

FEBRUARY 1984 \$2.50 THE CULTURAL NEWSMAGAZINE

# FUSE

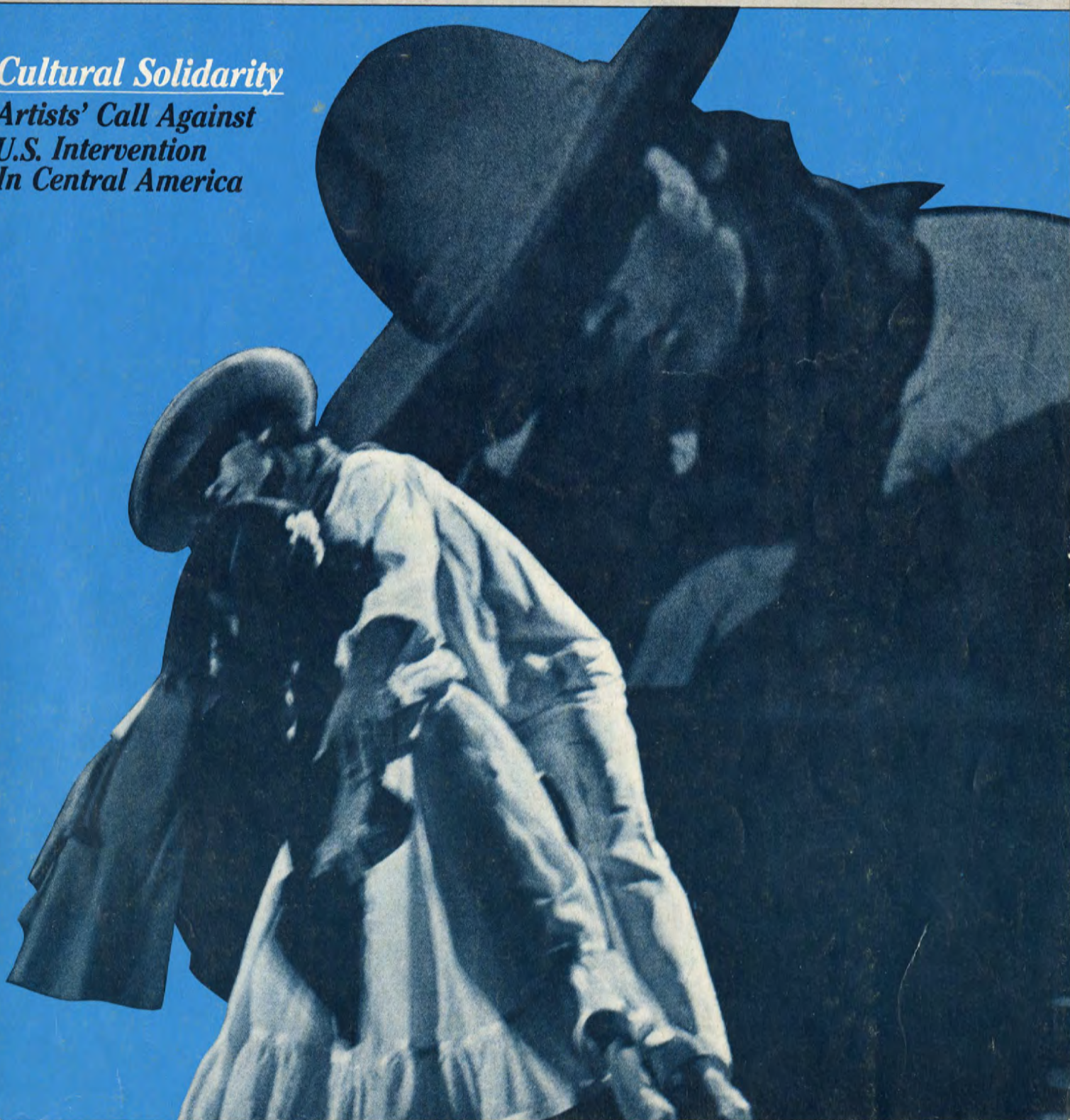
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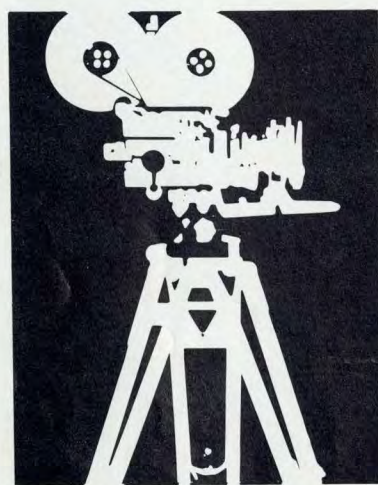
## Cultural Solidarity

