the critical and creative dialogues that you have had?*

**S.H.:** The London-based work has assimilated much theoretical material coming out of Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, semiotics — as well as the conventions of, say, local music hall (vaudeville), folklore, movies, TV . . . Where these concerns overlap for us seems to be in the area of language. So, first, women's alienation from male-dominated ("man-made") linguistic codes, and, by extension, from male behavioural

\*Women's House, indeed, was an important precursor to the Woman's Building. It is our understanding that Susan Hiller refers here to both.

conventions, is the underlying theme of much of the work. Second, the significance of class is understood by everyone here, whereas it is heavily masked in North American ideology. Our premises and assumptions are thus politicized to begin with: we could not make art unless we had analysed the implications of being female and seizing the 'privilege' of speech. We could not live in Britain without being aware of the way class forms motives and meanings.

And third, these insights contribute to the blatant transparency of any notion of a unified "culture" that relates to all regions, all classes, and both sexes in the U.K. We are particularly sensitive to issues of so-called "cultural imperialism" whether emanating from our own centralized bureaucracy or from abroad: it's not easy to continue to insist on the validity of differences and the necessity for different 'languages' in the face of both left and right-wing pressure to enforce acceptable dominant codes. Surely it's no coincidence that issues of regional autonomy in Europe inevitably revolve around language.

*At this point in time, what do you consider to be the significant distinction between feminist art and art whose manifest content does not deal specifically with feminist issues but is made by a feminist?*

**S.H.:** In my own work I consider it to be more subversive to speak, as a woman, on a wide range of subjects than to limit my scrutiny to women's subjects, whether traditionally defined or defined as acceptable by various interest groups. Really, all these debates about definition, about art "isms," are just ways of hiving off territory and giving some folks jurisdiction, the power to say "Yes, you are making feminist art" or "No, you are not making feminist art." It's a shame for women to fall victim to this kind of divisiveness that mirrors the categorizing that goes on in The Establishment, and that is always used to exclude some people, on theoretical grounds, from the ranks of the privileged. Let's realize there is always something to be gained from this kind of distinction — power, prestige, the right to dominate, the right to exclude.

*At this point, feminist art is served as well by judicious criticism as by advocacy. With this in mind, could you make a list of words, terms, nouns, adjectives, expressions, concepts, ideas, etc. that you feel would be beneficial to the development of a forming critical language?*

**S.H.:** I'm interested in work that speaks the language of art skillfully enough to subvert them; strong, beautiful, highly intelligent work; work that exists against the current and in the margin; extreme statements; risk; work that shatters ideological "givens" into fragments or makes connections where none ever existed before. I believe art can function as a critique of existing culture and as a locus where futures not otherwise possible can begin to shape themselves. My own critical sense refuses to hive off "feminist" from any other sort of art, or art from other expressive practices. Consequently, to line

up some appropriate words or ideas seems like special pleading, or else part of the attempt I outlined above to create a privileged territory. I see no reason at all to be protective about work that succeeds in giving voice to what remains unsatisfied, hidden, new, eccentric, disturbing to the status quo. When it works, it shatters the viewer's expectations so that new critical criteria are inevitable.

*What were the criteria you used in choosing artists for the L.A./London series at the Franklin Furnace?*

**Suzanne Lacy:** Variety was probably the main criterion (in choosing the artists). I chose artists who differed in age, length of time performing, and degrees of involvement with feminism and the feminist art community in Los Angeles. Each artist was chosen to highlight a different aspect of California performance, whether it be participation in an on-going collaborative group, commitment to feminist or marxist politics, exploration of technology, human survival, religion or oppression. Almost all had in common the revelation of the artist's personal history in the performance itself, and most were concerned with relationships — between women, men and women, children and parents, and performer and audience. All saw the exchange as an opportunity to explore their relationship with each other and with the British women, something they hoped might influence their future work.

The choice of critic was easy. Moira Roth has been the single strongest advocate for California performance art in the country. She was intrigued by the opportunity of finding out more about British women's performance, and the whole idea of a meeting between women of two nationalities won her over.

One final criterion Martha Wilson and I agreed on was to choose women who had not had a lot of exposure in New York. That left out people like Eleanor Antin and some of the other more established performers. Sometimes my rationale for selection broke down. Martha Rosler, for example, moved to New York in the middle of the planning, so she was no longer a Southern California artist. And she had just performed in New York in a couple of series. But she represented a strong feminist marxist viewpoint in her work, and I wanted that perspective in the series.

*With hindsight, would those criteria be somewhat different if you had to choose again?*

**S.L.:** Now that I've seen that particular constellation, I'd like to see a different one — not that I was dissatisfied. There are many themes I could have chosen that might have made a more coherent picture — narrative, public actions, punk, ecology, art of the Woman's Building, etc. but any of these would give lie to the real diversity we have.

I was committed to showing that diversity from the beginning, but some of the other criteria developed rather haphazardly, a function of artists' different availabilities. Originally I had hoped that we would be able to do a large collaborative project with the British women, so I chose women who either had experience in collaboration or who had addressed the theme of woman-to-woman communication in their work. When distance made it impossible for us to get together before the event, those criteria became less important, so when two women couldn't come I replaced them with others for reasons that mostly related, once again, to keeping a balance of styles and content.

*How does it appear to you that the socialist concept in British life and American thought has informed the presentation of much of the work that we saw? (Please be as specific as you can.)*

**S.L.:** California is not, in general, political in the conventional sense of the word. People don't read the newspapers as avidly or have the intense debates they do in the East. The climate of the area, and I mean that literally, does not seem to foster political debate and the development of ideologies. In my brief experience in London last fall, artists seemed to be much more conversant with a range of socialist political ideas than artists in California. As far as I know only Vanalyne Green of the Feminist Art Workers, and Martha Rosler would say about their work that they are

operation that seems to me to be, if not an expressed political ideology of socialism, certainly one of its fundamental feelings. Also, they handle the distribution of money, such as it is, and acknowledgement, in keeping with socialist rather than capitalist ideas. But with a few exceptions, women performance artists on the West Coast don't have a developed socialist ideological language. I think, however, that much of the more obviously public and issue-oriented work is feminist socialism in practice.

*Would you comment on the concerns that became apparent through the work and discussions of the group of artists included in the Franklin Furnace series you did not select? (Please feel free to express any criticisms you may have had.)*

**S.L.:** It was quite obvious to me that the women in the British half of the series were real veterans, that they had been performing for a long time. I was personally impressed with the seriousness and professionalism of their work... and the humour. It's hard for me to make connections and generalizations with such a brief encounter and without a genuine understanding of their context, but some of the things I noticed were a deep commitment to social and political issues, from Sonia Knox's Ireland performance, to Tina Keane's film on Scotland, and Hannah O'Shea's litany to "forgotten" women artists. Their improvisational work was quite successful, something I don't see much in California. There was a particular

*traditions) informed the critical and creative dialogues that you have had?*

**S.L.:** One has to understand California art in its separation from New York. That's something that the London women didn't seem aware of when we first began — that we were in many ways as alien to New York as they were. Los Angeles artists are in the distinct position of being part of a very large and vital art scene which is somewhat isolated from what has been considered the "center" of the art world (at least by New Yorkers). It's not so much that California artists were isolated from major art ideas, but that they did not feel the tremendous pressure to conform to them. This accounts not only for the variety of California art in general, but for the development of some distinctly new and different political and social approaches to performance.

There is a parallel in the development of feminist performance. Not only were we part of the general California isolation, but we managed to form a separate entity within the Los Angeles art scene. Since there was not a terribly active arts market, and not a lot of prestigious local publicity to vie for, there was not a tremendous and omnipresent hierarchy of art styles, forms, etc., as in New York, and artists grouped themselves into several interacting enclaves — the political artists, painters, performance artists, feminists, etc. This was part of the environmental circumstances that allowed us to develop a strong feminist art aesthetic and nurture

de Bretteville and Arlene Raven founded the Woman's Building, a series of exhibition spaces for women's culture, and The Feminist Studio Workshop, a school for training women in art, culture, and feminism. This move marked a radical transition out of male dominated institutions and into our own self-created ones. Over the next few years several dozen students graduated from the Feminist Studio Workshop into the Los Angeles art scene, and the Woman's Building became a large and well-established institution. It provided not only a showcase for women's art of all kinds, but its presence validated the very idea of a unique feminist expression. The feminist art movement began to give permission and visibility to the expression of personal experience in art, as well as to the relevance of using political issues in one's art, something that did not exist in California prior to the middle '70s. Artists developed a range of techniques for taking their work outside of galleries and art institutions that included political strategies and mass-audience appeal.

It would be hard to talk about Southern California performance without mentioning Hollywood. I don't think the influence of the television and film industries on performance is easily pinned down. Some artists have used the idea of "stars" as personas for their aspirations. Others have adopted detective stories and soap operas (Eleanor Antin's *Nurse and the Hijacker*, for example) as models for their performances. The familiarity with movie production must surely have had an impact on the scale of art performance projects, just as the accessibility of mass-media turned many artists' heads around as they sought larger audiences. Chris Burden crawled through glass in a commercial spot he purchased on late-night television; Lowell Darling ran for Governor of California using the media as any politician would; Labowitz and I staged performance events and public information campaigns in the media to bring attention to violence against women.

That's what I would describe as environmental influence on creative dialogues. As to critical dialogues, I don't think they exist to any large degree. People don't seem to talk about their work publicly. I think in part the lack of art critics and magazines in California has stifled critical dialogue, although that is rapidly changing. On the other hand, what seems to have developed in place of this institutionalized critical discourse is a situation where performance artists build criticism into the work itself, either by writing about its ideas and each other's work, or making it a part of the feedback form of the piece. In community art work, for example, many feminist artists incorporate the feedback of the intended audience into the piece as it develops, allowing this exchange to shape the eventual form of the work.

*At this point in time, what do you consider to be the significant distinction between feminist art and art whose manifest*



Carlyle Reedy in performance

*content does not deal specifically with feminist issues but is made by a feminist?*

**S.L.:** There is a difference between art that is expressive of feminist politics, and art that is made by a woman who considers herself a feminist, and that's about the last statement which I can state with certainty. As to what those differences are, I don't have a definite answer, and I don't want to get into the position of sounding like what I'm about to say is dogma, is the only way to do feminist art. (I don't think all feminists need necessarily make political, or feminist art, for their work to be beautiful, inspiring, or uplifting — in short, to be good art). But I will offer some speculations on the subject of what is feminist art, if they can be taken as just that — points of departure for a dialogue. The definition of feminist art is as varied as the definitions of feminism (and is, in fact, very dependent upon one's definition of it). I think that feminist art must first be political, by which I mean that it address social issues that affect large numbers of people's lives. Good political art in general sheds light on important issues, changes attitudes about them, and shows its audience a way to act to change society in accord with new insights. So, feminist art should have an active component in it, and will probably make an attempt to reach people outside the normal audience for art. Such art holds no forms or content sacred, but constantly strives to create the shape of an indefinable vision for the future. Since its materials and concerns are not those of traditional art it may indeed not look like "art" but its frame of reference remains embedded in creativity, art history, and the potential of visual imagery to cause change in our lives.

*At this point, feminist art is served as well by judicious criticism as by advocacy. With this in mind, could you make a list of words, terms, nouns, adjectives, expressions, concepts, ideas, etc. that you feel would be beneficial to the development of a forming critical language?*

**S.L.:** I think in my description of feminist art there are some beginnings of a critical language implied. Feminist criticism — support, feedback, and evaluation — is the cornerstone of feminist art. Feminism's second major contribution to art, after putting personal experience back into the

arena, was to describe each work as part of an entire system, which includes the artwork itself, its audience, where it is seen, and the social milieu in which it is created and to which it inevitably responds. There was no critical language for what we were doing, and it was clear from the beginning that the burden of explication for our uniquely female art lay in the artist herself. Criticism was built into our art, and we developed distinctly different criteria for what we felt was good art. These criteria came as much from political strategies and social sciences as they did from aesthetics. Let me phrase some of the parameters of this developing critical framework as a series of questions I might ask of an artwork I was evaluating (keep in mind that I would only ask these of art which either purports to be political, or, by addressing social issues by using public forms, becomes political, despite the artist's intention).

First, what is the intention of the artist? What does she say she is trying to do? I think this is a first step in demythologizing art to the artist herself. I am struck by how often artists say that their work is "about" something or other, or is having some effect on its audience when it is quite apparent it is not. I would have artists begin to move out of the realm of fantasy when they evaluate the actual or intended impact of their work.

Second, who is the audience for the work? The audience for the work should be appropriate to the content and the intention of the work. I make different works for different audiences, because people communicate and understand differently.

Third, how does it relate to similar imagery, ideas, and issues in popular culture? That is, what is the social context for the work and how does that influence how the viewer will perceive it?

What is the effect of the work on its audience? What visions and dreams does it evoke, and what is the model of human nature, human relationships, and our collective future suggested by the art? What does it do to the audiences' attitudes on a topic, and what kind of action does it propel them toward?

How can we measure the effect of the work? Adopting the language of political activism and social sciences to answer this one, how do we know if the work is in fact fulfilling our intentions?

The last question is how will the work, and the effects of the work, maintain themselves over time? Or will they? Will they create temporary change, an instant vision, or will they contribute to a larger ongoing movement of social change?

These questions are as much for the artist in the process of developing her own work, as they are for the critic who evaluates the work. I don't think there are easy answers, or even any correct answers. The questions I have laid out here are merely an attempt to introduce another way of thinking into the production and evaluation of feminist, indeed all political art. □

#### FROM LONDON

##### Rose English

Adventure or Revenge performance

##### Rose Finn-Kelcey

Mind the Gap performance

##### Tina Keane

Shadows of a Journey 16 mm film;

Clapping Songs slide/tape performance;

Play Pen video/performance

##### Sonia Knox

Echoes of Ireland performance

Birds of Paradise performance

##### Hannah O'Shea

A Litany for Women Artists performance

A Visual Time Span/Towards a Sound Track?

(A Visual Diary) 16 mm film

##### Sally Potter

Thriller 16 mm film

##### Carlyle Reedy

Yoga with Interference, Odette, Woman One, Laundry,

Waitress, Miss Aminta, Tortilla Mary, Reflections,

Waters... performance

##### The Marx Brothers (Georgia Born, Lindsay Cooper, Sally Potter)

Live performance of musical improvisation

#### FROM LOS ANGELES

##### Feminist Art Workers (Nancy Aneglo, Cheri Gaulke, Vanalyne Green, Laurel Klick)

Heartbeats performance

##### Cheri Gaulke

Broken Shoes performance

##### Leslie Labowitz

Sprout Time performance, business and consultation

##### Linda Montano

The Nun's Fairy Tale performance; Learning To Talk;

Mitchell's Death videotapes

##### Linda Nishio

A Good House is Hard to Find performance

##### Martha Rosler

Spinning into the '80s performance; Domination and the

Everyday, Secrets of the Street videotapes

##### Nina Sobel

Roundabout video installation

##### Nancy Buchanan

Primary and Secondary Spectres; These Creatures videotapes

##### Barbara Smith

Just Passing videotape

##### Smith and Buchanan

Love From A to B videotape

trying to express socialist ideas. Others do work that fits within a marxist analysis, but they don't label it as such. Leslie Labowitz' work, *Sprouttime*, for example, is an art and life activity intended to free people from dependence on the agribusiness complex by "taking over the means of production" of food. The collaboration in the Feminist Art Workers' performances reveals a deep level of co-

style, or quality of delicate caring, in the British work. I don't know exactly how to explain it, but a certain subtlety of approach to issues with respect for their nature. Aside from these notes about things I liked, I simply don't have the perspective or the background to make any coherent observations.

*How have regional identities (linguistic heritages, political/ historical and social*

women artists as significant contributors to the performance scene.

This West Coast feminist development was centered on two ideas: education for women artists by women artists in an all-female environment, and building our own institutions. After three years of feminist art programs begun in the early '70s at Fresno State College and California Institute of the Arts, Judy Chicago, Sheila

## PERFORMANCE NOTES

It was knit one, drop two, as the entire event unraveled into mutual bewilderment and missing links.

Spoken English is a thin common-denominator when traditions, educations, economic frameworks and perceptual affinities are so different. While the British artists, on the whole, were obsessed with language itself — with linguistic structures, semiotics, tonal modulations, etymologies — the Americans compulsively told stories, explained them, stated cases, stressed "content". Where the British explored narrative, the Americans were autobiographical. Where the British were personal, the Americans were confessional. Joyce and Woolf loomed as familiars on one side: Judy Chicago and Allan Kaprow were credited by the other. Gracie Fields vs. Carol Burnett, etc. Whereas a few of the British artists seemed to miss their targets by slipping into rather wistful, formal freezes, most of the Americans were invigorated and direct, and determinedly simplistic.

## Running in place

Rose Finn-Kelcey's *Mind the Gap* (London) and Martha Rosler's *Spinning into the '80s* with the stuff of carefully considered and developed double-bill. Both pieces, however, were somewhat lacking, in nearly complementary fashion. Finn-Kelcey introduced herself via audiotape, apologizing for her 'non-presence', then moments later appeared to perform a work that was beautiful but effortfully empty. At one end of the track-shaped performance area that she had defined, on twin pedestals, rested a large block of slowly dripping ice over which hung two dumbbells connected by wire. At the other end Finn-Kelcey alternately crouched into a runner's starting position and ran, fiercely, in place. Her taped voice went on to speak a litany of words pertaining to, one surmised, the female elements — yin. Except for the inclusion of "woman" and "art", references were to the principles of round or of void ("hiatus," "gap," "chasm," "lacunae," etc.). These words were surprisingly at odds with what was visible: a minimalist, ascetically linear, choreographic concept. Finn-Kelcey seemed to have deliberately emphasized the 'maleness' of her own body. In white pants and shirt, hair closely cropped, muscles taught, face intensely, stressfully blank, she looked like a Trova drawing in motion. I believe at the bottom of all this lay a Samuel Beckett vision of time and futility (the spareness, the ever-melting ice) within which, then, the artist's very words seemed futile. To shut one's eyes and listen to her wonderfully gruff and youthful



From Cheri Gaulke's performance "Broken Shoes" on the theme of foot-bondage

voice was one thing; to shut one's ears and watch this subtly modulated image was another. What was missing in the "gap" was a synopsis.

Rosler's piece, conversely, was overwrought with brain cells and neurons and synapses. Reading a long, discursive text, showing slides and videotape of the many places she had lived in over a period of about fifteen years, taping vestiges of those places — a bit of fabric, a framed picture — to the wall as she read, her young son at a little desk 'doing his homework' throughout, Rosler constructed a multi-dimensional scrapbook. She established a very warm rapport with the audience; one could feel the vibrations of affirmation and recognition as she barreled through her text tracing the crises of consciousness of the Sixties, Seventies, and so forth. Her personal life at every phase was presented and received as the perfect mirror or foil for any given ideological pulse. There was not an ounce of artifice to be found. The technical accoutrements were sort of on the friz, but what the hell; slides blurred but never mind the esthetics, you were there to listen, to remember, to think, to re-tread her — and presumably *your* — journey toward perfected doctrine.

## Oppression's history and acts of inhabiting

On another evening, a very different U.S./U.K. double-bill was a high point of the series. Cheri Gaulke's presentation of *Broken Shoes*, slick in terms of production

values, raw in effect, addressed the history of the oppression of women in the form of a musical on the theme of foot-bondage. As the audience entered they were asked to remove their shoes and boots by a number of comic geishas wearing karate outfits (the Feminist Art Workers and friends), who then massaged feet and performed rituals of mock-servitude. A dance routine, led by F.A.W. Cheri Gaulke (in gaudy Suzie Wong costume) followed in the central space. Two taped interviews intercut with popular songs like Fats Waller's "(I don't Wantcha 'Cause) Your Feet's Too Big" provided the background for the rest of this orchestrated commotion including marionettes, mimed monologues, an escape by knotted bedsheets from the balcony, and just plain activity. In one of the interviews an old woman with a great American Gothic twang discussed her bunions — how and why she got them; in the other a young Oriental woman explained how she narrowly escaped having her feet bound and described the damage done upon older, therefore less lucky, relations. The influence of television was evident in the rapid, staccato, variety-show-style pacing of *Broken Shoes*, and in its frontality. Cheri Gaulke put the Franklin Furnace space to especially inventive use. A stairway, a second-story loft area, a corridor, were all gobbled up and transformed by the staging. *Broken Shoes* was a one-note concept made into a big, bumptious overture.