*Artists' Call Against  
U.S. Intervention  
In Central America*





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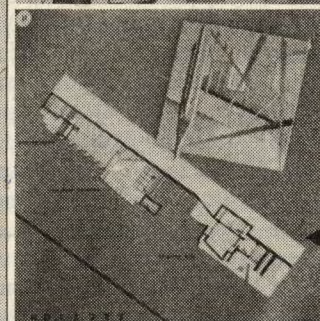
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COVER: The Nicaraguan theatre group *Grupo Macehualt* performing *Baile a Sandino*, a multi-media historical tribute to Augusto Cesar Sandino, who led Nicaragua's revolutionary movement against U.S. imperialism in the 30's. Photo by Adriana Angel, who also did the rear screen projection for the group.



## More Distinctions re: Greatness

I thought that Howard S. Davidson's letter in your Nov/Dec. issue contained some very ill-informed pieces of reasoning. Davidson criticized the movie *Gandhi*, your review of the same, and Gandhi himself in terms that struck me as overly suspicious, or overly fearful. I won't try to go through all the examples of this, but I will point out the one which I found most in error: the contention that the film *Gandhi* cultivates the "myth" of the "Great Man", and serves to "make people believe they are powerless". I would contend that, in contrast to this, the movie presents Gandhi the way he probably was — not as the Great Big Man, but as what you might call the Great Small Man (an entity which could just as easily be a Great Small Woman in societies where women aren't ignored before they've begun to speak).

If this strikes the reader as an appeal to the concept of "the little guy" or the "average Joe", let me state that it isn't. "The little guy" is a person who has been substantially disempowered, and who isn't at all comparable to Gandhi. Rather, the distinction between Great Big Man and Great Small Individual is that the former is motivated by self-interest, and becomes "great" through self-serving self-aggrandizement. The latter, even though he or she may draw a lot of attention, is a true servant of the common interest, a person who empowers the disempowered with every move and every conversation; a person who has so little personal power (as opposed to the tenuous and conditional influence of a person who people identify with) that any would-be jailer or assassin finds it easy to do away with him or her temporarily or permanently. The movie, I think, makes it quite clear that Gandhi was not a self-aggrandizer but a genuine egalitarian, a person distinguished not by some phoney "greatness" but by the possession of an unusual perspective. If anyone watching the movie was intimidated by Gandhi's disregard for

pain or privation, surely at the same time they realized that his basic way of treating people as equal beings was something anyone could do — and something almost no one *does* do. (Gandhi may, however, have been sexist; but nothing prevents the viewer from extending the essence of the idea to women as well.)

So what, then, set Gandhi off as "great"? Only that in the realm of his own personal excellence (a thing all of us have and one that makes us "individuals"), he had developed strategies for non-violent resistance that were truly something new. This doesn't suggest, as Davidson implies, that the rest of the Indian people are portrayed in the film as witless. All it means is that those Indians given to violence had strategies, while those given to non-violence did not — not until the strategies were brought into existence. The film accurately showed that a strategy, like a tool, a medical cure, or a work of art, can be the product of an individual, and that Gandhi merely gave "according to his abilities" (to use the words of Marx). Director Richard Attenborough, to his credit, drew the distinction between being truly great and merely being grandiose.