Carlyle Reedy may be the ultimate

Madwoman of Chaillot — she is profoundly sane. Her performance was inextricable from her persona, her intelligence and her devastating vulnerability. Called *Yoga with interference*, *Odette*, *Woman One*, *Laundry*, *Waitress*, *Miss Aminta*, *Tortilla Mary*, *Reflections*, *Water* . . . consisted of her emerging from behind a pre-set habitat of paper to chat and meander through an obstacle course of props and to inhabit a series of characters of her own invention. Each character was distinct, not one typical or typified. Each, in fact, was several characters in one and each was also the artist. The Yoga woman was a 'homemaker' escaping drudgery through spiritualism, but also a slightly crazed yogi with a domestic bent. Miss Aminta might have been a debutante, a fading film star, a prostitute, a drag queen — anyone railroaded by life into a kind of dilatory coquettishness. Tortilla Mary, swilling bourbon and passing the bottle, could have been black, chicano, or cockney. Reedy is a very intimate performer. She was so at home with every moment, every character, with herself, that she used her props with the offhandedness of someone turning out a bedside lamp. Dirty laundry was distractedly scattered when Laundry Woman became preoccupied with words. Shaving cream became body makeup when Miss Aminta glided into baroque. Reedy is that rare performer who has an exceedingly particular and delicate

relationship to her body. An inner-dialogue with it, as well as the tacit and spoken ones with the audience, sustained her throughout. At moments she was within it, at others she seemed to have mysteriously crept out of it. These undercurrents led to a moment of theatrical epiphany, of erotic, intellectual and artistic fusion, that occurred as Tortilla Mary gave way to Miss Aminta (who lives in her slip). As Reedy peeled off each of many layers of clothing, she seemed to gradually sneak back into her body, coaxing it silently as she spoke. It was a fully conscious and self-conscious striptease — the metaphor for performance.

## Suffering from good intentions

Despite many accomplished performances as well as a few of the discussions, there were moments when the events themselves seemed to suffer from a surfeit of good intentions. "Networking," for instance, is a vague term that was never defined to general satisfaction, yet its hypothetical presence cast quite a shadow, causing divergence, opportunities for brutal if silent comparisons, fits of curatorial and artistic disassociation (not to mention snobbery), and outbursts of polit-babble from all quarters. As discussion intensified towards the end, the British seemed to cringe at the merest suggestion of a

similarity to the Americans who, looking hurt, mumbled pieties about the relative sophistication of p-o-l-i-t-i-c-s on the part of the Brits.

Though never quite expressed, the old "You Yanks Haven't Had a World War at Home So How Could You Know" attitude reverberated and was swallowed dutifully and whole. The twin hydras Reagan and Thatcher were reciprocally acknowledged but there was no mistaking which side had thus far most felt the icy sting of duress. All of this has (arguably) little to do with performance art, but a lot to do with why a piece like Leslie Labowitz' *Sproutime* (L.A.), the upshot of which was that a cottage industry of bean sprouts could mean survival in a face-off with U.S. agribusiness goliaths, might strike one as an inspired leap in the direction of perfect political idiocy.

That these artists were given the chance to see and consider each other's work was the primary significance of this series. One of the most interesting developments was the rather guarded bewilderment that seemed to set in between the British and Los Angeles women. But no one ever broke down and spoke directly to this. Performances were courageous, yet the politics often timid and as a result too many sermons were addressed to the already converted. □

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## TONY WHITFIELD

## IN VIEW OF FEMINISM

LA/London Lab's film and video: Hitchcockian devices, assumed identities and memories of pain

Like a stubborn, poor relation, women's performance art has lived on the outside, in the margin since the late '60s. Its iconoclastic presence, however, far from unnoticed though rarely credited, has directly or indirectly enabled the development of such recently prominent mainstream art-currents as "narrative" and "word and image," "pattern" and "new image painting," and "installations." Its importance, nevertheless, does not hinge on other media or other interests. The women involved in the L.A./London Lab, as producers, have incorporated such bedrock as spiritualism, autobiography, subversion, activism, mythology, and history into their artistic vocabularies. If nothing else, this series provoked that those vocabularies have developed into complicated dialects articulating not only women's performance but broad feminist concerns in other modes of communication such as film and video. In the following paragraphs, I will focus on

the works that, to my way of thinking, imply, with varying degrees of incisiveness, the potency of those articulations beyond the parameters of art media, *per se*.

In retrospect, the L.A./London Lab defies any attempt at a definitive hierarchial ordering beyond that of its own complex, collective (and often schizophrenic) stream of consciousness. Few of the works in the series were premiering. Many of them had been written about in performance or feminist media. Some of them had become "hearsay classics." Rarely, if ever, had these works been put through such a critical endurance test or confronted such a variety of vested interests, be they political, esthetic or cultural. Beyond the issues determined by the works' formal structures, the relationships of each to feminism and an ideal audience, usually one other than the one it faced in New York, were not to be forgotten. Similarly, given their particular context, parallels and permutations of

performance concepts could not be ignored.

## Political strata

Despite the gynocentrism evidenced by the vast majority of works in the series, overt, expanded political inquiries were rare. Martha Rosler's videotapes, *Domination and the Everyday* (1978) and *Secrets from the Streets: No Disclosure* (1980) set themselves apart in that respect as faithful and, in varying degrees, didactic expoundings of marxist feminist ideology. Of the two *Domination and the Everyday* is more structurally complicated, theoretically self-critical, yet ultimately less successful. It is an amalgam of superficially disjunctive elements (images of the Chilean junta and scenes from Rosler's daily life, a soundtrack which records dinner conversation between the artist and her son and voice of a radio announcer rambling about the art scene, and running

subtitles discussing the nature of exploitation.) In shifting combinations, they repeat themselves in order to allow the viewer time to separate and interpret each layer. The immediate necessity to dissect the work itself, not the ideas it contains, quickly stacks the deck against its effectiveness. Rosler's insights into the relationship between national and cultural imperialism and the pacifier of daily lived reality, are astute and justifiably inconclusive. The repetition of a narrowly modulated information overload recreates the perceptual quandary that is a smokescreen to avenues for social change. The tape's self-conscious manifestation of the artist's intelligence and its formal density become counterproductive and border on conceits of inaccessibility. Why must we put in more hours on the treadmill to reach her point? *Domination . . .*'s end is the disassembling of its components to a final trailing off of the radio announcer's voice. Such an obvious structural dissolution left me grabbing for something beyond the hope of socialism to justify a work that demands so much drudgery from the start.

In *Secrets from the Street: No Disclosure* Rosler uses a repetitive format again — this time to the end of etching its point into our consciousness: Culture is a secret in divided societies, societies where "trash is a word used for those without money or power." The images here appear to have been taken from a moving car — graffiti covered walls, storefronts, ghetto facades. Cropped by the camera, quick-cut, strangely angled — what is shown at the primary remove of the video monitor is further distanced — a mysterious build-up of half-seen, loaded, peripheral images. The core of its soundtrack is a direct class analysis of culture. Against Rosler's beautifully constructed visuals (themselves, however, the product of the culture in power) the restatement of *Secrets . . .*'s political message becomes irrefutable. While the "correctness" of this work's polemics and its resolution, on its own esthetic terms, are remarkable, I could not ignore an element of propagandist romanticizing in its manipulation of the image of oppressed culture. If examined beyond a level of exotica, how long would it take to arrive at many of that culture's underpinnings that marxist feminist theory seeks to discredit?

I will dwell for a moment longer with Rosler's tapes — not on their specifics, but on their unique position within the context of the *L.A./London Lab* as a self-conscious voice of political theory. That position raises certain questions about the current direction of feminism in America in general, and of feminist performance in particular.

### The endangered left

Several years ago Rosler was making tapes like *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (also shown in the series) which dealt directly with the politics of women's lives. *Domination . . .* and *Secrets . . .* seem to indicate a



"Domination and the Everyday", a videotape by Martha Rosler

broadening of the base of her work into a more diffuse leftist cultural critique. Why? Is it a response to the current state of governmental conservatism with its resulting cutbacks in the arts (which in combination would make events like the *L.A./London Lab* an impossibility)? Are we seeing the renewal of historical/economic patterns that have thwarted radical feminist movements for the last century? Are omnipresent retrenchments redirecting feminist energies into the "larger issues" of an endangered, yet amorphous left? As crucial as those issues are and mindful of the misguidedness of single issue politics, does the relative absence of bluntly political work indicate a finer honing of the polit-language of feminism or, is the centrality of the sexual again a notion to be approached obliquely, an echoed discussion to be heard from the end of a winding institutional corridor?

In *Thriller* (1979), a 16mm black and white film by English artist Sally Potter, a chapter in the psycho-socio-economic history of women is interpreted in the dusty atmosphere of a bare attic. Marxist feminism here is funneled through a dramatic construct. Billed as "the first feminist murder mystery, *Thriller* should, perhaps, have been subtitled, "She Wonders, 'Would I Have Preferred To Be The Hero?'" Complete with *Psycho* soundtrack and, now worn, Hitchcockian devices, this film sets up a dialectic between two juxtaposed narratives. On the one hand one sees the death scene of Mimi, the seamstress/heroine/victim of Giacomo Puccini's opera, *La Boheme*, filmed at the highpoints of its theatrical splendor; on the other one is privy to the cogitations of Potter's modern heroine, herself the victim — or the witness — of a murder. The two tales are visually intercut. Intellectually, they are linked by a marxist subtext, spelled out in the heavy French (sometimes unintelligible) accent of the narrator (the murderess/witness in the attic.)

The initial process of trying to understand what, literally, is being said, underscores the problems of linguistic interpretation. From there the narrator's text must be further decoded into elements that detail her own story and those that relate it to a discussion of Mimi's death as a re-enforcement of 19th century patriarchy via "high art." What we hear begins to sound like a feminist version of Ingrid



Reconstructing the narrative

Bergman realizing how her "gaslighting" was effected, recognizing a heretofore unseeable manipulation by male power. The grief of Mimi's male companions, their heroization as payment for that grief — all at the expense of Mimi (of women in general) — are used to expose the artifices that have formed and perpetuated notions of the elevated (male) artistic sensibility.

### Reconstructing the narrative

While marxist theory acts as the gum that holds *Thriller* together, it is a work that focuses more on effects than causes. It hinges on the resultant distinctions between degrees of nobility of existence and the questions those distinctions imply — "Do (men) suffer to create the way (women) suffer to produce?" Potter leaves questions unanswered. Ironically, however, they become the film's most significant statements. Disturbing irresolution is their only logical consequence. Undermining *Thriller*'s potency, unfortunately, is its pervasive artiness. The positing of a narrative for the purpose of its deconstruction rather than its development, stylized physical interactions that look more like post-modern dance posturing than purposive movement, emotions heightened to the level of silent movie melodrama — together they become a serial surrealist tableau within a framework that does not afford it the necessary reverence for such indulgences.

While *Thriller* incorporates a discursive approach to biography that is a familiar component in women's performance, the tradition it attempts to extend is not primarily the oral historian's but the cinematographer's. It outlines a set of Potter's ambitions as a feminist filmmaker concerned with restructuring the narrative format. The irresolution of its evident goals makes *Thriller* feel strangely like a transitional piece that preceurs major work. If it succeeds, it is as promotion of Potter's talent, not as a fully realized film project.

Tina Keane's super 8 film, *Shadows of a Journey*, on the other hand, makes no pretensions to masterwork status. It is as simple and direct as *Thriller* is obviously ambitious. *Shadows . . .* records Peggy Morrison's verbal account of the eviction

of her ancestors from the Isle of Harris by the British army in the 1840s and '50s and their subsequent emigration to the Isle of Skye (or, in some cases, Cape Breton.) Quietly, Morrison, in a heavy Scottish accent, tells the story of the dispossessed families. "It is I think better forgotten if one can do it," she says. But clearly, that has not been possible. The painfulness of the event has caused the story to be passed from generation to generation. That emotion, although distanced, can be felt in Keane's film. Facts are sketched out but the story is nevertheless vivid.

Through the years and the oral retelling it begins to acquire a structural character of a myth in development, an explanation of a difficult-to-explain occurrence in tribal (Scottish) spiritual as well as political history. The hypnotic image that Keane has chosen to illustrate that event reinforces that transcendence. All she gives us to watch is the shadows of a few figures moving on shipboard, reflected on rushing water. As Morrison talks about the burning of Harris by the militia the water suddenly turns bright pink, then fades to blue-green as she continues her account.

### Cultural fragmentation

What is particularly striking about *Shadows . . .* is the subtlety with which Keane conveys the facts and reverberations of the eviction but uses neither a documentary nor a truly narrative form in doing so. Keane successfully walks a line between objectification and catharsis, a narrow functional path to survival. What was particularly useful about the inclusion of *Shadows . . .* was the obvious but necessary observation of the historical fallacy of Britain as the "United" Kingdom. It provided a non-artist witness to that fact, a personal account of the effects of cultural fragmentation within the Anglo-Saxon nation.

Like *Shadows of a Journey*, Linda Montano's videotape *Mitchell's Death* uses a fixed camera on a single image to create the deeply moving account of a fragment of her personal history. In the evenly modulated rhythms of a litany, she details the sudden death of her ex-husband, Mitchell Payne from the moment she hears of it, to visiting his body in the mortuary. The image of a talking skull slowly transforms into the downcast face of Montano wired with acupuncture needles then fades again to the brittle outline of a skull. As in her performance, *A Nun's Fairy Tale*, a primary reference is made to Catholicism. In this case, the dramatic pacing of ritualized prayer mediates her passage through disbelief, grief, and the beginnings of acclimation to his death. The familiarity of the ritual structure counterbalances, just as the reality of his death momentarily transcends, the actual details of their relationship. Montano's mourning becomes archetypal; spirituality surfaces as functional, curative and universal.

In *Learning To Talk*, Montano steps back and becomes an actress, a prime-time pro straight from L.A. In five scenes she

dresses up and acts out the roles of women hustling through the media — a French poetess selling her latest book on life and love; a half-blind, white woman jazz singer in a black man's world; a country and western singer with a few pointers to fame and fortune (that, in her case include hard-driving men, nature and the Holy Bible) — available, of course, for a small fee; a nun diagramming the worlds of mortal and venial sin; a practitioner of quasi-medical theory in the throes of shamanistic euphoria.

Montano's characterizations are hilarious. They quickly unite, however, around a few very unfunny issues. An unspoken critique of the ways in which women are trivialized through the media begins to be articulated as the cumulative and residual product of women talking about who they are in inauthentic voices — voices that have become media clichés. Montano uses the misogynist bases of television humor as a satirical device that allows the viewer to empathize with the women she has chosen to portray. Suddenly, these five women, who by their



In Rose English's "Adventure or Revenge", characters under hard feminist scrutiny.

very access to the air waves are special (*i.e.*, male establishment sanctioned) are victims of the hustle perpetrated on all women. That common ground is mapped out, not only by *Learning to Talk*'s politic and media reference, but by the fact that Montano, in playing all five roles, implies a sixth character undergoing a process of identification with each.

### Theatrical video

If any medium could epitomize the jaded glory of L.A. cultural life it would be television. For London, the theater tradition has come to occupy a similar position. Just as the glow of the video monitor and all it signifies was the point of departure for *Learning To Talk*, the institution of the British Music Hall was the springboard for Rose English's performance, *Adventure or Revenge*.

In dismantling the theatrical conventions of the Music Hall with all the skill of a double agent, English inadvertently exposed the formal devices

of her L.A. counterpart's comedic style. Among other things, the framework of her performance took the form of an eccentric improvised lecture on technique, baring the underpinnings of theatrical illusion — the tricks of the trade according to the *Actor's Handbook*. From a harshly-lit platform, dressed in a conglomeration of Elizabethan-ish men's garb, a bearded English expounded on how to do it well when one is on the road — or making the most of travel and adventure. Along her route she also managed more than a few well aimed shots at England, the art world and men. At the outset the personae she has assumed is under suspicion. As the pompous patriarch/veteran actor/man of the world she frequently refers to herself as a "non-sexist man." At one point she wonders aloud, "As a man, I am interested to know why women feel they have to dress in drag." Little by little, she abandons her drag image, rummages through a prop box, settling now and then on an item, demonstrating nonchalantly its many possible but unlikely uses on the stage — horsetail as phallus, diaphragm as hat, beard as bracelet or victim of her knifing, her revenge. Through all of this English's humor remained mad and unexpected, the detours in her discourse heterogeneous, and her awareness of her audience unerring.

Like Montano in *Learning To Talk*, English's relationship to character portrayal was fundamentally at odds with that of the ordinary actor. Her presence as the creator of persona was never subsumed by the persona she had created. Character remained invention and the uses and sources of that invention were, in fact, under hard feminist scrutiny. Her ironic reversal of the misogynist currents in traditional drag served to under-score a subversive, dialectical discourse on gender and public/personal image/action. When English abruptly disappeared from her, by that point, all but ransacked stage, an incredibly clever theatrical machine had brought into being a vision of the world quite unlike anything else to be found in the *L.A./London Lab*. A performance marked by false starts, strangely paced changes in focus, odd mixtures and manipulations of emotion and intellect, protean shifts in character, voice and sex left behind a dumbstruck audience thrown to the edge of some complex insight.

At the end of the *L.A./London Lab* itself I was also dumbstruck — but not by the proximity of revelation. Three weeks of periodic immersion in a pool of egos, hopes, assumptions, conflicting viewpoints, divergent esthetics, politics and cultures left me anxious for air and perspective. In the preceding pages I have isolated some of the works that, looking back, managed to surface not only as components of the quagmire, or as significant elements unto themselves, but as points of reference in coming to terms with the fecundity of the terrain. □

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VIDEO/VIDEO

If this event really was a dry run for PAY-TV, one must view the tapes as any interested subscriber would.

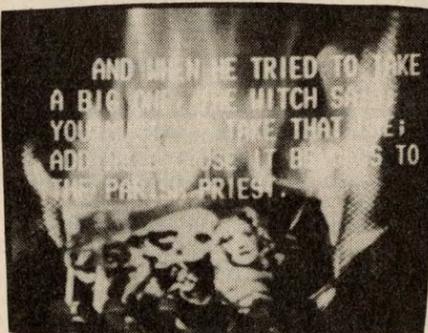
The Festival of Festivals is Toronto's over self-evaluated international film festival that nonetheless each year produces a few items of serious worth among the many cans of industrial waste. Like all grande cultural industries, the profit margins of film production are discussed until they eventually fill the complete page. This year the eye is focused around the significant promised bonanza of PAY-TV, and its economic effect on the growth of film and television production. In the midst of this year's Festival Trade Forum, where condensation seemed to be forming from the hot air produced by at least 27 out of the 28 PAY-TV license applicants, a series of twenty-six videotapes was shown under the title VIDEO/VIDEO. This recent package, like many others during the last seven years, promised exposure to a new audience. Within the independent video production community the "re-birth" is seen as a repetitive phenomenon that is both unavoidable but irritating. For while one property of independent "video" production has been its lagging technical development — due mostly to the economic situation of independent producers — the other side, the ideological challenge, has been repeatedly demonstrated from the very moment that artists and others placed their shaky hands on the new found tools. (Different people hold different views on what is meant by the "ideological challenge" to television. As we all know TV is such a rigid commercial structure that even a minor deviance appears remarkable.)

VIDEO/VIDEO was shown over four nights as "private" screenings open to guests of the Trade Forum, the tape producers, the Festival of Festivals and generally to anyone in Toronto that might keep tabs on video screenings. This "private" precaution has become somewhat of a new ritual given the Ontario Board of Censors latest court actions and encyclics. The video production community is adamant in its refusal to comply with the provincial government's claim to ensure prior censorship. Fortunately there were no incidents, most likely because the Festival of Festivals' own umbrella protected all that sought shelter.

Clive Robertson is a video producer and past-organizer of a number of video surveys including A Conceptographic Reading (1973), Canadian Video Open (1978), The Independent Video Open (1979), and (with Lisa Steele and John Greyson) Less Medium, More Message (1981).

VIDEO/VIDEO was organized by Marien Lewis, acting as spiritual cheerleader, and Randy Gledhill who actually chose the tapes and oversaw the production of the catalogue. Given the context of verbal inflation from both the Festival and the Trade Forum, the catalogue for VIDEO/VIDEO described those whose work was shown as "pioneer artists (who) are regarded as the modern Melies and Muybridges." While not depreciating the obvious achievements, most video producers would be somewhat embarrassed by this form of well-intended misrepresentation.

The physical display/screening of the tapes went without a hitch and the use of a video projector (which always has spelt disaster in the past) was successful and added, where relevant, an evident filmic dimension to the tapes. While watching the tapes with a fair but critical eye my comments are intended to reflect the context. That is, how would they look to an interested but unfamiliar subscriber? So what I have to say about tapes being too "demanding" should be thought of as the limitation of watching the tapes once. Where the content is almost, I suggest, "inaccessible" to any viewer outside of the video production community I have digressed into discussing the material in relation to its producer(s). While we all may decry the quantitative lack of video (or television) criticism, it has been the qualitative nature of "video writing" with its built-in limitations that all seem to add to the composite effect of a rudderless ship (or if you like a de-stabilised satellite). For most video (some documentaries are an exception) and its sister, Performance, the writer's credo has become: if you like it — write it; if you don't like it — leave it alone. Without an interactive form of criticism, these informative activities will remain publicly as serious as a pie in the face.



Sacrificial Burnings

Electronic Opera No.1

Electronic Opera No. 1 by Nam June Paik opened the first evening and was described as being an important historical link. The five minute tape was made in 1969. Unfortunately Paik has long ago been identified within what PBS would define as its "art" quota. Paik's tape was followed by work from both Canada and the U.S., all completed within the last three years.

Sacrificial Burnings

Sacrificial Burnings by Nancy Nicol is a tape about "love, power and illusion". (This and following quotations are from the VIDEO/VIDEO catalogue and I assume they were written by or with the permission of each producer.) Nicol tells a story by using videotext, voiceover, the readings of a spiritualist and an interview. The strength of the content of this work is that it coagulates the treatment of women in medieval times through quotations from an inquisitor's manual with a recounting of the life of Hollywood actress Frances Farmer, plus the implication of an intimate lesbian relationship. The complexity of the mixture results in a heavy demand on the viewer who is forced by the structure of the tape to piece the material offered into some re-assembly that has meaning. While some of the material suggests the need for mysterious allegories, there is a saturation point beyond which the capacity of the viewer is stretched and the visual medium breaks down. If looking away and "switching-off" does not harm the intended reception of the tape then Nicol succeeds. If close attention is imperative then the tape itself would have been better simplified.

Michelle on the day of surgery

The next tape, Norman Cohn's Michelle on the day of surgery, was well within VIDEO/VIDEO's pluralistic sweep. Cohn's tape (one of a series of hospital portraits) warrants attention for many reasons. Cohn works within a well-defined set of functional parameters; by choosing intimate portraits of specific people as they work (or are worked upon by institutions), Cohn provides clear-cut research material that can then be directly used by those who are responsible for planning social interaction. In the case of the hospital series, doctors and nurses can see how children are treated in hospitals. In another series by Cohn, the David MacDonald tapes, we

are shown politicians practicing their acrobatics — balancing, trying not to fall off their electorate's high wire. Cohn's institutional investigations seem to work best because we are given an intimate view, the camera (and microphone) are unobtrusively there documenting privacy up close with the minimum of invasion. Michelle does not exploit its ten-year-old subject, nor for that matter the hospital but somehow we are shown the child's hospital experience for what it is.

Steel and Flesh

Eric Metcalfe and Dana Atchley's tape, Crime Time Comix Presents: Steel and Flesh is perhaps the electronic candy for the hospitalised child. This eleven minute parody/eulogy is pop video. Steel and Flesh has not seen the interference of TV's editorial boardroom, consequently the compressed soap opera duplicates television with a little extra sauce on the side. Though the tape introduces very little new content, the fantasy works and the harsh editing creams the best out of Metcalfe and Atchley's co-collaborators. The title tells all.



Steel and Flesh

Gloria

The last tape of the first evening was Gloria by Lisa Steele. Gloria is a series of episodes in the life of a single welfare mother. Steele treads carefully on the soap opera format, while attempting not to re-create stereotypes. The script, based on Steele's long-term relationship with women in crisis holds the narrative together. The production meets minimum standards and though in places demands are made on the audience through the use of long static monologues, the material nonetheless makes it to the other side.

Transvideo

Transvideo by Tom Sherman is a tape described as "video programming for television." The bulk of the tape is taken up with footage shot on a highway (both day and night scenes) which makes literal Sherman's stated interest in the metaphoric interplay between information systems and transportation systems. After a soft opening with animated editing of a record turntable, followed by an earlier video portrait of the artist, the voiceover then describes the video technology as



Transvideo

being of Japanese manufacture, and the vehicles used to shoot the tape as being American. This subject is not taken further.

The tape opens with Sherman introducing himself to the prospective viewer, but as the tape progresses it becomes more difficult to ascertain who he might have in mind as the receiver of this particular signal. One unusual clue is given when Sherman's voice suggests that the soundtrack that will follow can be recorded by those viewers who have access to a microcomputer. As we hear the sound of data being dumped, Sherman informs us that what we are hearing is digital information which, when read by microcomputer, will reveal what happens further on in his tape.

The central theme of Transvideo is that information technology provides something that moves through us and that transportation technologies in their ideal form provide us with exactly the opposite experience. In some ways an earlier tape of Sherman's, East on the 401, has been updated. Concessions have been made in order, one can suppose, to make certain intentions clearer. Put another way as Sherman himself insists (see FUSE March/April 1981) "Video information produced by artists must be assessed in terms of its communications potential."

What is meant here by "communications potential"? Sherman has discussed it in terms of "high information" — a message we receive that is one out of a million possibilities has greater potential reception than a message that is only one out of ten possibilities. In other words surprise by and of itself is a functional device. Sherman cautions us to remember the language used to convey the surprise must not be evasive and this brings us back to "information produced by artists" which is most often (for one reason or another) evasive.

While not intending to put this roughly paraphrased version of Sherman's axiom to the test, there is one section of Transvideo that seems to throw the theory to the wall. Towards the end of Transvideo we hear a poem read with a traditionally metered voice. The content is personal, possibly autobiographical, and includes a sounding of life, soul and machine. In this case the form (not the content) is so familiar that it would not score well on an informational test. Which is not to say that poetry, like dance, cannot be cast into the

video mould but both forms contain their own very exclusive baggage. It may be a failing of our current electronic culture that we do not use verse in everyday conversation or celebrate our bodies by doing contact improvisation dance in the streets, but if "communications potential" is a scientific menu we perhaps should stick to the proposed diet?

Love Tapes

The second tape on the second evening was Love Tapes by Wendy Clarke of N.Y.C. The tape was shot in a booth where people were invited to talk about 'love' for three minutes. The artist's project "grew from her sensitivity of the public's need to communicate various personal feelings." I only caught three of the ten edited segments. Two of them began as a party game until at different times both participants finished what they had to say before the three minutes had elapsed. Then came the agonising exploitation as the artist insisted that each fill their time slot. Whatever familiarity and "intimate scale" Clarke believes the medium to have, she unwittingly re-created some of the same insensitivity we see in TV news when cameras are shoved into the faces of distraught victims. Of course these situations create scenes of living dramatic tension, but such 'entertainment' is not in short supply.

Split

The focus of Ardele Lister's tape, Split is an intelligent 16 year-old girl recounting why she repeatedly runs away from home. The girl, Susy James, is a witty storyteller and what used to be called a 'natural' actress. James paces her performance to the music that we also hear as part of the soundtrack. As the tape progresses, you may begin to wonder what relationship the girl has to Lister. Is this a found object or is there some resolve that the tape does not



Split

explain? Is this meant to be a story of the decline and fall of the liberal parent? The social boundaries implied by the tape are both hard and fast — what is omitted becomes irritatingly obvious. So the tape functions as a gallery, the portrait of the girl is limited to an equivalent of an animated double-page spread from Life magazine. The girl and the story seem real and the frame-up is, in retrospect, synthetic.

**Weak Bullet**

**Weak Bullet** is a short tape by N.Y. artist Tony Orsler. The location for the tape is a home-made puppet theatre. With nimble sets and props that look like anything from macquettes for carnival-style Ghost Houses to German Expressionistic paintings, Orsler plays with illusions of scale that challenge the soaped senses. Having snatched our attention Orsler/the camera transports us through the sets in much the same way as the Ghost House car. We follow the witless travels of a speeding bullet that ricochets through sets and puppets. Included in this charabanc tour is what looks like a mammoth environmental wall sculpture of an erect penis with two eggs for testicles. The "bullet" strikes and breaks one of the fresh eggs. The mind wanders to think of what forms of political satire this kind of video theatre could facilitate.

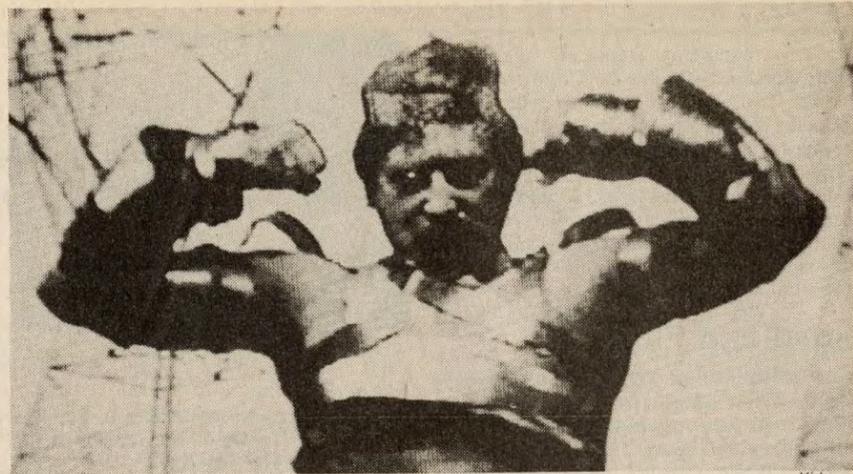
**Videage**

**Videage** is a fifty minute tape by Randy & Bernicci. As the last work on the second evening, **Videage** was playing to hard core viewers. (The same could be said about the last tape on each of the four nights.) This tape is extreme in both its weaknesses and strengths. Simplistically — the tape is a rich collage of staged video events that included some inventive and sophisticated rear projections, scenery and settings. At the same time the work is so concerned about its own informational mystery that it leaves interpretation as wide open as any farm gate could possibly be.

In one scene as people "died" and kept being re-cycled I assumed **Videage** was evoking lessons in re-incarnation. However the catalogue states: "Randy & Bernicci touch upon our object of worship — technology — and focus on the emptiness of those rituals." The only emptiness in ritual that I saw were some references to various other filmmakers and their use of ritual; overall 'rituals' seemed piled one on top of another as if quantity would act as qualitative insurance. One scene that was particularly strong reminded me of the earlier work of Robert Ashley (with the Once group). A line of performers in turn climbed a dais. Each performer leaned over and picked up a wine glass that appeared to be floating over the head of the performer standing on a lower step. Mechanically the drink was downed and the glass was thrown against a very large rear projection of a man's head. The soundtrack simultaneously played the clinking of glass bottles mixed with three or four notes on the upper register of a piano. There were a number of such 'moments' of light, no doubt all loaded with meaning, but ultimately we are left in the dark.

**Get Ready to March**

The third night began with an eighty second tape by Chip Lord entitled, **Get Ready to March**. We see the new Ronald Reagan reviewing a march-past of military



Videage

bands. The soundtrack consists of a trumpet player struggling with "America the Beautiful" (or "God Save the Queen") and then we hear (again struggling) a drumroll. Lord's tape (with sub-titles) protests Reagan's proposed cut of some \$86,000,000 from the National Endowment of the Arts and simultaneous additional aid of \$88,000,000 for military bands.

**Delicate Issue**

Kate Craig's tape **Delicate Issue** was one tape that was transformed by the assumed context of VIDEO/VIDEO. With a close-up lens travelling expeditiously over the surface of her naked body, it is Craig's voiceover that sometimes seems artificial. She asks questions such as "When do I stop sharing? When do you stop accepting?" The tape was made long after the heroic era of public body art. But somehow defying the canned nature of this performance it was as if the live audience brought out a better version of the same song. The allusion to Craig's own community service and her sexuality became a statement that stood its ground.

**Ma Vie C'est Pour Le Restant De Mes Jours**

**Ma Vie C'est Pour Le Restant De Mes Jours** by Robert Morin and Lorraine Defour was in French with no sub-titles (but a written English translation was provided.) The location is rural Quebec, a lone building that houses a bar. The tape opens with a male stripper followed by a black woman who also strips. The people drinking and the strippers are as far as we know the local inhabitants. For some reason a male figure that looks like a Quebec version of Davy Crockett walks into the scene only to play a ham role. While the locals spit beer over each other, the elderly males play with their false teeth and many of the same males playfully harass the black stripper. The lead character — a stunt man by profession gets slapped in the face by the woman stripper only to fall, as expected, through the tables. The man's girlfriend/fiancee doesn't approve his pawing of the woman stripper.

The tape up to this point is worthlessly sexist. Are we supposed to laugh at the lumpen proletariat? Is this tape showing us a form of real life that we presumably already know? The lead male then begins a philosophical monologue, at the beginning addressing his girlfriend, and in the end the camera. The philosophy simply stated is: I have one life and I will do whatever I want thank you very much. It could be that I missed some indigenous black humour but even so the tape fails to translate its intention.

**The Breakfast Table**

**The Breakfast Table**, a tape by N.Y. artist Anita Thacher was a video sketch of a husband, wife and parrot. The ensuing breakfast comedy was complete with nostalgic (TV) dream sequences and a hand-painted monochrome set. The tape was produced at WNET-13 TV Lab, and as it effortlessly fits into TV, it probably has already arrived at its resting place. It did provide a well programmed relief among tapes with different and perhaps more challenging aspirations.



Peter George

**Peter George**

**Peter George** by Kim Tomczak, like Norman Cohn's **Michelle** were somewhat unconnected to the VIDEO/VIDEO series Tomczak's tape is a found performance by a native Indian. The performance is a dance by George based upon the sound of a deer at the moment it is shot. The "found" nature of the performance is connected to the documentation taking place in Pumps, the former artists-space in Vancouver. As George moves your eyes drift to the somewhat incongruous 'modern' art that hangs behind him on the wall. It's nevertheless a loaded juxtaposition.



Dogmachine

**Dogmachine**

**Dogmachine** by Elizabeth Chitty is somewhat of a disaster area and it's difficult to know exactly where not to tread. To over-focus on the banalities of this tape would be a disservice yet it does perversely anthologize many half-ideas that were never supposed to see the full light of day. The specific tape is not overly important except that it draws attention to itself by being externally a spoof, but internally both serious and earnest. Chitty's work is continually described as an "analysis of language and methods of communication", ingredients that are strikingly remarkable because of their absence.

To quote from **Dogmachine**: "it doesn't matter if your natural turn is to the left or right. To do the dogma think and act in unison". Of course "Doing the dogma" is for Chitty a new dance complete with contemporary music, contemporary fashion, and one might add, timeless misunderstanding. Dragged again off the road of some highway accident we see the myth of the artist (as open-ended, flexible, creative, original in thought word and deed) presented as the most blatant form of (dogmaless) dogma.

Unfortunately, Chitty's own originalities are cover versions. From her own video contemporaries we see colour-coded costumes from one artist, a storyline from another, visual devices from a third, rec room anarchism from a fourth. What compounds the irritation is that **Dogmachine** looks like the production of some uninformed entrepreneur trying to market a street trend that has just passed its point of consumer saturation.

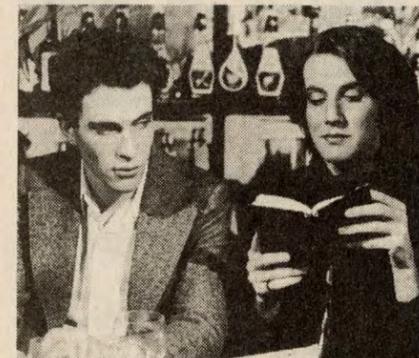
The tape — if we stretch our imaginations — could be a statement about the passé nature of New Wave and so again be ahead of the pack by transforming the last few years of industrial exploitation into a kitsch re-spin. If so the effort seems misplaced. Anne Murray (god rest the Bank of Commerce), provides the same camp appeal but I have yet to hear her talk about her work as "analysing language and methods of communication".

In its forgivable incestuousness, the "artist community" is capable of some very

powerful dogma (just think of modernism) and like other dogma it is the rigor mortis of what originally was alive and kicking. I assume that Chitty's abhorrence of dogma (and I imagine fear of 'ideology') is its authoritarian manifestations. The danger is swerving out of the way of an on-coming car only to hit a pedestrian. **Dogmachine** may be a product of "culture under pressure". If, and it's a big if, the current role of the 'media artist' creates the need for such full-blown pretenses as **Dogmachine** then apologies could be made and we are in a much bigger mess than I thought we were.

**Dangling By Their Mouths**

**Dangling by their Mouths** is a sixty minute tape by Colin Campbell that opens with an actor telling a shaggy dog story. Campbell, like a small handful of other video artists, has honed a delivery of performance plus story-telling that is rarely in a hurry. This relaxed 'cool school' demands crafted scripts or improvisations if only because



Dangling By Their Mouths

the viewer is fed the lines with sufficient time to analyse the meanings of the narrative. Having perfected this method of address, the difficulty comes in then surrounding the story teller with satellite performers who will not upset this delicate dramatic balance. In **Dangling** Campbell continues to play the role of the middle-aged, middle-class woman with a degree of respect and insight that forms the pivot

upon which the overall drama must balance. In this tape the central character is a female Belgian art critic, who towards the end of the tape becomes slightly demented supposedly at the loss of her younger female lover. The sub-plot — Canadian artists going to Europe and encountering this admiring female spider — in some ways upsets the above mentioned delicate balance. The male actor that begins the tape well, is not exactly the best foil as the story progresses. What does emerge in this tape is a promised sense of melodrama which Campbell seems hesitant to push too far. So while his common thread of sexual ambiguity remains unbroken, the sixty minute tape often loses its dramatic pace and gaps, instead of being moments for reflection, stick out as dead air. (A more complex soundtrack, in this particular tape, would have possibly remedied such problems.)

**Casting Call**

**Casting Call** is a thirty-six minute tape by Susan Britton. Like an earlier tape (**Interference**), **Casting Call** demonstrates Britton's fluid filmic technique that she has developed within the video medium.

The "plot", as the title suggests, is a series of snatched portraits of people refusing other people (who are off camera) jobs. We are not shown a story but a string of scenes that are repeated via an editing console. At various times we see Britton sitting behind the editing decks logging tapes and in fact choosing among those who are themselves supposedly choosing others. We therefore can see the hierarchy of quality control that leads to this particular manufactured product. The subject matter warrants the gothic effects (a re-birth of industrialisation) which Britton stokes up with both the soundtrack and alternating imagery. The tape's interpretation has been left open and therefore my reading of it is somewhat subjective.

There is an overhang of creative values: the tape repeats itself beyond its own necessary extension. No doubt we are supposed to get oversaturated? Though there are other recent tapes of Britton that are more specific and less endearing, **Casting Call** remains a strong contemporary of work done in other media particularly the music produced by British performers Cabaret Voltaire or Throbbing Gristle.