—Richard Summerbell, Toronto

## The Film and the Man

I WOULD LIKE TO REPLY TO A letter on the recently circulated movie *Gandhi* in your November/December issue.

It seems to me that, although many of Howard S. Davidson's criticisms are valid, Davidson has made a few errors. The scenes of masses of people do contribute to a sense of the helplessness of groups too large for personal interaction or responsibility and since India is a country with a large population and many problems, it is easy to interpret these scenes as tangible evidence of helplessness, political, economic, social or whatever. Again, Gandhi himself is not portrayed in the film as a whole human being struggling with difficulties common to all human beings and to which the viewer should be able to

relate, but in a sort of series of fragments of sainthood which trivialize the significance of his life. Gandhi's work clearly was his life, yet neither this film nor Davidson's letter acknowledge its controversial character, let alone its dramatically moving implications. Moreover, in his criticisms, Davidson fails to distinguish between the movie and the actual man, making his valid points seem to apply to both. For example, Gandhi was *not* a supporter of the upper classes and their power at the expense of the people. His refusal to accept the first victory won by his textile mill strike when he saw that it was an admission of defeat by the mill owners, not a recognition of the justice of the cause suggests, rather, that he was not opposed to anyone but to injustice itself, regardless of kind, level of interaction or by whom perpetrated. His magazine, *Harijan*, the Hindi word for "untouchable", was named in defiant defense of that most miserable group, considered up to that time lower than even the lowest class by Indian society. In the community he started with members of this group, he lived and worked, refusing to even recognize the designation of "untouchable". His promotion of the spinning wheel and other cottage industries was to make the masses of people aware of their power to gain control of their destiny and improve their condition.

As far as the Great Man theory is concerned, this concept has implications for Indians that are not widely accepted or understood in the West. So in dealing with the life of an Indian whose influence has been felt worldwide, it seems necessary to take note of the fact that a hero honoured as a great soul is not traditionally considered in India as a unique production of the times but as an example of the achievements all men are striving for and may reach through the efforts of many lifetimes. To people with this concept as part of their long cultural heritage, even if not overtly articulated, they are not, as Mr. Davidson avers, made weak because Gandhi is strong; rather, his example speaks to their strength.

Kathleen Yamada  
Little Current, Ontario  
FEBRUARY 1984

# Cultural Solidarity

DIONNE BRAND

Poet, Mikey Smith is stoned to death by right wing thugs in Jamaica.

Rickey Singh, editor of *Caribbean Contact* is expelled from Barbados for speaking out against the invasion of Grenada.

Detroit painter and poet, Michelle Gibbs is expelled from Grenada as an undesirable.

The PSYOPS unit of the American military throw leaflets from helicopters to imaginary Cubans in the hills of Grenada. They beam anti-communist propaganda at the population and rewrite history in the Caribbean. They write themselves a victory.

The thick-necked poetasters of the 82nd airborne scrawl their Mansonian doggerel on the walls of the Cuban embassy in St. Georges — 'eat shit commie faggot'.

The Americans drop armaments and military dog trainers on Barbados, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Jamaica.

The militarization of the Caribbean is taking place. Soon the arc of islands will take its place with the others, Chile, Guatemala and Honduras, in what the United States calls democratic states. The only people who will feel the cruelty of that hoax will be the poor — that is, the majority of the people in those territories.

A friend in Toronto, devastated by the invasion of Grenada, says to me, "now it is probably up to the poets and writers to explain what happened in Grenada". I answer, as poet Nikki Giovanni, "perhaps these are not poetic times".

Crouching in a hallway during the American war against Grenada, I do not feel like writing poetry. I feel ill and incapable. To try to describe any of it seems sacrilegious, seems wanting. I cannot understand why they do not feel ill also. Who is in the jet bomber which splays six thousand rounds per minute? Who takes aim at

the beach at Grand Anse? Who destroys this place? Cruelty happening before your eyes is not the same as the reflected-upon lines of a poem. So it is difficult, seeing everything fall so quickly and so brutally. Out there, you know that they only see this as another 'hot spot' in that dangerous volatile place called the third world. You know that they see it only in the language of the cold war. And because of that, it continues.



Collaborative mural, Managua, Nicaragua.

No one in North America comprehends bombs falling on their houses or their schools. No one comprehends dying in a messy pile somewhere. No one comprehends the kind of poverty and hardship which pervades all gestures. That kind of thing only happens in the third world. And so, people there must give reasons for wanting to eat and they better be damn good otherwise they're a commie plot. And then it is alright to call things 'intervention', 'rescue mission', 'restoration of democracy'. It is alright to be mopping up, to encounter 'pockets of resistance'. Because it is the cold war which is being fought, not the war against domination. And it is not happening in North America, so no one goes home to hear of dead sisters and lost

brothers. And what else can 'these people' hope for except to sell trinkets to kindly tourists. 'These people' must be rescued from their folly of self-determination.

This is not the stuff of poems is it?

Once after a poetry reading on Spadina a well-heeled poet told me that my poems were good but I should stay away from "politics". I've come to understand what people mean when they say "politics". "Politics" is when you have an opinion which is not theirs. Theirs is correct/right; yours is "politics". It's the loss of a very fine word (the best definition of which I've found to be: of persons; that which concerns the people).

On the fourth day of the war, at the American camp at the Ross Point Inn, talking to some of the marines, it was evident that they did not know where they were; they had no idea where Grenada was in the planet Earth. They thought that Grenadians spoke Spanish; they were not sure who they were fighting; they did not know why they were killing people. One marine wore a T-shirt — on the back, in reference to his company, was written "Fox and son — exterminating company". This, 38 years after the second world war and eight years after the Vietnam war. On each occasion questions of accountability and responsibility dogged the footsteps of soldiers — Germans in the first case and Americans in the second. Atrocities, trials. What will we charge these young men with? Travel automatons, they take orders from a mindless government which does not see the spectre of nuclear war in its escalating use of military force as foreign policy.

The war in Grenada did not only affect Grenada. Perhaps if it had happened ten years ago, it may not have raised the same issues as it has. For me, it tightened and highlighted the distances in the world. I remember the



feeling, in Grenada, back in March. When the American-backed Somocistas invaded Nicaragua, the solidarity of the Grenadian people with the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan people was palpable. The next day there was a massive demonstration in St. Georges. People chanted "if they touch Nicaragua, they touch Grenada". Well they have touched Grenada. More than that, they have taken it and Nicaragua seems to be next on the agenda.

Against the backdrop of nuclear war, no one can act as the U.S. has with impunity and everyone is responsible. The use of cold war language to describe what is patently a U.S. objective of recolonizing third world countries does not only suppress the legitimate struggles of poor and working people. It also creates a tension of its own, heightening the possibility of the ultimate nuclear confrontation. I do not want to die because the United Fruit Company wants to start business in the Caribbean or because Bechtel wants to increase its holdings in the middle East.

The danger which we face as a result of U.S. action in Grenada is that of a world power which believes its own propaganda. Either that, or it is so cynical as to pose people's challenges to inequality as manipulation by an evil empire.

Either way, we are in trouble. We are in even more trouble if we sit here and say that we do not know; we cannot tell; we are artists, not politicians; it does not touch us. It will soon.

Dionne Brand is a poet and writer living in Toronto. She returned from Grenada, where she had been working for C.U.S.O., shortly after the American invasion.

## Artists Call

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE cultural brigades which work in the northern provinces of Nicaragua — the war zone — may be difficult for

North Americans to understand. Just as it is difficult to directly understand why cultural workers are the focus of torture and repression in the unliberated countries of Latin America — Guatemalan feminist and art critic Alaide Foppa, disappeared two years ago; INALSE member, Armando Martinez, a rock musician, was tortured and imprisoned for the growing political consciousness of his music; Brazilian and Uruguayan artists have been jailed... But, it is essential for artists and cultural workers in North America to understand these things and to act in solidarity with the struggle of these people.