**Virtuality**

**Virtuality** by Marien Lewis is a three minute tape. We are shown various fruits being cut open with a surgical knife through the optical mediation of a magnifying glass. While Mother Nature has provided an immense variety of succulent female 'genitalia', fortunately she probably wasn't directly responsible for the annoying soundtrack that supplies off-camera giggling in the background of **Virtuality**. Though the visual imagery doesn't tell us much, the soundtrack makes up for it.

**Test Tube**

**Test Tube** by General Idea is a tape that was made for broadcast (See **FUSE** March, 1980). Unlike their last TV tape, General Idea seem to have run into problems with manipulating the TV "format". Their art world satire has been preempted by many other commercial satire shows and where their content is more specific its wooden character destroys the finger-popping flow. TV relies on the credibility of the performer and though General Idea (AA Bronson, Jorge Zontal and Felix Partz) take it for granted that three heads are better than one, only Zontal can cut the illusion necessary for this TV talkshow.

The tape, shot in Amsterdam, revolves around their sculptural creation of test tube cocktails in their Colour Bar Lounge. Apart from a story about a stereotypical woman artist (playing the man's art role) **Test Tube** returns again and again to the cocktails. The programme is cut with ads including an ad for Nazi Milk which is the highpoint in the tape.

The overuse of colour becomes as ineffective as the overuse of puns in the script. What could have been a joker up the sleeve wrinkles into forced humour. General Idea's relentless re-telling of their own myth of creation is close to becoming a back-firing strategy in their self-marketing scheme. In all seriousness perhaps they should divide up what they see as their



Test Tube

markets so that repetitive products don't overlap. (I'm sure an audience unfamiliar with G.I.'s previous work would have quite a different reaction to **Test Tube**.)

Their cocktail bar produces cocktails for capitalists, anarchists, communists, revolutionaries and artists. Their ad lines, though not without sophistication (à la Volkswagen), continue to chorus, "Stop the World I Want to Get Off". **Test Tube** shows General Idea in the unusual position of sweating over the effort to be effortless. After a hard day's work in the studio forget the cocktails — I'm sure both we and they could both do with a larger and stiffer drink.

**Ontogenesis**

**Test Tube** was followed by **Ontogenesis** from Chicago video artist and dancer, Janice Tanaka. Though this tape was awarded first prize (in the experimental category) in the National Video Festival, Washington, the image flood — long since appropriated as merely a technique — leaves me both cold and without comment.

**And Now the Truth**

**And Now the Truth** by Vera Frenkel is equally as demanding as Nancy Nicol's tape **Sacrificial Burnings**. There is among these two artists what could properly be called a shared sensibility. I am not too sure how many people could understand **And Now the Truth**, because it's an episodic story that does not necessarily appear to be self-contained. The tape by itself doesn't allow enough access but the story is worth extending because Frenkel uses the medium quite differently than any of the other tapes in **VIDEO/VIDEO**.

**And Now the Truth** is a continuation of Frenkel's historical ficto-drama **The Secret Life of Cornelia Lumsden**, a story about a Canadian novelist living in Paris in the Thirties who is purportedly writing a book that deals with both fiction and degrees of the truth. The new tape intends to convince us that when Frenkel showed her tape **The Secret Life**... at a women's artist gallery in Montreal a woman in the audience challenged Frenkel for using the name and identity of a member of her family. To make it clear: the tape is a fiction, Frenkel went to Montreal to give a lecture and the fiction was enhanced with a parallel real life. The most unbelievable of coincidences. The "appearance" of this woman seems to be yet another event created by Frenkel. **And Now the Truth** therefore is a vehicle to drive home the possibility that the impossible coincidence is possible. Such is its vigor (in our contemporary state) that if you concentrate hard enough you may begin to see a mechanism of enforced schizophrenia in operation.

How far is Frenkel pushing the 'truth'? Does the illusion work? For the viewer that sees **And Now the Truth** without any background will perhaps only see a murky tape of characters appearing in period costume with some inserted footage of Japanese filmmakers shooting historical Japanese puppet theatre. What isn't convincing is the 'real intruder' from Montreal. The intrusion is too calm, too sedate. Frenkel may only be interested in the viewer that will, in spirit, scan and ponder over every inch of the screen, in short those who are willing to become co-detectives. My immediate reaction to **And Now the Truth** was that Frenkel was too embedded in this fiction, but it does work. It forces you to at least resolve the puzzle.

**I Bet You Ain't Seen Noth'n Like This Before**

The last tape in the series was the most controversial in that it contained explicit scenes of an unusual sexual act. Rodney Werden's **I Bet You Ain't Seen Noth'n Like This Before** was a video interview with an older man who in the privacy of his own home demonstrates his own self-sufficiency and a further relationship between sexual and technological pleasure (without even reading Foucault).

Werden presents his material in a low key, low-exploitative fashion. The subject of the interview is a confident, modest, witty man who fully understands the ironies and contradictions that his actions will provide for the viewer. The man is also, so it happens, a short-wave radio buff whose explanation of the warbling airwaves defuses the somewhat snickering expectations that any description of the tape might incite.

In conclusion, it shouldn't be assumed that all of the tapes screened in **VIDEO/VIDEO** were ever intended to be shown on TV (Pay or otherwise). However, this series of tapes does point out one condition that deserves further thought. Some producers now don't like to think



And Now the Truth

of video as an art form but would rather consider such work analagous to other forms of electronic information communications. But so far, the language structure that video (in all its creative forms) has developed rarely states its references and inspirations in any common recognizable form. (Recognizable, that is, for a TV audience.) The implicit conventions allowed within contemporary art, where 'ambiguity' plays a large role, have little validity within a mass medium. For instance, within television the ideological values of family, authority and state are transmitted within a seamless market continuum. There is *no* ambiguity — whether it's broadcast, cablecast or educational TV. The artistic confusion might be this: Because TV advertising (and later, programming) updates its language structure with popular cultural icons, it is wrongly assumed that art (in this case video) can borrow "popular devices" and somehow get a foot in the audience's door. Television, whether made for a small or a large audience, is an extremely difficult medium to reform and further manipulate.

Frequently, tapes made by artists are not doing what the artist imagines. In the context of a gallery (or similar support structure) it is not critical to spell out one's intentions nor provide a projected goal against which the product or service can be measured.

Television, on the other hand, has and probably will continue to follow set management strategies that ask such questions as: What? Why? For whom? How much? and What do we gain? Though not a fault, few video producing artists could answer more than two of these questions to the satisfaction of those who control television programming. □

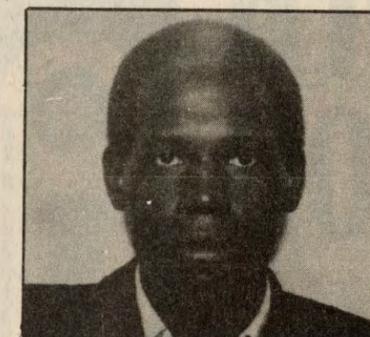
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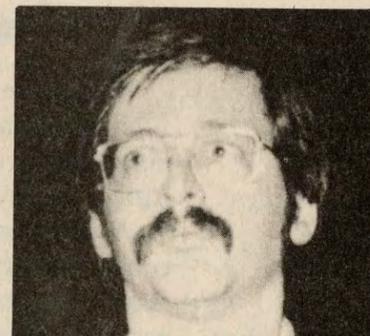
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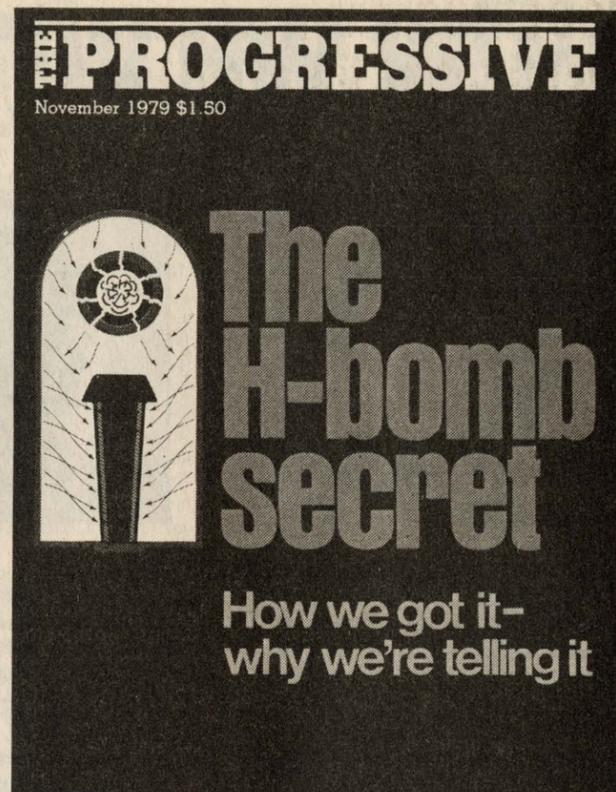
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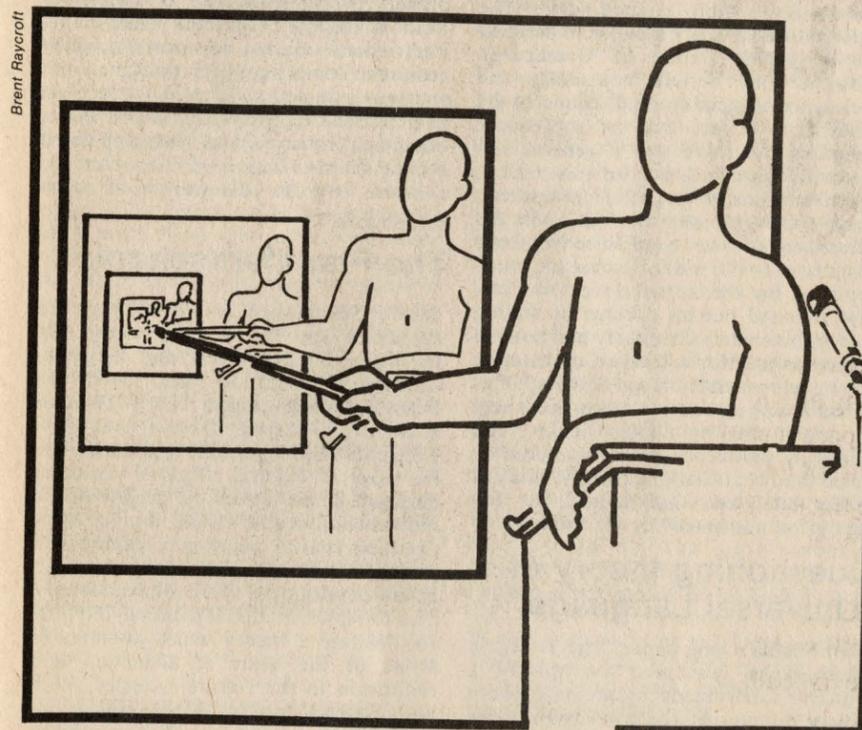
**THE PROGRESSIVE**

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BRUCE BARBER

## MODERNISM AND MODERNITY Investigating the avant garde's 'necrophiliacal' mania for crisis/death/rebirth followed by crisis...



Modernism and Modernity: A Question of Culture or Culture Called Into Question  
Symposium held at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver  
March 12-14, 1981.

The symposium was organized by UBC art historians Serge Guilbaut and David Solkin and funded by the Department of Fine Arts, UBC, various granting committees within UBC, The Emily Carr College of Art, The Canada Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities research council of Canada. Papers were presented by Hollis Clayson, Paul Tucker, Dominique Baudouin, John Wilson Foster, Benjamin Buchloh, Marc Bensimon, Allan Sekula, Marcelin Pleynet, Clement Greenberg, Timothy J. Clark, René Payant, Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin, and Thomas Crow.

A contrast to the Montreal conference on Post-Modernism: Performance and Multidisciplinary<sup>1</sup> and underfunded by comparison (a conservative estimate — 50 per cent), the Vancouver symposium presented a timely opportunity for those interested in the continuing debate between Modernism and Post-Modernism to participate in an extended discussion on the subject and to hear papers dealing with the complexity of the problems given by a few acknowledged leaders in the field of

cultural and art historical scholarship. The program included scholars from Canada, United States and France, most well known through their writings, theoretical and critical activities or their institutional ideological alliances.

Two of the key participants, French social theorist Henri Lefebvre and Annette Michelson (editor *OCTOBER* magazine) were unable to attend. This was particularly unfortunate in Lefebvre's case as his critical writings during the past two decades have done much to surface, clarify and focus the many problems associated with Modernism et Modernité and specifically their confluence within a critique of ideology(ies). However Clement Greenberg, the chief artificer and ideologue of American formalist criticism and one of modernism's most lucid exegetes was in attendance and his presence provided the necessary star emphasis to the program. The degree of sardonic humour and acerbity which marked the exchanges between himself and Timothy Clark provided a few needed moments of intellectual anxiety and high relief to what was for many members of the audience a lustreless and dryly delivered series of academic performances.

The keynote address delivered by symposium organiser Serge Guilbaut fashioned *au courant* the style of the symposium and underlined the various

themes and problems that were to be dealt with. Guilbaut, paraphrasing Lefebvre's *Introduction to Modernity* (1962), stated that there were many distinguishing characteristics between Modernism and Modernity: the first, by way of its unrelenting adherence to fashion and the new was to be distinguished by its irony (of affirmation); the second, by its ironical negation, its self-reflexive transgressions and criticisms. In his overview of the proliferation of styles and labels since c. 1860, Guilbaut spoke of the 'necrophiliacal' mania of those imbued with the modernist impulse who consolidate their ironies with conversions and conclusions: the 'death of this'; the 'decline of that'; the 'dissolution of this' and the 'suffocation of that'. But these were, in true *dedoublement* fashion, but "les petites morts... for pleasure in order to resurrect again."<sup>2</sup> His sexual innuendo intact, Guilbaut continued that this was typical avant-garde strategy. The strategies of transgression, appropriation, antagonism, appropriation-recidivism; to live in an atmosphere of crisis and impending apocalypse are some of the authoritative characteristics of our culture and as ironically commented, these crises are not final but are "apparently necessary for the rejuvenation of our consumer culture."<sup>3</sup>

### Neglecting the culture question

A few general comments can be made regarding the relationships between the content of the papers and the theme of the conference. For the most part, the authors of the papers, with the possible exceptions of Clark, Pleynet, Buchloh, Sekula and Crow, steered clear of any radical examination of epistemological and teleological problems of the terms modernism and modernity and all neglected to deal (probably wisely) with the Culture Question. For the symposium to have succeeded in the stated aims of the organisers and more especially in the second of these, an attempt to apply the historical analyses of the phases in the history of modernism since Baudelaire in various fields of artistic production and to apply these to various problems in theory and practise in a variety of disciplines<sup>4</sup>, a broader range of disciplines should have been included. A few more cultural theorists from such areas as literature, theatre and film history, and sociology would have allowed the symposium to more readily appreciate the intricacies of the problems associated with the modernist ideology. For it is true to say

that modernism and modernity is not just the preserve of the humanities, nor I would venture to say, of 'culture' per se. There are scholars working within Canada/North America whose work crosses several disciplines, who, carefully chosen, could have added significantly to the debate without losing the valuable social history-of-art bias.

The papers were extremely wide ranging, a few uneven in their quality of scholarship and intellectual insights. At times lip service was paid to the theme(s) or worse to the few 'stars' assembled. A few of the papers were singularly brilliant in their respective analysis of a particular field. T.J. Clark's "More on the differences between Comrade Greenberg and Ourselves" revealed itself as an exemplary analysis of the early *Partisan Review* articles of Greenberg and where, to put it crudely, Greenberg had surfaced and masked a form of 'fellow traveler' Trotskyism (described succinctly by Clark as Eliotic Trotskyism). Through his clear and sustained argument Clark led his audience into the early work of Greenberg, his shrouded (at times) and ambiguous political ideology, and the reasons why his early political writings became submerged in a kind of disingenuous essentialism. Clark concluded his discussion with his own 'critique of judgement'; of what might have been had Greenberg explored more fully the social dimensions of his activity as a critic and rejected his Kantian insistence

on a separate and autonomous realm for art and the subsequent entrenchment of these ideas in his critical writings. It was an interesting question to speculate upon, and presented in true academic form with gentlemanly wit, no degree of malice was confirmed in the minds of the audience.

Greenberg's "On Modernism" was pure Greenberg c. 1963-5. His answers to the discussion which ensued after the presentation of Clark's paper underlined the peripatetic nature of Greenberg's thought and beliefs especially the irrelevance of social determinations for the production of art and its subsequent reception. As there was a general and unusually large audience for this session, Greenberg's insistence that (sic) "aesthetic value is the ultimate value" and that *his* (Greenberg's) own experience confirms this fact, met with wide approval and much applause. But the last word went to Clark who rounded out his critique by stating that unfortunately Greenberg had become a spokesman "for a kind of devastating artistic self-satisfaction and laziness." This was said with some respect and Greenberg — safe in his 'omnipotent realm', and seemingly untouched by this criticism — stated that what Clark had to say, "did not bother him" and that, indeed, he "felt highly complimented" by the talk.

### Questioning theory of "Universal Language"

Alan Sekula's long paper "The Traffic in Photographs" was read too quickly, a criticism safely made by an irate photo gallery director at the conclusion of his presentation, but it made its points directly and with intelligence. Sekula presented an analysis of the twin problems of photographic reproduction — the desiring and retiring truths and pleasures of Aestheticism and Scientism. He focused his critique on the pervasive belief that photography is a "Universal Language". Leaping effortlessly from example to example of ideological misrepresentation and confusion in the writings of photographic theorists, Sekula finally collapsed his critique into the rigors of the commodity market to arrive at the condition of the photographic image as ultimate (valueless and paradoxically value laden) fetishized commodity — paper money. He quoted Marx only once and consequently did not alienate his audience until the end of his presentation. Here, analyzing the epic *Family of Man* photographic exhibition organised by Edward Steichen and toured by the Museum of Modern Art, Sekula revealed clearly the use of this, and by extension, other such exhibits, as tools of American Imperialism. To quote from his paper:

"Family of Man, originating at the Museum of Modern Art, but utilizing a mode of architecturally monumentalized photo-essayistic showmanship, occupies a central problematic but ideologically convenient middle position between the conventions of high modernism and those of mass culture. The modernist category of

the solitary author was preserved, but at the level of editorship. The exhibition simultaneously suggested a family album, a juried show for photo hobbyists, an apotheosis of *Life Magazine* and the *magnum opus* in Steichen's illustrious career." And with reference to Roland Barthes' essay "Great Family of Man" (*Mythologies* 1972), he continued: "The peaceful world envisioned by *Family of Man* is merely a smoothly functioning international market economy, in which economic bonds have been translated into spurious sentimental ties, and in which the overt racism appropriate to earlier forms of colonial enterprise has been supplanted by the "humanization of the other" so central to the discourse of neo-colonialism."<sup>6</sup>

### The Frankfurt school

Where Sekula had employed Marx to explain a specific form of commodity fetishism, Thomas Crow and Benjamin Buchloh in particular, relied heavily on Frankfurt school culture theorist Theodor Adorno, quoting from "Negative Dialectics" and his erudite ruminations on the 'positive' cultural effects of profound negation in the age of the decline of the individual. Buchloh's slide tour of early twentieth century painting beginning with Picasso (Part I, I was informed, of an extended critique of the recent reactionary turn to representational painting) did little to illustrate a theory which attempts to strike at the heart of alienation and reification in the culture industry. With authoritarian spectres of representationalism lurking in the wings, the paper was in essence a Frankfurt School theorist's vindication of modernist essentialism, perhaps even a justification for anarcho-individualism. A principal fault in Buchloh's analysis was that there was too little explication. The slides of paintings lacked a context. They served merely as formal signifiers of kinds of representationalism that in the light of theory, the author hoped, would reveal their kinship to more contemporary works. The paintings became, at best, passive participants in a theory of authoritarianism. Adorno is fine on the "fetish character in music and the regression of listening" but much care has to be taken when his ideas are applied to the visual arts and other forms of cultural production.

Crow's paper on Andy Warhol and the Velvet Underground, "The Demon Children of Pop Art", intelligently explored the typical and continuing avant-garde strategy of 'low' culture appropriation. As Crow explained it, this form of appropriation dialectically maintains a form of 'aesthetic rejuvenation'. This occurs after the work has been assimilated and academicized in the high culture domain and returns in altered yet still viable form to the popular domain. While this is a good Kuhnian (*Structure of Scientific Revolutions*) hypothesis, Crow also suggested that these forms of appropriations maintain ideological dynamism

and confusion, for the purpose of their own survival, in the Capitalist cultural realm.

Beginning sardonically with the notion that "the avant-garde functions as a kind of research and development arm of the culture industry"<sup>8</sup>, Crow then attempted to de-construct this arm by examining specific instances of appropriation in the primitive and marginal behaviours of the Velvet Underground, the group that Andy Warhol 'sponsored and manipulated' in the mid Sixties. He demonstrated with cuts from their recordings how their use of primitive musical forms became, after a short interlude as elite and avant-garde production, transformed into chic and kitsch forms as they entered popular culture. The lowest common denominator for Crow's claim that modernism is too resilient 'to die', is that its importance in the sphere of capitalist market expansionism is too strong. The most unfortunate and willful aspect of Crow's thesis was that the only authentic response (after Adorno) for cultural producers working under capitalism was "one of rigorous negation of the existing and affirmation only of non-identity, difference and possibility"<sup>9</sup>. Yet another call to pessimism, extreme (modernist) individualism and prescriptively a (post-modernist) narcissistic withdrawal.

René Payant and Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin, both from the University of Montreal and presumably invigorated by the Post-Modern conference, presented papers dealing with some of the more popular yet still contentious issues in modernism, particularly post-modernism. Payant explored in his paper "Formalisme et Formalisme: Distinction", the differences between Russian Formalist theory as it was applied to literature in the early twentieth century and American (Greenbergian) formalism in the production and criticism of painting. His analysis was compounded as lexicographical error when he attempted to entrench both Greenbergian and Russian formalist analysis within the 'logical' structures of structural linguistic analysis. While his Distinction was in no way an incarceration into the 'iron triangle of the culinary' to paraphrase Sartre's criticism of Levi Strauss, his disregard for the fine points of the contextual applications of these various and distinguishable formalist theories tended to invalidate much of what he had to say.

### Feminism and modernism

Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin's "Feminisme et Modernisme: Paradoxes" did little to settle the recurrent debates within feminist circles of the modernism/formalism equation. Her paper gave some weight to the question of why there is no place within modernist ideology for feminism. But implicitly, she reduced the equation modernism/post-modernism to masculine/feminine as if this were clearly the 'natural' thing to do. Her annotation of the critical successes of certain women and

their recent visibility in art did little more than pronounce "vive la difference". Unfortunately hers was a lone voice in the symposium. The issues are critical and direct and could have been more adequately discussed within the symposium had a wider representation of feminist critics and art historians been present to debate the issues.

For the most part the rest of the papers addressed specific examples of early modernist work within their particular historical contexts. Hollis Clayson's analysis of Degas' monotype images of brothels in the time of the Third Republic and her description of the official policies of regulation and de-regulation of prostitution during times of social stress underlined the changing attitudes towards class consciousness and the subsequent strengthening of class divisions during times of extreme regulation.

Paul Tucker's work on Monet's Argenteuil landscapes intelligently revealed these works, through a process of careful comparison of their content over a period of several years, as examples (especially in the later paintings) of romantic and bourgeois escape to family, hearth and home from the encroachments of a rapidly developing industrial world. Dominique Baudouin applied rigorous scholarship to the quintessential modernity of Mallarmé's poetry and persona in the period of La Belle Époque and John Wilson Foster to the work of W.B. Yeats, analysing the claims made for Yeats' 'modernist' work in relation to his class background and assumed ideologies, Romantic and modernist.

While the basic critical goals of *Modernism and Modernity* were not attained as too few critiques were constructed that challenged or extended the original description of the symposium, the general tenor of the event and the energy devoted to the rejuvenation of the problems, was exemplary — something that the Vancouver scene (and other centres after the publication of the papers) will benefit from for years. And perhaps most strongly, the symposium remains as a possible model for other events of this kind. □

#### Notes

I would like to thank the organizers of the symposium for making some of the abstracts and papers available to me for the purpose of writing this review.

1. Held at the University of Quebec in Montreal, October 9, 10, 11, 1980.
2. Guilbaut, S., from the keynote address p.2.
3. *ibid.* p.1.
4. Paraphrase from the organisers' description of the conference, p.4.
5. Sekula, A., "The Traffic in Photographs" p.22
6. *ibid.* p.27.
7. The title of one of Adorno's most important essays on music and commodity-fetishism.
8. Crow, T., "The Demon Children of Pop Art", p.6.
9. *ibid.* p.29-30.

Bruce Barber is a performance artist and art historian who currently teaches at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax.

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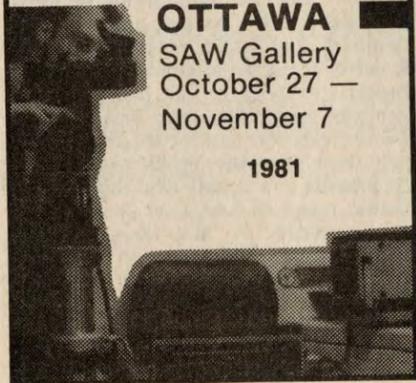
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## CENSORED! ONLY IN CANADA

### Film censorship is not the innocent smut search it claims to be. Dean reveals the political tools.

**Censored! Only In Canada**  
Malcolm Dean  
Virgo Press (Toronto), 288 pp.  
appendices, \$9.95 (paper).

Reading Malcolm Dean's anecdotal and quote-laden history of censorship in Canada will net you at least one favorite story. Mine is the 1925 *Maclean's* article entitled "What the Censor Saves Us From" wherein the writer, R. Laird Briscoe, says, "... (I) saw two pictures in the United States which undertook to instruct children how stockings were filled the night before Christmas. When these pictures were shown in Ontario it was a relief to find such details omitted. Surely realism has its limits." Indeed. But Dean's book is no catalogue of old-fashioned ways; he has extended his history into very contemporary events. Thus, a half a century later, he quotes Don Sims, head censor in Ontario until 1980, likening censorship to the laws governing traffic safety and saying, "You can consider me a seat belt on your psyche."

So in Canada, the more things change, the more they remain the same when it comes to censorship. The vocabulary may be up-dated, but the effect is identical — social control manifesting itself in a pre-selection process. But we Canadians have always been known to desire a comfortable distance between ourselves and our democracy's due process. Time and again, our elected representatives have asserted a need to go outside of or beyond the already-enacted legislation or to create new laws in order to protect us from ourselves. The process of censorship, while not the most detrimental form of this 'protection', is certainly one of the clearest models and thus useful to understand.

#### How many censors is too many?

Censorship, of course, is not particular to Canada, and Dean makes this quite clear with short summaries of censorship practices in other countries and longer examinations of its history in Britain and the U.S. Nor is censorship particularly peculiar in Canada. (But this can be said only after acknowledging that censorship, in general, is peculiar, embedded in the gauzy fabric of morality — or more recently "community standards" — while remaining strictly supported with the whalebone of political currency *du jour*.) For this reason, Dean's title, **Censored! Only in Canada** is somewhat misleading.



courtesy Malcolm Dean

Photograph and caption from *Maclean's*, 1925: "This is the sort of thing the Canadian censor frowns upon. Its effect upon weak and degenerate minds might be dangerous to the highest degree."

For it is not the content of what is censored here that is unique, but the way in which censorship is carried out, according to Dean. He points out that "(a) history of Canadian film censorship presents unusual problems to the researcher, if only because Canada is practically the only country where so many censor boards flourish with equal powers." He is referring to the provincial (rather than federal) control over the regulation of film exhibition and distribution which still exists in Canada. Most other countries have national boards. Dean says that film censorship has remained a provincial matter for "one of the strangest and least appropriate of reasons: film has been viewed solely as property and as a business" and thus remains under provincial jurisdiction. He details several campaigns — the first in 1917 — which attempted to establish a national board, but only hints at why these all failed. One possible cause — as the process of film censorship involves a fee levied against the distributor or exhibitor, it is a form of indirect taxation, so if the

provinces ceded their authority to the federal government, they would also lose any revenue gained from it.

Although well researched and loaded with information about this often-covert activity, **Censored! Only in Canada** labours under its own over-structured form. Dean's chronological approach is often cumbersome as it divides and subdivides facts and events into provinces, countries, states and, occasionally, themes. Thus, the pertinent information must emerge willy-nilly from an over-load of often not-so-relevant background material. (It takes the most dedicated censorship trivia buff to make it through the extensive recorded proceedings of the annual meetings of provincial censors.) The year-by-year method also makes for some annoying repetition. How many times, for instance, do we need to hear that censors in Canada aren't "qualified" when surely Dean knows that there are no appropriate or "safe" qualifications for this position of cultural judge. I assume he is not suggesting a two-year course in 'open-

ness' as a pre-requisite for employment.

Other problems arise from the encyclopaedic range of his inquiry which seeks to locate the censorship of film within the larger climate of censorship (and obscenity laws) in general. While sometimes effective, often the "related material" is so extensive as to put the reader off the trail of the book's main purpose — to reveal the extent of film censorship in Canada.

#### Who defines "subversive"?

In spite of these flaws, Dean's research yields support for the anti-censorship struggle in several important areas. One is the claim that censorship — all censorship — is political at base. He quotes Murray Schumach's First Law of Censorship (from *The Face on the Cutting Room Floor*) "... in a democracy the more popular the art form, the greater the demand for censorship of it." In the context of censorship, *political* can be outright repression and Dean cites many examples:

- Newsreels which were pro-trade union during the '30s were banned in B.C., as was Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, the latter for sedition.
- Quebec Premier Duplessis brought 16-mm film under censor control in 1947 to prevent the circulation of "subversive" film. Again the impetus in this case was a pro-union film.
- National Film Board films were suppressed after being completed because of "subversive content" — such as *On est au coton* and *24 heures ou plus* — as well as

being severely cut — Gilles Groulx's *Normetal*, a film critical of a one-company mining town and the slave-like conditions of the workers living there, was reduced from 40 minutes to 17.

But equally as dangerous as the suppression of film because of its political content is the pervasive political nature of censorship's administration. Often the *how* is just as important as the *what*. To this end, Dean returns again and again to the problem of provincial jurisdiction over film censorship in Canada, exposing corruption and conflict of interest all along the way.

• As provincial censors are appointed, the positions are often used as patronage jobs, thus keeping the line of governmental influence unbroken.

• Not surprisingly, provincial members of parliament often see uncut versions of censored or banned films. Who shows them? Their own censor boards of course.

• Provincial Attorneys-General, says Dean "are *not* satisfactory guardians of public interest insofar as they cannot always be relied upon to challenge the legality of provincial statutes or to lend support to private citizens who do so. *No Attorney-General has taken his own province's censor board to court.*" (emphasis added) Citizens with complaints must go it alone."

In all, despite some confusions within its presentation, Dean's book is a valuable tool for understanding how censorship is practiced, complete with all its built-in contradictions. For anyone actively involved in a fight to alter the current censoring process however, it makes for rather depressing reading, as Dean details the many previous campaigns — the

petitions, the protests, the letter writing — most of which made no direct impact on censorship legislation.

#### "The Danish model"

But the book is not without alternatives. Dean suggests that "the Danish model" could be adequately implemented in Canada. In Denmark, where pornography has been legalized and thus removed from the titillating realm of 'forbidden fruit', the only films submitted to a board for classification are those which children will be permitted to see. Examination of adult-only films is not required. Denmark's solution is interesting in that it fulfills the purported function of all film censorship — the protection of children — while leaving adults free to make their own choices.

One final tidbit from **Censored! Only in Canada**: In Ontario, where censorship is a business as well as a game, the Minister in charge of the censor board, Gordon Walker, recently announced changes to the Board's classification guidelines which would now permit younger teenagers to view some films which previously were restricted. In his press release, Walker solemnly declared that such films as *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* and *All the President's Men* — real "political" stuff — would now be available to uplift and educate the youth. What went unmentioned in the press release was the estimated \$900,000 increase in amusement taxes which Ontario stands to gain from the sale of additional Adult tickets to teens. It would seem that when the Ontario government considers our 'moral fibre', they just want to know how much a metre.

## JEFF HOUSE

### IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

#### Jack Abbott was in a state of literary grace and he fell. His fall could be a setback for prison reform.

**In The Belly Of The Beast**  
Jack Henry Abbott  
Random House (New York)  
1981, 166 pp., \$15.50.

The opening years of the twentieth century gave the coup de grace to a practice common in England until the 1880's — the public rendering of a punishment. Victorian sensibilities were thereby assuaged, as the lower order of folk could no longer indulge their more salacious side by turning out riotously and festively, for a view of Crown-ordered whippings or executions. As a result, punishment withdrew behind the slate-grey walls of the prison, gaining in mystery what it lost in

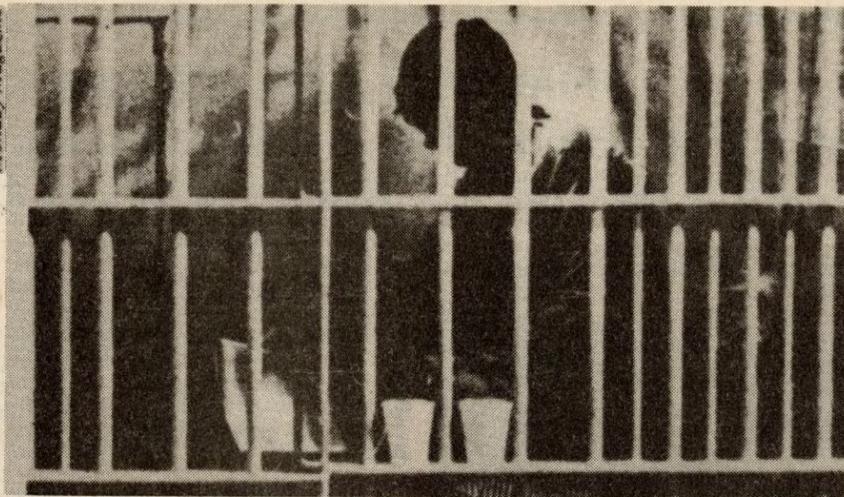
openness.

From time to time, the publishing world comes upon, or otherwise invents, what it deems to be an "authentic" voice of a convict, whose cry, we are told, breaches those penitentiary walls, and faces us with the realities of imprisonment. Thus it is that the books of the last twenty years which come from inmates tend to be written by revolutionaries. Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* was carried by every bright young undergraduate in the mid Sixties; George Jackson's *Soledad Brother* etched brilliantly the militant black man caged, but learning Chinese and doing one thousand pushups a day, studying history,

and most of all, planning the downfall of the racist state which had enslaved him.

Ten years have passed since Jackson was shot to death by guards while "attempting to escape"; and since Eldridge Cleaver embraced The Godhead, turning in his militancy for the right to spout faith-headed nostrums on Holy talk shows. Canada has seen, in the last decade, the publishing of one prison memoir of the first rank, Roger Caron's *Go Boy*. That work, although it was never a publishing event of the first rank, is a quietly convincing tale of the crushing of a human being by the prison system; it saw the light of day due to the efforts of Pierre Berton,

Monday Magazine



with whom Caron corresponded, and who presided over the many drafts of the work, finally contributing an admiring Introduction, in which he expressed his confidence that The Parole Board would soon set his protégé free. Caron, now fully rehabilitated, works as a consultant for the Federal Government.

Norman Mailer was not so lucky with his prison scribe. As with Berton, an initial correspondence led to mutual admiration, the identification of authenticity in the convict's writing, in the honesty and simplicity of his concerns, in his anger. Finally, after numerous reworkings, Mailer threw his literary weight behind *In the Belly of the Beast*, assuring publication.

**A literary "discovery"**

Jack Abbott arrived in New York City a freeman on June 5, 1981. Thirty-seven years old, he had been committed to the Utah State Industrial School of Boys at age 12. He had been out of prison for a total of nine months in the preceding twenty-five years. As the "discovery" of the moment, he undertook a heady round of talk shows, literary parties, and newspaper interviews. On July 18, having just completed a final television taping, he and two women admirers dropped in to a Greenwich Village restaurant. A disagreement developed between Abbott and a waiter, and, according to eyewitnesses, Abbott asked him to step outside. The waiter, 22 years old, was found knifed to death shortly thereafter. A murder warrant was issued for Abbott and on September 24th, he was taken into custody in Louisiana.

Much of *In the Belly of the Beast* concerns Abbott's self-descriptions, his musings about guards, bullfights, race, and history. He claims to be a communist, and to have spent fourteen years in solitary confinement, and to never have been "broken" by the penitentiary regime. Yet there is reason to believe that Abbott's advertisements for himself shield a more tawdry reality; one does not have to believe post-partum allegations by prison officials that he was an informer to see this. In fact,

much of the book contains highly unlikely claims by the author. "There are not many books of philosophical importance I have not read", he modestly admits. His study of "all the sciences" led him to the realization that "I grasped things which only someone like Bohr had." Quine's name is dropped, as is Hegel's and Sartre's. Yet his thankfully brief philosophical digressions alternate between banality ("Lenin, Stalin, and Mao teach the highest principles of human society.") and confusion: "Nietzsche felt the presence of communists when he wrote of the philosophers who would come after him, such as Kierkegaard . . . The thing in itself is knowable through action.") Those seeking Abbott's views on why Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are so meaningful to the prisoner will find little more than this; a descent to specifics never takes place.

The author's interest in action flows from his affirmation of his own anger. This fury, which he sees as justified by the conduct of the guards, places him at permanent odds with the administration (to hear him tell it.) Interestingly, he feels the same about the prison population in general; they are slobbering fools and jabbering simians. "When I'm forced by circumstances to be in a crowd of prisoners, it's all I can do to refrain from attack." Indeed, central to Abbott's self-appraisal is the conviction that he is *ubermensch*, forced by imprisonment to absent himself from his true home, his philosophical Berchtesgarden.

**The purity of violence**

He also embraces a second fascist myth, that of the purity and primacy of violence. Only here does his writing rise to the occasion, and carry conviction: "Here is how it is: You are both alone in his cell. You've slipped out a knife (eight to ten inch blade, double edged). You're holding it beside your leg so he can't see it. The enemy is smiling and chattering away about something. You see his eyes: green-blue, liquid. He thinks you're his fool; he trusts you . . . As you calmly talk and smile, you move your left foot to the side to step across his right-side body length. A light

pivot toward him and the world turns upside down: you have sunk the knife into the middle of his chest. Slowly he begins to struggle for his life. As he sinks, you have to kill him fast or get caught. He will say "Why?" or "No!" Nothing else. You can feel his life trembling through the knife in your hand. It almost overcomes you, the gentleness of the feeling at the centre of a coarse act of murder. You've pumped the knife in several times without being aware of it. You go to the floor with him to finish him. It is like cutting hot butter, no resistance at all. They always whisper one thing at the end: "Please."

Abbott here switches to the second person, even though he is, in all likelihood, describing a murder of an inmate for which he was convicted. I suspect the abrupt switch from the otherwise all-pervasive first person takes place because for Abbott, combat, struggle and killing out of primal anger comprise the essence of the human condition. As he says when describing the murder "Here is how it is". If action really precedes knowledge, then murder does reveal what is in the belly of . . . the beast.