While there have been individual artists working in solidarity with the people's of Central America for years, the current efforts in the United States under the name of ARTISTS CALL Against U.S. Intervention in Central America, have been a sign of great encouragement to Central American cultural workers and the Central American people. As a member of the F.D.R. told ARTISTS CALL organizers, "We've been waiting for the artists; because, to us, anti-intervention is not a popular movement until the artists are involved."

In this issue of FUSE we have taken up the theme of ARTISTS CALL on both our cover and our editorial pages. We wish to support all artists here, in the U.S. and elsewhere, who have been organising in order to call

attention to an untenable political situation and to the ideological circumstances and questions from which the arts cannot be separated. The support which they offer to culture and self-determination in Central America is essential.

ARTISTS CALL has organised events and public showings over a period of a number of months, focusing around the dates of January 21 and 22nd, in commemoration of the 1932 massacre of 30,000 peasants in El Salvador. As part of this large show of support for the people of Central America, we are encouraged that it has generated such wide participation. JM

## Apologies

to Berenice Reynaud, whose name was misspelled in Volume 7, Number 3 (Fall 1983).

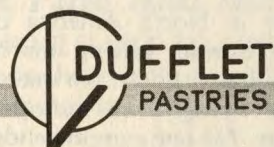
for having failed to include our introduction to "Art & Censorship", Volume 7, Number 3 (Fall 1983). The paper (written by Varda Burstyn) was commissioned for, and delivered at, the Annual General Meeting of the Association of National Non-Profit Artists' Centres (A.N.N.P.A.C.). It was printed in FUSE with the co-operation of A.N.N.P.A.C./Parallelogramme.

to Raymond Boyd, whose photocredit on page 160 in Volume 7, Number 4 (Nov/Dec 1983) was partially cut off on some copies of the magazine.

## FUSE Volunteers

FUSE can always use a little extra help in getting things together and out. If you have some spare time, a special skill or some good will to offer on a regular or irregular basis, give us a call.

We could use help particularly in some of the following areas: archiving, editorial assistance, errands, distribution, filing, fundraising, proofreading, production assistance, etc.



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## Forum on Funding Pruning the Art Garden

TORONTO — The evening of November 11, 1983 was the 'opening' of the provincial government's *Special Arts Forum* weekend, held at Queen's Park. The keynote speaker was Luke Ritner, Secretary General of the Arts Council of Great Britain (A.C.G.B.), renowned in England for his work with "Business" and the "Arts". He advised the artists and the arts administrators present that this evening was, "the first day of the next ten years..." of art in Ontario.

Following quickly upon this prophetic note, he listed, in that BBC-voice of dispassionate reason, the events of the past year in England from which I culled the following points:

- Abrupt defunding of the arts council by federal government.
- Decentralization of funding.
- Formation of 12 regional arts councils.
- the ACGB, endorsing art, but supporting art only where there was matched funding at all levels of government.
- No more touring of opera and ballet in England (centralizing pure art for the purists?)
- No money available for capital purchases.
- "Community Arts" struggling to establish and maintain relationship with the Arts Council vis à vis funding.
- Council assigning new money only to areas of 'priority'.
- Government emphasis on people improving that which they have (left from WWII?)

Meanwhile, having finished with this smoothly polished history of the betrayal of arts in England (there was no rough edge for the critics tooth to hang on), Ritner addressed the context wherein the art organization might locate itself for renewal. Arts, FEBRUARY 1984

here and in England, (he said) should look to and develop areas of corporate support — but always remembering corporations expect "...something in return...". Corporate decisions to sponsor are perceived in the same light as an expenditure on advertising, so corporations would likely go for "...safe, fashionable, and prestigious..." art. Box office, merchandising, and distribution...these are key words to invite corporate sponsorship.

John Greyson



Secretary General Ritner invited his audience to insanity with the effortless flow of allegorical images: "...We are at the cross-roads (he said) There will be pruning in the garden. (he said) Weak and diseased varieties should be pruned. (he said) We must maintain hardy stock." (he said)

The audience was incensed. The air stirred with grumblings.

The question and answer period was safely tucked away after speeches by John Hirsch, Artistic Director of Stratford (the Shakespearean Festival Theatre) and Dr. Walter Pitman, Executive Director of the Ontario Arts Council.

Dr. Pitman spoke passionately for the role of the artist in this high tech, new communications environment,

concluding that the artist's role in a society under fire, (wherein all competitive models are being questioned), would be that of seer. The arts/the artist would fulfill expanded roles in the comprehension of the new technological age.

John Hirsch spoke of the connection between the love of family, the "humanness" of the arts, and the absolute necessity to continue funding, to increase funding to artists, as they are the interpreters of human history, the critics of our times, the cutting edge that trims the dross, the chalice that contains the "humanness".

It was a rude evening in spite of the trappings of propriety. The 'forum' had been long and tedious with little consideration for the audience. The question and answer period came at about 10:45 p.m.

QUESTION: This comment and question is directed to Mr. Ritner of the ACGB. You spoke, sir, at great length about the broadening of the funding base by approaching and involving corporations. My question is: If I am a video artist and I wish to make a tape about apartheid in South Africa, do I contact Carling/O'Keefe beer company?

ANSWER (Mr. MacCauley): Those questions will be handled on Sunday morning by the corporations. Please save such a question until that time.

QUESTION: But sir, the question is directed to Mr. Ritner who has spoken in this area tonight.

INTERVENTION (Audience): Answer her question...

ANSWER (John Hirsch): I'll take the question if that is acceptable. It is the same question as that which revolves around the loss of arm's length funding. It would be a loss of freedom to lose arm's length funding. It would change the critical nature of the artist.

And so the questions came hot and furious from the audience. Most seemed provoked by an anger that was based in fears that the *Special Committee for the Arts* would use all material gathered as ammunition to justify decreased funding to many of the smaller arts organisations. Most answers came cool and deliberate, us-



ing rhetorical devices well to side-step the issues that were raised.

The report that will come out of this year of soundings and hearings is currently being prepared. So the question, for now, is: what will this report suggest?:

a) defund certain 'not safe', 'not prestigious' arts organisations and/or individuals.

b) maintain all present clients at present levels, but do not take on any new 'clients'.

c) take on only individual artists, defund all organisations (with the exception of prestigious, safe organisations).

d) gradually defund all arts organisations and artists until the provincial government (with the city government) can devote all its time and money to praising drunken, rampaging Argo fans and raising domed stadiums in the name of prime time. Amen.

ANSWER: all of the above.

Pat Wilson

## Assault Apology

TORONTO — The out-of-court settlement on the case launched by Margaret Dragu following her assault of October 17, 1980 represents a major victory and a time of celebration for many in the Toronto art community. The assault, which had staggering repercussions for Dragu both personally and professionally, exercised its presence on the community with sharp divisions of opinion throughout the three-year battle; divisions which attacked preconceptions of a supportive artistic community.

The event raised in our midst clear issues regarding assault that are gender specific. Her experiences precisely mirrored the experience of rape victims who find themselves accused of "causing" the attack. It was a shock to witness the crumbling of assumptions that the downtown Toronto art community was not party to such repressive victim-blaming. Response from the community grossly compounded the effects of the assault itself; Dragu concluded that, to reverse her victim status, she must act and so, launched a civil suit.

Throughout the Days of Discovery, her position as victim was frustratingly

entrenched by the legal process which dragged on and allowed the classic defence devices of intimidation and insult. (For example, the defence was provided with photographs, taken by a member of the audience during a prior Cabana Room show, with the intention of illustrating the prosecutor's dubious moral character.) That the admission of guilt and apology was procured through this legal process — Dragu's chosen means of action — is in itself a victory.