The writer's fascination with proto-fascist gobbledegook would have little importance were it not for the way in which America's media hailed him as a remarkable genius, an "exceptional man." On the very day that the hapless waiter breathed his last, *New York Times* reviewer Terrence Des Pres finished his puff on *Beast* with the comment that "we must be grateful to Norman Mailer for helping to get Abbott out on parole." Now, of course, the worm has turned, and those journals with less frequent editions can castigate Mailer for refusing to see the criminal in the protégé. Underlying the heavy-bore rightwing attacks throbs the unstated lesson: turn your eyes away from the prisons; don't risk your reputation by helping a con. Yet it is instructive to recall that a similar instance never caused any public eating of crow by William Buckley, who had assisted an inmate named Edgar Smith; Smith later was convicted of attempted murder, yet Buckley escaped with his reputation intact.

The easy conclusion, that artists should keep their noses out of the business of prisons, ignores contributions such as Berton made. It would make less likely the exposés of prison conditions which periodically emerge from official reports, such as that of the MacGuigan Committee in Canada, or Warden Tom Murton's exposé of the murder of convicts by the administration at Tucker Prison Farm in Arkansas. As the recurring prison rebellions and official repression make clear, the inhumanity of prison administrations can be ignored at our peril, and at literally murderous cost. Norman Mailer may have been conned, but is that really more shameful than countenancing a homegrown Gulag? □

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**AFTER THE CATAclySM**  
Documenting lapses, gaps and lies in the 'free' press accounts of postwar Indochina

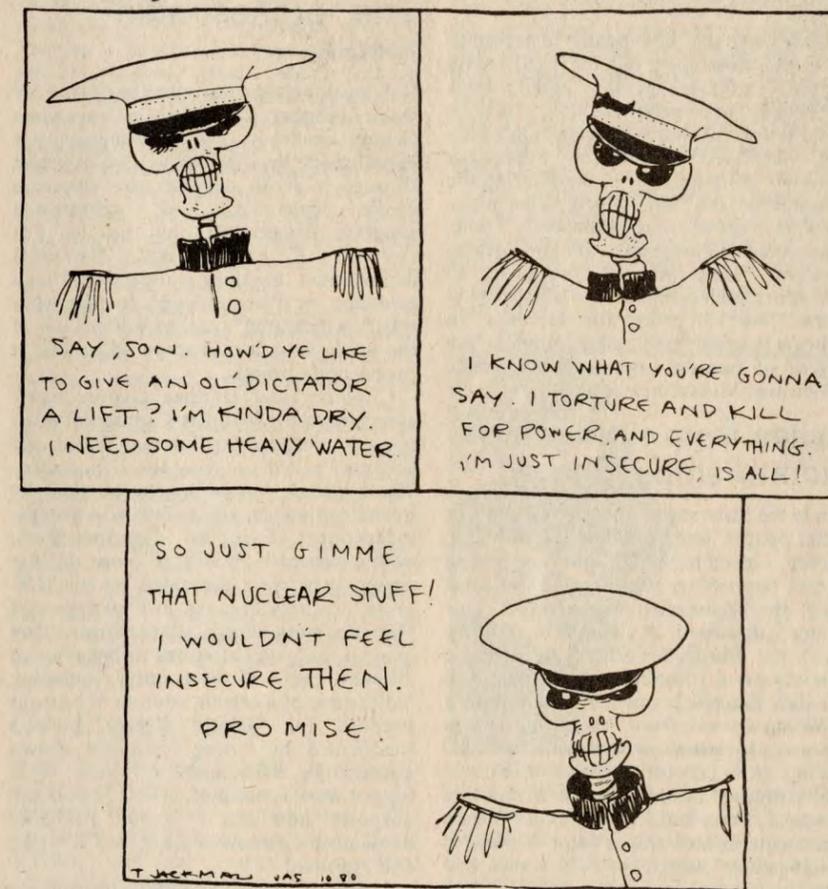
**After the Cataclysm: Postwar Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology**  
Volume Two of *The Political Economy of Human Rights*  
Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman  
South End Press (Boston), 300 pp., notes 84 pp., 1979.

"Liberty for business, liberty for prices, liberty for trade: one throws the people in prison so that business will remain free."  
(Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan author)

**The Political Economy of Human Rights**, two volumes, is an inspiring effort to present the truth about U.S. foreign policy, and an exposé of the extent to which the "free" press and media in the U.S. have come to resemble "state propaganda institutions".

**Volume One: The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism** documents a global pattern of U.S. support for right wing militarist regimes. The authors delineate a U.S. policy that is designed to cultivate in developing nations "an essentially fascist-minded, repressive, reactionary, privileged military elite, faced with a majority of farmers and laborers who have been deprived of the dignity of political, social or economic recognition." This is the well documented truth behind the obfuscations and lies presented by U.S. politicians and apologists in an effort to create an image of intense American concern for human rights.

Indeed, whether it be in Brazil, Chile, Thailand, Philippines, El Salvador, Indonesia, Paraguay, Argentina, Guatemala, South Africa, etc., the book documents a U.S. strategy that has systematically undermined democratic processes whenever they have threatened the system labeled "totalitarian free enterprise". American money and personnel have helped develop some of the world's leading terrorist organizations (Chile's DINA, the Shah's SAVAK, South Korea's KCIA, and more). American policy helps maintain economic structures in developing countries which nurture a military-economic feudal elite by means of the "marginalization" of 80 percent of the indigenous population, their enforced irrelevance to the workings of capitalist economy, their reduction to categories of economic cost and political threat. "No wonder that even nuns and priests throughout Latin America have become



sworn enemies of Reagan and Haig.

As for the frenzy of "humanitarian" concern that rises in the U.S. press over the slightest human rights violation in the USSR, the authors place the issue in the perspective where it belongs: "The trial of a single Soviet dissident, Anatol Shcharansky, received more newspaper space in 1978 than the several thousand official murders in Latin America during the same year, not to speak of the vast number of lesser events such as tortures and massive dispossession."

**Indochina aftermath**

The bulk of Volume Two is devoted to events in Cambodia (now renamed Kampuchea) after the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975, prefaced by discussions of Vietnam and Laos. The U.S. media was ready for a convincing communist blood-

bath in Cambodia when long predicted massacres failed to occur after the revolutionary victories in Vietnam and Laos. How quickly Vietnam fell out of the news when it became clear that the communists were in fact demonstrating relative restraint in their post-revolutionary policies!

The legacy of the American assault on Indochina has left these societies with horrendous problems of reconstruction. A World Health Organization report in 1976, cited by Chomsky and Herman, described South Vietnam as "a land of widespread malaria, bubonic plague, leprosy, tuberculosis, venereal disease and 300,000 prostitutes." The U.S. has denied any aid to Vietnam (in fact it preaches about human rights to the Vietnamese!) despite appalling misery for which it bears primary responsibility: the half-million drug addicts; the 80-160,000 cases of leprosy in

Union Art Service

## AFTER THE CATAclySM

the South (Vol. 2, p.84); the hundreds of health centers, hospitals, research institutes destroyed in the North; the purposeful devastation of North Vietnam's fertile agricultural base; the "43-plus My Lais" carried out by South Korean mercenaries; the murders of over 100,000 communists in the South as part of the "Phoenix Program"; the 10 million people allegedly displaced by U.S. operations in South Vietnam; the psychological ravages left by an imperialist war machine which wreaks destruction on foreign soil and then returns home to safety.

Only when the "boat people" emerged as an exploitable issue did the U.S. media seriously address Vietnam again. What emerges as "fit to print" in the U.S. is news suitable for anti-leftist propaganda which will help reconstruct the imperialist ideology, so tentatively shaken during the activism of the '60s, which helps make possible regimes like Pinochet's Chile, Stroessner's Paraguay, or the death-wielding, Haig-financed thugs in El Salvador. Such tyrannies are labeled "sub-fascist" by Chomsky and Herman, to indicate that they don't even command the degree of popular support which made Hitler and Mussolini effective.

## Exiles from right-wing dictatorships ignored

While the furor raged over the Vietnamese "boat people" and atrocities in Cambodia, silence reigned in the U.S. press regarding events happening elsewhere at the same time: the Indonesian massacres in East Timor (discussed at length in Volume One), the murderous attacks by Burmese soldiers and Buddhist tribesmen on Muslim Bengali people, the quarter of a million driven from their homes in Lebanon by Israeli air strikes, the 700,000 fleeing U.S.-supported terror in Bolivia and Uruguay, not to mention the Haitian refugees. These unfortunate exiles from a right-wing dictatorship are not the kind of "boat people" which the U.S. wants, and they never should have expected much from U.S. authorities except the indifference and calculated racism which the U.S. usually shows to victims of its "friends". Throughout both volumes of **The Political Economy of Human Rights**, the authors have to rely heavily on the foreign press (or on unreported or unpublished testimony in the U.S.) in order to find out the information they present.

After a short chapter on Laos (its population near starvation in 1976, a result of the "secret" U.S. war; its land riddled with unexploded ammunition, after 12,500 U.S. raids per month, most directed at "Pathet Lao sympathizers", ie. the civilian Lao population; the Plain of Jars, a once flourishing rural society now resembling a "lunar landscape" according to post-war eyewitness testimony) the authors turn to Cambodia.

At no time during the final chapter on Cambodia do the authors deny that atrocities followed the Khmer Rouge

victory, but they do discuss in detail U.S. press coverage, which turned a hideous human tragedy into a media propaganda spectacular. Chomsky and Herman agree with well publicized reports on the brutally enforced "peasantization" of the entire society, but they add: "It is quite important to stress, in this connection, that while the West is appalled that privileged urban elements are compelled to live the life of peasants, it does not regard peasant life in itself as an atrocity. Rather, this is the normal state of affairs."

## The "orchestrated" media

Relying on refugee testimony and on a very small number of published accounts (whose accuracy, indeed integrity, are demolished by Chomsky and Herman through in-depth analysis), the American media depicted a well orchestrated program of genocide by the Pol Pot regime. Chomsky and Herman demonstrate that there really is not enough evidence for these charges. In fact what was "orchestrated" was the western use of the grisly situation to score anti-socialist propaganda points.

Chomsky and Herman analyze many assessments by visitors to Cambodia which counter or at least expand upon the refugee accounts relied upon by the U.S. media. These include scholarly articles, visits by Scandinavian, Japanese, Yugoslav groups, independent European correspondents, even a pair of U.S. writers. None of their perspectives were presented by the U.S. press, precisely because, as Chomsky and Herman meticulously demonstrate, they tend to indicate variations in behavior in different parts of the country, including indications of a certain amount of peasant support for Khmer Rouge policies (reaffirmed by strong resistance shown against the Vietnamese invasion). This type of work is not useful for U.S. political purposes, and thus we would probably know nothing about it if not for Chomsky and Herman.

Much of the worst refugee testimony, for example, came from those entering Thailand from northwestern Cambodia, an area long victimized by Thai military attacks, savage assaults by Lon Nol forces on recalcitrant peasantry, and sustained U.S. bombing which grew to devastating proportions in 1973. Chomsky and Herman merely point out that this background of brutality preceded the rise of the Khmer Rouge and had a lot to do with the rage and revenge which was unleashed. This is not apologetics; rather it is the kind of complex analysis which is always alien and irritating to propagandists.

Perhaps Khmer Rouge atrocities were what Nixon and Kissinger et al. had in mind anyway. Chomsky and Herman refer to the "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine" in which the U.S. seeks to exploit instances of communist brutality to serve the interests of sub-fascism. Just as Stalin's tyranny was what the enemy needed to resuscitate the

capitalist corpse after W.W.II, so wicked communist regimes are still needed to rally support for the world system of sub-fascism. Scholar Michael Vickery, cited by the authors, points out that "when it became clear (to U.S. leaders) that they could not win in Cambodia, they preferred to do everything possible to insure that the post-war revolutionary government be extremely brutal, doctrinaire, and frightening to its neighbors, rather than a moderate socialism to which the Thai, for example, might look with envy."

## U.S. ignorance of peasant society

Most importantly, the authors convey the magnitude of deceit and opportunism in western attitudes, pointing out how little we really know about peasant societies, past and present, and how little the U.S. cares about the welfare of people in these societies, except when it can use them for purposes of promoting its own phony superiority and that self-willed ignorance which allows Americans to *still* think that their government is actually working on behalf of "freedom and democracy". As the authors conclude: "The success of the Free Press in reconstructing imperial ideology since the U.S. withdrawal from Indochina has been spectacular. The shift of the United States from causal agent to concerned bystander — and even to leader in the world struggle for human rights — in the face of its empire of client fascism and long, vicious assault on the peasant societies of Indochina, is a remarkable achievement. The system of brainwashing under freedom, with mass media voluntary self-censorship in accord with the larger interests of the state, has worked brilliantly. The new propaganda line has been established by endless repetition of the Big Distortions and negligible grant of access to non-establishment points of view; all rendered more effective by the illusion of equal access and the free flow of ideas."

While the books offer no reassuring counter-strategy to combat this alarming process, there is one implicit in the fact that these sub-fascist regimes are devoid of meaningful popular support, as any such terrorist system must be. Thus the interests of the overwhelming majority of the world's people are stacked against the kinds of regimes which capitalism must turn to in order to maintain its moribund network of class hate and racism. Even the Catholic Church in Latin America (long a smug apologist for right-wing dictatorships) has been forced into opposition by the sheer gutter level of most right-wing regimes. Perhaps a spiritually vibrant, egalitarian socialism will develop in Latin America to revitalize our conception of alternatives. Whatever the case, the authors make it clear that the source of so much pain is right here in North America. Ultimately the gauntlet is thrown down to Americans of good will to repudiate Reganism before it is too late. □

Richard Royal is a poet and co-editor of **Central Park**, a New York journal.

## ALEXANDER WILSON

## SCRATCHING THE SURFACE

### How the youth create a rupture in society's meaning by adopting a complex and coded style of outrage.

**The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures: Sex and Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll?**

Mike Brake

Routledge and Kegan Paul, £3.95

**Subculture: The Meaning of Style**

Dick Hebdige

Methuen, £2.75.

Last summer's riots in the slums of British cities shocked the public into recognition of the reality of life under Margaret Thatcher. After years of ostensible incomprehension on the part of the mass media, the tensions between the state and unemployed youth were revealed to them in one violent moment. "To tell the truth," Simon Frith, in the **Voice**, reports a white Liverpudlian as saying, "if someone round here saw a policeman on fire, they wouldn't even piss on him."

But these conflicts have been understood — indeed, lived — for some long time by disenfranchised youth themselves. If the media had cared to notice, the young Rastas, mods, women, students, and even skinheads who battled the cops and looted the shops last summer participate in a subcultural tradition that for thirty years has resisted (although in distinct and very complex ways) state authority. At the same time, most of these subcultures have constructed a range of vibrant expressions that celebrate their marginal status.

In the face of much sensational, insensitive or simply irrelevant reportage on the subject, Mike Brake's **The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures** attempts readings of many of these groups. Brake's title, indicating as it does as much interest in the *study* of youth cultures as in the cultures themselves, presages his academic approach. For such a work to be successful — or the least bit interesting — it needs models that are far more sophisticated than Brake's turn out to be with which to evaluate sociological studies.

### "Deviant youths"

I say turn out to be because the book is initially promising. Its title recognizes a divergence of thinking in British cultural studies. "Youth Culture," in the singular, is the term most common in casual and journalistic usage. It understands an entire range of cultural practices as a unitary phenomenon, revealing nothing of the many and complex relations between youth groups themselves, nor of their

connections to dominant culture or class society. Much of the early work Brake examines — his survey begins with the Thirties — never moves beyond this point and is, indeed, most notable for its prescriptions for the rehabilitation of "deviant youths". Much recent work in the sociology of culture, however, has stressed the importance of the concept of "subculture". This approach is far more receptive to both the specificity of various subcultures and to the challenges these offer — albeit in oblique and mediated ways — to the social order.

Brake argues that subcultures are formed as attempts to resolve collectively experienced problems that arise from contradictions in the social structure. The solutions that are forwarded — often no more than the opportunity to achieve an identity not determined by class, education, or occupation — are of course cultural solutions, and as such are temporary, bringing about little or no *material* change. He goes on to suggest, almost as an aside, that youth cultures "tend to be some form of exploration of masculinity" — a provocative idea that is never very satisfactorily developed in a later chapter on the role of females in subculture.

### On the surface

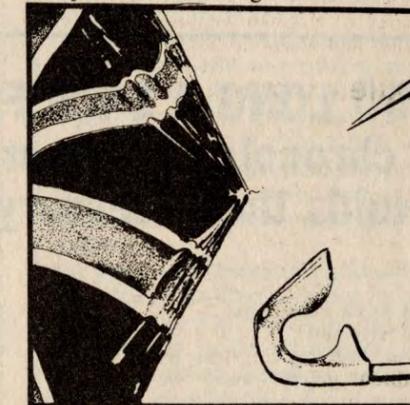
What Brake misses, I think, is the most subversive and perhaps most subtle moment of youth subcultures. The objections they make to normalizing society, and the contradictions they express and "magically" resolve, all take place, as Dick Hebdige suggests, "at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs." That these struggles occur within the process of signification itself is nowhere more apparent than with punk: the dislocated safety pins and dog collars do nothing so much as rupture the orderly process of meaning, and as such refute the taken-for-granted, the normal.

It is on the level of appearances, then, and principally through *style* — a platform shoe, the way a cigarette is smoked, the acquisition of a motor scooter — that youth subcultures make themselves felt, and contest the dominant ideological institutions of society.

So while Brake is obviously aware of the spectacular nature of the subcultures he studies — for these aspects have been consistently exploited by the media — he is unable to construct a systematic reading of them that incorporates models drawn from

semiotics and art, as well as from customary race and class analyses. Instead we get solemn, lumbering expositions of countless sociological studies, and hasty and uneven summaries of the music, fashion, dance, and argot themselves. Brake seldom looks outside his own discipline, sociology, for enlightenment on these things.

**The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures** is, in short, another dreary volume in a field of study distinctive for its mediocrity. And a very poorly edited one at that: the publisher has paid shamefully little attention to the sloppy syntax and punctuation throughout.



Brent Raycroft

So it was with some excitement that I put down Dick Hebdige's **Subculture: The Meaning of Style**. A small book, **Subculture** manages to draw on music history, anthropology, literature, semiotics, art and sexual politics to engage in the most concise and sophisticated discussion of spectacular subcultures I've come across. Its successes and pleasures are many. First it provides a succinct introduction to all the significant sub-cultural moments in Britain since the Second World War. Its treatments of rastafarianism and reggae, and especially of punk, while by no means exhaustive, are probably without parallel.

### The coded dialogue between black and white

Hebdige traces the complex structural relationships — the patterns of rejection and assimilation — between black and white communities since the fifties when large-scale immigration from the West Indies began. He argues convincingly that white working class youth cultures comprise "a phantom history of race relations since the war... The succession of

## SCRATCHING THE SURFACE

white subcultural forms can be read as a series of deep-structural adaptations which symbolically accommodate or expunge the black presence from the host community. It is on the plane of aesthetics: in dress, dance, music; in the whole rhetoric of style, that we find the dialogue between black and white most subtly and comprehensively recorded, albeit in code."

The second and most useful part of the book, which owes a great deal to Stuart Hall *et al's* **Resistance Through Rituals**, sets out many of the ways we can read those codes. Styles are understood as symbolic forms of resistance, as "spectacular symptoms of a more generally submerged dissent which characterizes the whole post-war period." Hebdige carefully introduces a number of difficult concepts — *bricolage*, *homology*, *signifying practice* — in a series of readings of the trajectory of a style from its initial oppositional construction to its eventual, and inevitable, incorporation into dominant culture. In one of his most suggestive passages, Hebdige argues that

*bricolage* (a term borrowed from Lévi-Strauss) is an anarchic mode employed by punks and Surrealists alike. The apparently random and incompatible juxtapositions that characterize punk practice — the T-shirts made of holes, the ransom-note typography, etc. — have as their aesthetic antecedents the collages and assemblages of Dada and Surrealism. The impulse in both is to subvert "common sense" and to disrupt and reorganize meaning. Punk, Hebdige concludes, is expressive of breaks and contradictions in a group's experience of society, as opposed to something like the teds or skins, whose cultural practice moves more toward an organic and ideal coherence.