"An assault is an assault is an assault." That there was ever any question of this, because the assault took place in the context of a public art performance, is preposterous. That any consideration of the victim's mode of dress or action was even entertained is to perpetuate the mythology that victim's "invite" attack. That the assault could be viewed and/or defended as an "artistic statement" and its censure regarded as a breach of "freedom of expression" is an aberration of stunning bombast.

Margaret Dragu's work, as a burlesque, dance, theatre, film and performance artist, confronts its audience with issues of sexuality. This is a traditionally male domain, and the assault and its aftermath only strengthens our knowledge that when a woman steps into the sexual arena, she is "fair game".

The context of the assault lent special implication for performers. One criticism of Dragu which was voiced was that "as a performance artist" she should have dealt with the assault "better". This is not only evidence of startling lack of compassion and an endorsement of violence on the part of its proponents, but illustrates peculiar ideas regarding the role of an artist and her relationship to her audience. It was the theatre community which first came forward with public support. As one actor put it — "We will not be gladiators."

Elizabeth Chitty

Following is the text of the signed affidavit which was the settlement — a public apology:

I, Gordon Wojcickowski, assaulted Margaret Dragu on the evening of the 17th day of October, 1980. For the humiliation, depression and emo-

tional damage that occurred to her because of this assault, I am truly sorry and wish to apologize.

Dated at Toronto this 8th day of December 1983.

### The Facts:

ON THE 17TH DAY OF October, 1980, Gordon Wojcickowski (alias Gorgon) jumped onto the stage of the Cabana Room at the Spadina Hotel and assaulted Margaret Dragu while she was performing in a cabaret show. The performance satirized television evangelism and was directed by Robert Stewart. It featured five performers including Ms. Dragu who wore high-heeled boots and a leopard skin bikini under a mini-dress for her role as a lay preacher.

Wojcickowski approached Ms. Dragu from behind. She didn't detect his presence until he pulled down the pants of her bikini and touched the string of her tampon. Ms. Dragu, who had been holding a bible in one hand and her microphone in the other, dropped her bible and tried to bring her thighs together to prevent him from removing the tampon. It was pulled half-way out before the parties were separated. Ms. Dragu finished the rest of her performance which lasted 20 minutes but she was unable to speak afterwards. Two weeks later, she attempted to talk to Wojcickowski at the Horseshoe Tavern but Wojcickowski was unable to understand the humiliation and distress his actions had caused her. She subsequently suffered a physical collapse that lasted 4 months and a depression that continued for over a year. The assault shattered her self-confidence as a performer and a person.

She was obliged to cancel many work projects over the next year, notably her part in *Nightlites*, a video series for cable television, and postpone the theatre play *Unfit for Paradise* which was to have been directed by Jack Blum. In addition, she gave up doing live performances in Toronto's Queen Street galleries and performance spaces, which up to the time of her assault, had made up the bulk of Ms. Dragu's theatre work.

In March 1981, she performed at the Art Gallery of Ontario in *Her Majesty*, a performance work by Tom Dean. It was her first live appearance in Toronto

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DECEMBER 1983, downtown Toronto, Ontario. This man, arrested previously at the Litton plant demonstration in the fall, is being arrested again at the Santa Cruise parade. Reason: The terms of his bail included stipulation that he not appear at a peace demonstration again until his trial. Question: Is this a denial of basic human right?

since the assault in October 1980. Wojcickowski attempted to enter as a spectator but was turned away at the door. The AGO called in a security squad for the second night of *Her Majesty* but Wojcickowski didn't appear again. Shortly afterwards, Ms. Dragu decided to lay a civic suit of assault and battery against Wojcickowski.