Hebdige comes finally to the image of the prison, and to Jean Genet, who presides over this book from the opening page. In his introduction to George Jackson's prison letters, Genet outlines the paradox of the Black writer whose work enriches the (white) language he or she struggles to resist. The only resource is to "accept (that) language but to corrupt it so

skillfully that the white men are caught in its trap."

For Genet, as for the subcultural groups we sanctify in our times of optimism, that language is composed of the objects and commodities that litter our everyday lives. They can be made to assume a double meaning, to embody the tension between dominant and subordinate. A Rasta's patois and dreadlocks at once signify "difference" and a forbidden identity (in this case, a self-identity that has historically been denied slaves) and at the same time call down upon themselves suspicion and outrage. These objects in the catalogue of style, then, can be transformed into gestures of defiance and contempt. A symbolic graffiti that mars the streetcorners and housing estates of urban Britain, they are, in potential at least, the "superficial" corollary of last summer's riots: A refusal of the authoritarian and racist Thatcher state. □

Alexander Wilson lives in Toronto.

## ANDREA LYNETT

## TOO LONG A SACRIFICE A chronological approach to violence in Ireland which avoids the necessary political analysis.

**Too Long a Sacrifice**  
Jack Holland  
Dodd, Mead & Co., New York.  
1981, 217 pp., \$13.95.

**Too Long a Sacrifice** proposes to be a personal account as well as a critical examination of political events in Northern Ireland since 1969.

The personal account is mainly comprised of excerpts from letters the author received from his relatives in Belfast, while he was either away at school or working in America as a journalist. The attitudes of his relatives are recorded with the intention of giving the reader insights into how some individuals cope with living in a war zone. However, references to the family are not brimming with insight. Holland writes, "While Northern Ireland hovered on the brink of civil war, Aunt Martha sat securely and proudly in her new armchair." Lower middle class Catholics are seen as double victims. Firstly, as victims of exploitation and discrimination in jobs and housing and secondly, as the innocent victims of the various paramilitary organizations' military actions.

The critical examination of events is even more disappointing. The book moves chronologically through the Seventies rarely stopping to analyze the events. Holland records bombings and shootings,

naming the party responsible for the damage and paying a brief homage to each victim. Focusing on the atrocities, the theme of the book becomes 'man's inhumanity to man'. The violence is never seen as a symptom of a discriminatory and depressed economic state or the result of an alienated population, whose faith in government promises has been destroyed. Because the book reads like a catalogue, important aspects of the war milieu are not fully investigated.

The work's most blatant oversight is its quick dismissal of the Loyalist tradition. Holland writes that the Orange Order is an "extraordinary anachronism". Ian Paisley, the fire-brand evangelical preacher whose hatred is aimed against "Popery" and who commands the following of many Loyalists, is lightly dismissed as a "political hangover". However, Paisley's mobilization of Loyalist sentiment attests that he is doing a very good job of identifying and addressing the present fears felt by Protestants. Paisley found ample subject matter for his sermons in the mid-60s when Terrence O'Neill was elected Prime Minister of Northern Ireland on a platform of proposed economic and social reforms. This move to modernization had occurred just after Pope John XXIII's announcement that the Catholic Church planned a drastic reorientation of its rigid institutional framework which included a

bid towards increasing ecumenism in the Christian world. In Ulster, ecumenism and modernization implied Catholic integration into Protestant jobs, housing and political power. Paisley's 'fundamentalism' was seen as reinforcing the values of a traditional Unionism, where Protestants held privilege over the 'disloyal' Catholics.

### Loyalist power eroded

It was not only the abstract spirit of ecumenism that Protestants began reacting. In Belfast, they could already see Loyalist power eroding. Segregated areas of the city had been politically self-sufficient with neighbourhood politicians having more power and prestige than they would have had under a more centralized government. These politicians and small businessmen were the ones most affected by changes made in the structure of the city during the 60s. The appearance of international chain stores, the centralization of power from the local council to a central level and the shift to modernization within the Unionist party diminished the power and privileges of these Loyalists. The working Protestants who lived in these neighbourhoods where their leaders were losing power, would rather align themselves with the ideas of the Orange Order, whose objective is to "bestow

privilege and to preserve the economic interest of Protestants", than associate with the Catholic workers who economically are more their equals.

Paisleyism, at first glance, does appear to be a bizarre cult from the medieval ages with Paisley ranting from the pulpit that the Catholic Church is really the whore of Babylon. But the fears of the Protestant population need to be understood by anyone who questions how Paisley could gain so much political power in Northern Ireland.

### Political prisoners ignored

A second major omission in the book is Holland's refusal to follow the men of the various paramilitary organizations once they have been placed under arrest. He diligently records every manoeuvre of the Ulster Defence Association and the Irish Republican Army, but their stories end once they are arrested. During the 1970s, Britain maintained that the unrest in Northern Ireland was only a matter of 'law and order'. The battle that seeks political recognition has been fought from within the prisons. The British Government has often been at a loss as to what to call prisoners arrested after internment began in 1971. By May 1972, the British Government would not admit that any men in British prisons were political prisoners but rather the distinction was made between 'ordinary' and 'not ordinary' prisoners. The Irish Republican Army, who has traditionally insisted on seeking recognition for the political nature of its fight, began hunger strikes in three prisons. Mass demonstrations were held outside the prisons demanding political status for the prisoners. During the next month the British said that it would award certain prisoners with "special category status" which included all the demands of political status such as receiving more visits, having greater opportunity for education and the right to wear one's own clothing. Also, the

80 Republican and the 40 Loyalist prisoners would be housed in separate wings from the "common criminals".

### The Diplock Courts

Following recommendations set down in the Diplock Commission Report 1972, Britain ended internment without trial. "Special category" status was abolished in 1976. Since then suspected terrorists have still been arrested under the Emergency Provisions Act for offences described as 'political crimes'; yet, they are only recognized as being politically motivated during their arrest and trial. One outcome of the Commission's report was the establishment of Diplock courts, which were set up specifically to try suspected terrorists. Diplock Courts have been severely criticized as merely a more sophisticated form of internment. Charges against the detainee are worded in general or ambiguous terms with the result that the accused and his token solicitor do not clearly understand the exact nature of the charges. Evidence can be given by witnesses concealed behind curtains, who cannot be cross-examined. A single judge hears the evidence and passes sentence without the assistance of a jury. Many men and women are convicted on their own self-incriminating confessions obtained while being interrogated in such places as the Castlereagh Holding Centre, which was unfavourably investigated for police brutality by Amnesty International. The Bennett Report, 1979, (the first report done by the British Government since 1971, also investigating brutality in Northern Ireland) found that the Diplock Courts had a conviction rate of 94%. Having gone through this special process of political arrest and political trial, the accused becomes a common criminal when sentenced.

Republican prisoners now entering prison refuse to wear prison uniforms, which would identify them as regular criminals. Since 1976, these prisoners, who

Funeral of the assassinated Maire Drumm, vice president of Provisional Sinn Fein



## Theatre/ Women

A National study is being undertaken under the auspices of the Status of Women Canada. This study is a modest but serious attempt to assess the current status of women in the Canadian theatre, with particular reference to women playwrights, directors and artistic directors.

Your views, experiences, and suggestions will help us to evaluate the opportunities now available to women, and to discover any obstacle to the full participation of women and to make recommendations towards enhancing the position of women in the Canadian theatre.

**• If you are a Canadian playwright, director or artistic director or work in the theatre in any other capacity**  
**• If you are, or have been involved in a feminist theatre, women's theatre, or alternate theatre company in this country**

**• If you have concerns as an audience member about the characterization of women in the plays produced in this country**  
**• If you are aware of any obstacles to the full involvement of women in the Canadian theatre and/or can suggest programmes, legislation or other action**  
**• If you would like to meet to discuss this subject or suggest other individuals and groups for us to contact**

Please write: Rina Fraticelli, 96A Bellevue Ave., Toronto, Ontario M5T 3N9.

Meetings will be arranged in several cities across Canada through the winter of '81-'82. If you would like to attend one of these discussions, please indicate this in your letter and we will send you a schedule as soon as one is available.

## TOO LONG A SACRIFICE

are referred to as "on the blanket", have been denied many basic human rights such as medical treatment, proper diet, heated cells, reading materials, exercise, and the right to interact with other prisoners. It is in the H-blocks (the name given to the section of the Maze/Long Kesh Prison where these prisoners are incarcerated) where the present hunger strike began. Presently there are 400 men living in the H-blocks of Long Kesh Prison and approximately 28 women living under the same conditions in Armagh Women's Prison. Also being held inside of Long Kesh Prison are 350 men, who because they were arrested before 1976, are considered "special category status" prisoners. Although the Thatcher government looks on the men and women currently in the H-

blocks as common criminals, it recognizes that those arrested before 1976 for the same offences, were politically motivated.

## Public sympathy with the hunger strikers

Holland's avoidance of the prison history is unfortunate as today the H-blocks have become a focal point of the war in Northern Ireland. Republican sentiment has grown as more Irish citizens have vocalized their disgust with the British Government for its refusal to recognize the prisoners' demands. The swelling of public sympathy is a well known by-product of hunger strikes, which are undertaken as a last resort to motivate governments and members of the middle class, who are

apolitical and refuse to become active in the struggle going on in their cities.

In his concluding chapters, Holland's sympathy is clearly with the middle class people who have chosen to remain outside of the political arena and who are trying to seek out a peaceful existence for themselves regardless of what is happening a few blocks away. He writes, "Belfast people are still on the whole nice to children, stray dogs and strangers."

**Too Long A Sacrifice** is a book for individuals who like to read stories of prejudice and tales of brutal murder. It is not for individuals who wish to gain insight or political understanding of the events in Northern Ireland since 1969. □

Andrea Lynett is a member of the Irish Prisoner of War Committee in Toronto.

## TIMOTHY ROLLINS

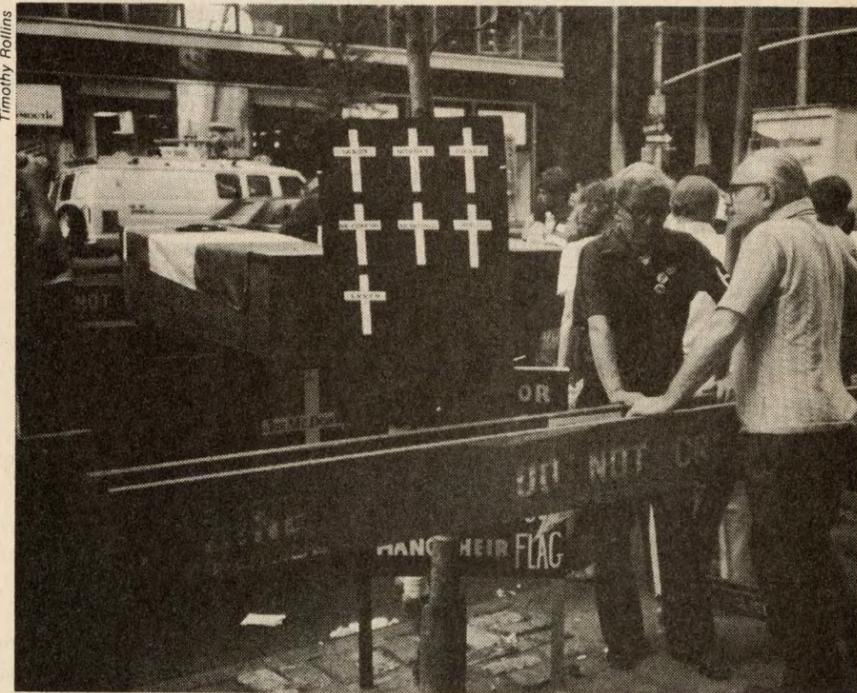
# MILITANT CULTURE

## Irish political theatre 24 hours a day in N.Y.C. — the struggle against British imperialism continues

"Only with the Irish the English cannot cope." — Engels, *The Preparatory Material for the History of Ireland 1869*

If most educated, professional artists find it a strain to forge genuine and effective unity between art and political action, there has always existed another field of people who, beneath the wheel of direct and daily oppression, find themselves producing a spontaneous militant culture. Their aesthetic is historical yet surprisingly unconscious. To call their project *art* is irrelevant — perhaps even a liability. For one class art is a luxury; for another — a last resort.

In New York City, a large and loosely organized group of Irish-Americans have been presenting a moving and ferociously visual demonstration in front of the British Consulate on East 53rd Street. This anti-British festival has operated 24 hours a day (featuring daily picket marches and performances from 5 to 7 p.m. and major rallies on Saturday afternoons) since the catalytic death of hunger striker Bobby Sands this May. The demonstrators are sponsored and supported by the New York chapter of Irish Northern Aid, an organization providing legal, economic and propaganda assistance to the families and American supporters of I.R.A. political prisoners. Beginning with an emotionally charged and effective demonstration on the occasion of Bobby Sands' death, the activists felt their first sensation of moral victory when the British Consulate, in panic, pulled in their giant Union Jack. Angered at this traditional attempt by the British to hide and ignore that the Irish question even exists, the Irish



Placards on the barricades in front of the British Consulate

retaliated by establishing a permanent demonstration site on the sidewalk outside. Headquarters for the demonstration organizers were provided by the Irish bar down the street — a lively, noisy place where British gin and scotch are nowhere to be found.

The real history of art — the history that can't be easily commodified — often lurks

in places that have been darkened and obscured by dominant ideology. For the thousands of non-Irish bystanders who watch the ceaseless demonstrators' theatre work against the policies of the British government, the dedication, animation and very duration of the Irish-Americans' action have left a lasting and popular impression. The demonstration

immediately enrolls spectators in a crash course on Irish history. The concealed legacy of the destruction of Irish culture, language, economy and geography under 800 years of British imperialism is presented with a lion responsibility and a sword-like edge.

## Irish culture censored

Since the British Government of Ireland Act and the subsequent partition of the nation in 1920, the British tactic, especially in the realm of culture within Ireland and among Irish sympathizers in England, has been one of silence and censorship — of pretending that the Irish question is non-existent, or, in any case, irrelevant to Britain's internal politics. The historical tactic of the Irish, in the U.S. as well as in the homeland, has been to scream bloody murder. From the first major invasion of Ireland by the British in 1169, to the drive into Ulster in 1184, to the complete domination of Ireland by the England of Elizabeth, James I, Cromwell and William of Orange in the 17th century to current policies of Thatcher, the Irish nation has been forced to construct an entire culture of resistance. The earnestness with which the Irish-Americans have taken up the Republican cause can be historically explained. Most of these people are direct ancestors of the victims of England's mass eviction of the Irish from Ireland, over two and a half million, from 1840 to 1860. Extermination of Irish presence in British-ruled territory developed in the direction of creating intolerable living conditions, thus forcing emigration to places like the U.S. No wonder the fierce participation of the Irish-Americans who continue to confront the British occupation as absentee freedom fighters even if that involvement has been restricted to demonstrations, symbolic gestures and fund-raising parties.

It is in the revelation of Ireland's tortured history that the New York demonstrators have made their greatest political contribution. For a general public who see Ulster only as a confusing media spectacle of fires and funerals, masks and tears, the impact of the demonstration asserts an education onto its onlookers.

The demonstrators claim that the character of their sidewalk occupation has developed organically, on site. All of the varied ideas, talents, skills and participations of the 100 plus demonstrators have been tapped. Again, the immediate impact of concrete issues and events in Ireland (e.g. the death of another hunger striker) and in the United States (such as the recent visit of Prince Charles) determines the forms and qualities of the objects of demonstration.

The key to the demonstration's effectiveness is its ambidextrous nature — like a political three-ring circus, several visual elements are always functioning at once.

## The vigil

In his "Report on the Irish Question" of 1867, Marx explains the total economic

appropriation of Irish farmland and industry by the British. Quoting a Feinian, Marx writes, "All they have left is the making of coffins." This sentiment is still shared by the Irish-Americans responsible for the dramatic 24-hour vigils that take place in front of the British Consulate at the time of another hunger striker's death. In a long row rest elaborate facsimile coffins, one for each dead striker, all draped in the green, white and orange of the Irish Republican flag. An actual vigil, an Irish tradition of guarding a coffin for 24 hours is orchestrated by the demonstrators. Men, women and children of all ages participate in 4-person shifts. All are working people who must rearrange their free time to participate in the all-night watch. Throughout the hot, noise-filled



The vigil goes on 24 hours a day

days and often treacherous Manhattan nights they stand at attention, grimly serious, eyes looking forward without expression. According to the organizers, the vigils are the most popular subject of the F.B.I. and police photographers who visit the demonstration site regularly.

## The placards

"These things aren't fancy, but they're very good, don't you think? This is art from the kitchen tables of the Irish!" (Peggy, a demonstrator)

The most varied and visually democratic aspect of the demonstration is what the organizers jokingly call "The Anti-British Gallery" of placards. Their system of exhibition is this: anyone sympathetic to the demonstration is invited to make a placard of his/her own design. Once the placard is contributed, it is then stapled to a pole that is stuck in between the police barricades that have literally corralled the action since its inception. The result is a ring of images by artists and non-artists alike. Some placards are sophisticated (the arresting images of hunger strikers by Irish Northern Aid's staff artist Brian Mor O'Baigill command the respect of the entire Irish-American community here); others are primary (as in a 6 year old's careful first letters written in colored crayon: I R A.) The goal of many of the 'artists' I spoke to was *not* to be artistic. Part of the prevailing aesthetic intention here is to force the commanding political

## MILITANT CULTURE

content out in front of the crude magic of the visual objects.

## The warning

When the death of a hunger striker occurs or British troops approach, Northern Irish Catholic women, armed with metal garbage can lids, bang out a community warning on the street pavements. Reproducing this tradition, as the staff of the British Consulate offices come out of their flagless building, the many women demonstrators, young and old, haul out garbage can lids and bang in unison on the Third Avenue sidewalks. The British Consulate people actually run down the sidewalk in irritation. This action — called "The Warning" — has proved to be a real crowd-pleaser with the afterwork street audiences. Much conversation and information is exchanged between the interested and the Irish after this daily event.

## Performances

The back of a large flatbed truck functions as a permanent stage for the demonstrators. Everyday between 5 and 7 p.m. there are performances of music and poetry readings. The music is usually derived from ancient and contemporary songs about the Irish struggle. Most of the songs were at one time outlawed by the British in Ireland. The poetry has been liberated from even more important wells of repression — it comes from past and present political prisoners from the Maze Prison. The prisoners make culture about their tragic battle to obtain political prisoner status, to force the British to recognize the Irish question as a historical and political issue, by writing on infinitesimal shreds of toilet paper with matchsticks that have been chiseled down to microscopic points. The manuscripts are then smuggled out of the Maze Prison for international dissemination. If Irish bards and poets have been censored and persecuted by the British since the 17th century, today's Irish still retain the traditional poetic structure of the historical four-line verse. From Maze Prison:

I'll wear no prison uniform  
Nor serve my weekly time  
That might brand Ireland's fight  
800 years of crime.

For the group of Irish-Americans who at this very moment continue to occupy New York's Third Avenue, the deepest meaning of their efforts is drawn from the position their demonstration holds in the total culture of resistance concentrated in Northern Ireland. The significance of their actions is evaluated by whose minds are changed, in what direction. Their example is full of power. The action that refuses to be 'art' is the art that militates meaning, the art that bangs the warnings, the art that manifests the spirit of insurrections and freedoms that are inevitably to be. □

Timothy Rollins is an artist and writer living in New York City.

## LES VOLEURS DU JOB

A film which records the labour of immigrants — working hard and working for less.



Night cleaning in offices and factory work in a hosiery shop

**Les Voleurs De Job** (Where Money Grows on Trees) Tahani Rached, director Distributed by Carrefour International, 4258 de Lorimier, Montreal H2H 2B1, Canada, 1980, 68 minutes.

Towards the end of this film, a middle-aged Greek woman says, "I was... no I am an immigrant. I will always be an immigrant." She has been in Canada since she was thirteen years old. Had this self-description occurred earlier in the film, it would have seemed like hyperbole, or worse, like self-pity. But by the time that this assertion is made, Tahani Rached has already established the central premise of her film, **Les Voleurs De Job**: an immigrant is defined as such by the work she or he does. As this particular woman speaks, the film views her in her workplace; she is a thread-cutter in a garment factory, working for low wages no doubt.

**Les Voleurs De Job** (literally translated as "Job Stealers") is a carefully edited series of interviews with people who have immigrated to Canada, some recently and some a long time ago. In the interviews, which are edited to become monologues, the people present their views on being immigrants, and almost without exception, they are filmed, as the Greek woman above, in their workplace. The type of work done by those interviewed is most often low-status service work such as night cleaner, hotel maid, dishwasher or else "unskilled", non-union factory work. This, in itself, accumulates until Rached's point of view is clear — that far from being "job stealers", immigrants often perform work which, although essential to the economy, is nonetheless so low paid as to be undesirable to most native-born Canadians. I say *accumulates* because there is almost no direct statement of this viewpoint in the dialogue of the film. The one exception to this is a longer interview

with a young Greek woman who presents the most political awareness of the working situations of immigrants. She is able to view her own personal experiences in view of attitudes toward all immigrants and clearly recognizes the economic determinates governing immigration quotas — "(countries)" which accept immigrants accept them only when they need them."

## Searching for 'freedom'

But if the motives of the recipient country are plainly self-serving, the motives of those who have themselves immigrated are not so apparent in **Les Voleurs De Job**. They have come seeking a better standard of living, more "opportunities", and "freedom" both economic and political. This quest for "freedom" is addressed in most of the interviews and becomes the most interesting sub-text of the film, as the workers grapple with defining exactly what freedoms they really have gained in coming to Canada. Those who have fled repressive governments point out that they now, in fact, don't have the "freedom" to speak out politically if the statements they wish to make are critical of other governments because to do so is to risk deportation. And economic "freedom" is just as illusory. The young Greek woman says, "Freedom? Sure, I'm 'free' to move to a bigger apartment — but I don't have the money for it... Freedom is like piece work. People think it (piece work) will make them free of the boss, but it doesn't work that way. It's just more pressure."

The strength of Rached's film is its observation of immigrants' labour — what is done, in what conditions, how do the people feel about it. But this strength mitigates itself at times by stressing the powerlessness of immigrants, their isolation, their inability to alter the circumstances of their lives. Caught

between their desire for a better life and the realities of their new country, the immigrants' stories are too often melancholic and inactive — tales of despair unchanged by the telling.

Because of its presentation style — observation and personal recollections with little information which is purely factual and no generalized overview — **Les Voleurs De Job** is clearest in its critique when analysing *attitudes* toward immigration. The last sequence in the film is particularly effective in showing the gap between the official attitude toward immigrants — the smiling, patronizing, "aren't we doing you a favour" pose — in contrast to the actual lives of most immigrants, lives taken up with menial, poorly paid employment. The scene is an immigration court. The event is the induction of 94 new Canadians ("from 31 countries") into the sacred fold of citizenship. The judge fairly bubbles over with enthusiasm and federalist patriotism, talking about the "freedoms" which are now available to all of them, passing out tiny maple-leaf lapel pins and holding out the promise "this rich country is now yours as much as it is mine." For a climax, the judge, accompanied by full orchestra and chorus (pre-recorded of course), delivers "O, Canada" in solo. (The new citizens aren't sure of the words.) With the proceedings completed, the smiling and satisfied judge sweeps into her office. Another day's work done. The camera now pans to view the empty room, catching the cleaning staff entering at the back, mops, dust rags and vacuums in tow. They are all immigrants. And as they go about their work, dusting and tidying, vacuuming and window cleaning, their actions echo every word which has gone before in the film. For immigrants, "opportunity" and "freedom" often mean one thing: the 'opportunity' to work hard and the 'freedom' to do it for less. □

## EXPERTS OF EVIL

### Chemical manufacturers use cosmetic creams to cover up the ravages of capitalism.

**Experts of Evil**  
Fugitive Cinema, Holland  
(35 minutes, colour)

On March 6, 1963, an explosion occurred at Philip's-Duphar, an Amsterdam chemical manufacturer. **Experts of Evil** is a film about this incident. This particular branch of the company manufactured a type of weed killer which many years later would become quite well known — the defoliant Agent Orange.

Agent Orange, used extensively by the U.S. during the Vietnam war, is a chemical form of TCP (trichlorophenol). In its production, impurities are created; the major one being dioxin which is said to be one hundred times more toxic than cyanide. But the marvels of dioxin have not been reserved exclusively for the Vietnamese and sundry chemical workers. Canada for one can claim a thriving dioxin industry that produces the herbicide 2,4-D. Unfortunately, eco-freaks, worried parents, scientists and other malcontents have spoiled the fun, and on January 27, 1981, Federal Minister of Agriculture "Clean Gene" Whelan was forced to announce a ban on technical esters of 2,4-D. While Whelan "... (couldn't) emphasize enough the value of 2,4-D to Canadian agriculture" — eight million pounds a year are used in Canada — he also couldn't emphasize *at all* the 'value' to exposed farmers, farmworkers, and the environment in general. Nor were chemical workers taken into consideration as the ban applies only to the "sale by basic manufacturers", and not to the production process.

With different forms of dioxin showing up in fish, gulls' eggs and chickens, official response has been ironic. Speculation on the latter is that the chickens were ingesting dioxin through the wood chips in their coops which had been treated with the wood preservative PCP (pentachlorophenol). Immediate action was taken to save these abused chickens by removing the PCP-treated wood from their coops and restricting its use to where it rightly belongs; in woodworking shops across the country, in telephone poles climbed by Bell maintenance personnel, etc. — workers being easier to replace than chickens.

## Dioxin induced death

But it will take more than a botched-up case of corporate irresponsibility in Holland to convince capitalism to be more considerate of the lives of workers and

citizens. And that one case, as portrayed in this film, was to become small potatoes compared to later catastrophes.

Nevertheless, **Experts of Evil** could have illustrated in microcosm the manner in which workers' lives are sacrificed in the pursuit of profit, but the film falls short and leaves many unanswered questions.

The first half of the film, done in semi-cinema-verite style, is a dramatization of the events around the explosion; the second half is a documentary interview with two survivors fourteen years later. In the dramatization we see the company, applying the standard corporate rationale of "blame the worker for any misfortune, and minimize your losses." Thus the four workers whom the company considers to have been responsible for the explosion are, in turn, made responsible for cleaning up the mess. During this initial clean-up, we also see earnest looking (presumably company) scientists carefully watching rats which have been placed in the contaminated area. These rats, in slow-motion close-up, topple over dead.

The point having been made that dioxin is not one of the healthier chemicals, the film returns to the clean-up itself. The company workers have been replaced by a professional outfit known as Fresh and Clean, a team of experienced trouble-shooters whose job it is to deal with these kinds of "mishaps".

Intimately eavesdropping on one of the Fresh and Clean workers, it is revealed that he's developing pimples all over his body and that he's become impotent. We also learn that while he has no idea of what he's dealing with, he is getting three times his normal pay for this job. The company's response to the pimples — the visible manifestation of dioxin poisoning — is to make appointments for the workers at the local beauty parlour, so they can have mud-pack treatments, hoping, no doubt, that what you don't see won't hurt you.

But the film doesn't tell you that these pimples are in fact a skin disease known as chloracne which is a common result of dioxin poisoning; it is not a minor ailment and is only the first visible consequence of dioxin poisoning. Other effects of dioxin exposure include weakness of the eyes and muscles, liver poisoning and cancer, a high rate of miscarriage and infant malformation. In the second half of the film, we learn that of the fourteen workers exposed in 1963, five had died, and four are suffering from serious permanent disabilities. Unfortunately, the nature of their disabilities and the causes of the

deaths aren't disclosed. We do see another effect of dioxin poisoning, however. In a second test of rats in the contaminated area, instead of just falling over dead, the rats attack, kill and eat one another. This effect is less dramatically manifested among the workers by an increasing irritability as the clean-up progresses.

The film makes it clear, both in the dramatized section and the documentary interviews that: 1) Dioxin is a deadly chemical; 2) The company did nothing to protect those that were to be exposed to it; 3) Treatment of those effected was limited to, literally, cosmetic care; 4) Compensation for those effected was equally ludicrous, with the company offering so much *per pimple*, and requiring signed waivers which absolved them of any further responsibility. What it doesn't make clear is whether it is to be viewed as a condemnation of Philip's-Duphar in particular, and the mindlessness of capitalist production in general or a critique of American barbarity in Vietnam. (This last theme is presented at the end of the film by means of a newsreel collage of American bombings and Vietnamese victims, with "White Christmas" on the soundtrack.) While all these elements are present, the required synthesis is missing; what remains is a **Sixty Minutes**-style exposé.

## The capitalist machine

Unfortunately, this incomplete analysis leaves the viewer with one of two conclusions; either this particular incident in Amsterdam in 1963 was merely an aberration that occurred because of a negligent or greedy employer; or it was only a result of the need to quickly fuel the American war machine. Both conclusions are fundamental errors in understanding the health and safety struggles of the workers in Holland, Canada or the U.S. The first lays the blame on an individual employer rather than the economic laws under which *all* employers operate. As Canada's "radical bureaucrat", Robert Sass, Director of Occupational Health and Safety for the Saskatchewan government, puts it, "Management priorities reflect contradictions in our political economy, not a lack of morality in management." In fact, Philip's-Duphar didn't act any *more* irresponsibly towards its workers than most other companies have in similar situations; Johns-Manville with the asbestos workers and Inco with the miners, being two instances among thousands.

## EXPERTS OF EVIL

After all, in capitalist society it is immoral *not* to make profit, regardless of the well-being of those that produce such profit. And governmental regulation continues to favour the consumer over the worker when dealing with health and/or environmental hazards. A good example of this hypocrisy is the Canadian government's ban of urea formaldehyde foam insulation which seeks to protect home owners while disregarding those employed in the wood-working, clothing and other industries who work directly with the banned material and thus are exposed to much higher concentrations than any average home owner ever will be.

In all, *Experts of Evil* seems fragment-

ary, leaving the Amsterdam incident as an isolated example, with no connections to any overall political analysis and no relation to other similar catastrophes (of which there are thousands). Nor does the film explore the historical role of this incident in the health and safety struggles of Dutch workers. Both the dramatization and the interviews leave an overwhelming pall of defeatism, without pointing to solutions aimed at preventing similar occurrences. Fourteen people's lives are destroyed and nothing is learned.

*Experts of Evil* is part of a trilogy which was released commercially in Holland at small neighbourhood theatres. As such,

despite the critical tone of this review, it is certainly better fare than most commercially released films. With no pretensions other than serving as a footnote to the mindless destruction of workers' health and safety, it shows one more incident in an endless litany of ruined human lives. □

Nick Macombie is a community legal worker at the Injured Workers' Consultants.

For more information contact: DEC Films, 427 Bloor St. W., Toronto, Ont., M5S 1X7. (416) 964-6901.

**BILL GLENN**

## ACID RAIN As the struggle between industry and environmentalists continues, so does the damage.

**Acid Rain: the North American Forecast**  
Ross Howard and Michael Perley  
Anansi Press Ltd (Toronto)  
206 pp., 1980.

**Acid Rain: the Silent Crisis**  
Phil Weller and the Waterloo Public Interest Research Group  
Between the Lines (Kitchener).  
104 pp., May, 1981 (2nd edition).

United States-Canada Memorandum of Intent on Transboundary Air Pollution  
**Impact Assessment - Interim Report**

**Before the Rainbow: What We Know About Acid Rain**  
Carolyn Curtis (ed.)  
Decisionmakers Bookshelf Volumes,  
(Washington), 102 pp.,  
Edison Electric Institute, 1111 19th St.,  
N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, \$2.50.

The spectre of acid rain, inexorably sterilizing Canadian lakes and stunting forests and crops, has been grist for the media for the last three years. For more than twenty years it has been the subject of intensive research by a handful of perceptive scientists and researchers in Europe, Canada and the United States. Their work proceeded slowly and carefully, for acid rain was not the kind of environmental hazard that was familiar to most people. It was easy to connect respiratory problems with the billowing black smoke of an incinerator or link dead fish with the liquid waste bubbling from a factory sewer, but, acid rain is a silent and indirect killer. Not until the destructive effects of sulphur gases emitted from power plants and smelters and the nitrogen

oxides from car exhausts became visible — consider the blasted terrain around Sudbury, Ontario for example — did government regulators respond. Their solution was a control program of remarkable simplicity — they would rely on the ability of nature to absorb the pollutants and render them harmless, thus instituting a strategy which would quickly overload the natural recuperative capacity of the environment. To implement this 'natural' control program, tall smoke stacks were built at the sites of most of the major emitters — and gases were dispersed over the continent. By the time they drifted back to earth, the engineers calculated, they would be too diluted to do any harm. Unfortunately the "dilution solution" presented us with a new environmental dilemma. The sulphur and nitrogen oxides are suspended in the upper atmosphere for days and under the influence of heat and several catalysts undergo a complex chemical transformation. Hundreds of kilometers from their site of origin those pollutant gases are being returned to the earth as weak acids. Most rainfall east of the Mississippi River has an acid load forty to several hundred times higher than is found in unpolluted precipitation.

### Permanent damage

Over time these acids have the power to totally eliminate life from susceptible water bodies, to leach the nutrients from the soil, to burn and stunt crops, to dissolve the faces of buildings and scar works of art. The damage is extensive, expensive and, in most cases, permanent.

Yet it is impossible to link the emissions from any particular factory or generating station with any specific damaged sector of the environment. The science for predicting the movement of pollutants over great distances is even more primitive than the inexact skill we have developed for predicting the weather. Unless a clear, precise cause and effect can be demonstrated between a polluter and his victim, government agencies are reluctant to institute a control strategy. Such a strategy would consist merely of "turning off" the gas emission, the technology for which already exists. But the price tag for this action would be enormous. At present, only Ontario and British Columbia have required that utilities and smelters begin to control acid gas emissions. No other jurisdiction in North America has a similar program although almost all guarantee

that local air quality criteria are met, primarily by using the tall stack approach.

As the magnitude and range of damages grow, more and more research dollars have been spent to catalogue them. The few early biologists who painstakingly put together pieces of the acid rain puzzle have been joined, in recent years, by a legion of atmospheric scientists, doctors, foresters, computer programmers, conservationists and other specialists. Their findings are only now reaching the public in accessible form, stripped of scientific jargon. In *Acid Rain: the North American Forecast*, Ross Howard and Michael Perley devote more than half the book to indexing the horrors. Non-technical but comprehensive, the facts are lined up in terse but compelling prose. A chapter giving the magnitude of the economic implications is of particular interest.

### Calculating the damage

There is a growing clamour by industry against the institution of further environmental regulation: "over-regulation" or "regulatory burden" they call it. They are demanding that the costs of control be justified by commensurable benefits realized in the environment. The hundreds of millions of dollars needed to remove sulphur from the smoke stack gases are relatively easy to calculate. But it has only been in the last few years that the economists have been able to assess even the first rudimentary estimates of the damages. Howard's book looks closely at these. The billion dollar damage costs are awesome, but the evidence, while compelling, is still incomplete. Utilities and industries are vigorously attacking the scientific basis of these claims and label controls "unnecessary and unwarranted". Anyone arguing the need to 'turn off the gas' will need the Howard book to bolster their side of the cost/benefit analysis battle. They will also need to look at the inherent weakness of having to argue hard economics on the basis of damages that are, as yet, not completely understood.

Phil Weller's *Acid Rain, The Silent Crisis* is rich in detail. Maps, charts, graphs and quotes offer persuasive evidence of the danger the aquatic environment faces. Fish losses and lake deaths are graphic and irrefutable. The forest, crop, architectural and health damages are less well documented. Researchers have been able to show examples of isolated deterioration and from these postulate ramifications of enormous magnitudes but have been unable to compile the necessary data to present a complete case.

Like most pollutants, acid rain is flushed into the water system and accumulates there until it reaches toxic concentrations. Scientists have been able to document severe changes in water quality over short periods of time. Weller presents much of this evidence in his book. However, acid rain is only a transient traveller through the terrestrial environment. As it passes on its way to a water body it erodes buildings and degrades soils but these changes occur much more slowly and the exact

dimensions of the problems caused are hard to measure over the short term. Industry has used the incompleteness of this research to push for a delay in control. Both Howard's and Weller's books go into great detail to show how effective these delaying tactics have been in the past. Before Canadian regulatory agencies were finally convinced of the seriousness of the acid rain issue, INCO and Ontario Hydro were able to avoid an extensive acid gas control program for many years. Both authors are soundly critical of government compliance with industry demands for inaction and accuse the regulators of sacrificing the environment for the sake of corporate profits.

### U.S. industry: defending their interests

Of course acid rain does not originate exclusively in Canada. It has been estimated that from 50 to 70 per cent of the acid rain falling in this country originates with U.S. sources. And unlike Canada, U.S. authorities have not been convinced of the need for extensive control action. U.S. coal interests, coal mining states and electric utilities are adamant that the federal government does not have the necessary information to justify requiring that the expensive pollution abatement equipment be installed. A recent tract by corporate utility Edison Electric, *Before the Rainbow: What We Know about Acid Rain*, steadfastly maintains that the available evidence does not warrant any action beyond further research. Although these interests do not dispute that acid rain exists, *per se*, they do not believe 1) that it is increasing, 2) that it is responsible for any documented environmental damage, or 3) that there is any relationship between the emissions from coal-fired plants and the formation of damaging acid rain.

The arguments presented in *Before the Rainbow* can be refuted but only with the most recent information which brings me to the last in the list of recent publications. Acid rain has spawned more reports than any environmental problem of recent memory. Since spring, the Canadian and U.S. National Research Councils have each released comprehensive studies, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has published five volumes in connection with the revision of the Clean Air Act and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment has more than two dozen reports arising from its research. Glossy publications range from Pollution Probe's *Acid Rain Primer* to Environment Canada's *Down Wind*. One of the best is a collection of research findings compiled by the Canada-U.S. working group set up to analyse the issue under the terms Memorandum of Intent on Transboundary Air Pollution signed in August, 1980. The resulting *Impact Assessment: Interim Report* is as rich in detail as it is turgid and technical. It is also the only acid rain result that won't cost you anything. □

Bill Glenn is a freelance writer and environmental consultant.

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### Fall Titles from BETWEEN THE LINES

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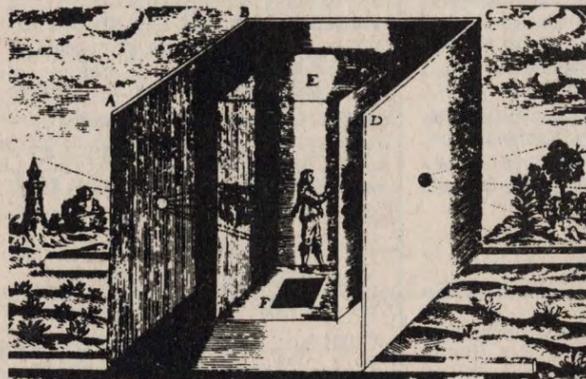
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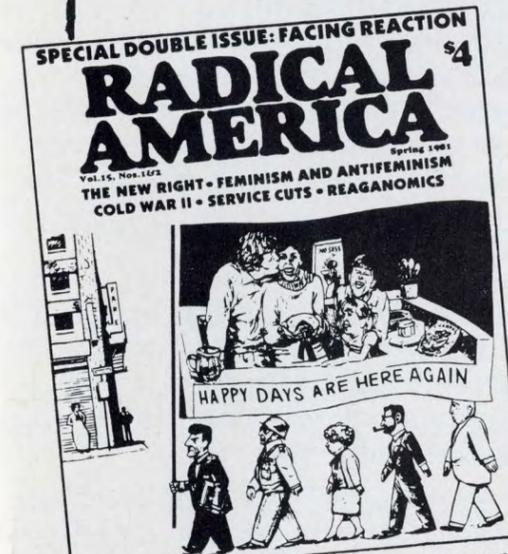
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