### Dragu's Statement:

WHETHER IT OCCURS IN THE parking lot, at home, or on stage, an assault is an assault. If you are assaulted, call the Rape Crisis Centre. They are concerned with how you, the victim, feels. It may take several years to get over it, even longer. Depression, anxiety, fear, guilt, physical illness, nightmares and inability to eat or sleep are common afterwards.

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Try to talk about it to your friends, family and lovers. You need their support. Try to stop feeling guilty — try to get angry instead. It is not your fault that you were assaulted. You do not deserve violence because of what you were wearing or because of your gender, or sexual preferences. If you froze during the assault and were unable to fight your attacker, you are not alone. That was my reaction, too. Taking actions that help you regain some control will help you get over the guilt of not defending yourself. For example, two legal options are pressing criminal charges against your attacker or suing him through civil laws instead of criminal laws. Taking self-defence classes can make you feel part of the human race again.

I would like to thank Michael Hartrick, my lawyer; The Ladies Auxiliary,

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the feminist community, the theatre community, Theatre Passe Muraille and all those who worked and contributed to the benefit held March 13, 1982 for my legal expenses. I would also like to give special thanks to my friends who encouraged me to keep on working and living.

## Poetry of Persistence

...  
Many years from now  
this surf, this night  
of american war ships in barbados  
...  
this contra of a night  
...

TORONTO — On the evening of Thursday November 10th a group of about thirty people had gathered in the lounge of the Graduate Student Association of O.I.S.E.\* to hear Dionne Brand read her poetry. Many of them had known her as a poet before, but now their interest was not only in the poetry but in the recent situation in Grenada. Dionne has just returned from that shell-shocked world where she had watched the world's wealthiest and most militarily-equipped nation smash to pieces the work and hopes of a 133 square mile island and its population of 110,000. A people who had dared to get out from under imperialist control and to reorganise their lives on some equitable basis.

Dionne had been living in Grenada for the past year, not as a tourist, but as a worker for C.U.S.O. In fact, she could never have been a tourist in the Caribbean as she had grown up in Trinidad. The poverty, the hunger, the oppressive social relations, the forced maintenance of underdevelopment — in short, all the problems that Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement were struggling against — were known to her. The poetry which she read, still largely unpublished and written over the last months, built a context for the communication of her experience in Grenada, since it communicated the context itself.

The poem "Amelia", on her grandmother, is filled with the knowledge of struggle — a child conspirator, she

\*Ontario Institute for Studies in Education



understood the reality of her grandmother's world; "I know that lying there in that bed/in that room/smelling of wet coconut fibres/and children's urine/bundled up in a mound...you wanted to escape". In this reality there was only room for change, for improvement.

And at the base of this need for a revolutionary change there is the world of shared experience — of people and places, of history. Here strangers know each other, "right away he knew me"... "this charm of ours, this familial gesture". There were little towns visited and revisited "full of Jean Rhyses", slums with pigs and garbage and potbellied children, all waiting for a change. And change seems held in suspension in the Caribbean sky, the "persistent sky" which in its oranges and purple could be a "vengeful motherfucker of a sky", holding "massive life and massive death".

Linked to Grenada and the Caribbean with chains of oppression and resistance there are other countries — those of Central America. El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras... private estates of landowning gunmen who put their guns at the service of the United States and fatten from the leavings at their master's table.

And there is Nicaragua. The once-estate of Anastasio Somoza, now under a U.S.-sponsored siege. Nicaragua is determined to keep out the old ruling class and its military beneficiaries — now experts at international gangsterism. In the poem "Mount Panby Beach", Dionne outlines this life of a country under

constant siege — forced to direct its scarce resources towards defence. The people of Nicaragua are not really gunhappy. They would rather be doing literacy work, healthcare programs or cultivating people's art. But they won't be allowed to do this. Instead, "this contra of a night/spilled criminals and machismo/on our mountains/fouling the air again/eagle insignied somocistas/bared talons on the mountains of Matagalpa...".

This 'night of the contras' looms all over the Caribbean as the Prime Ministers Seaga of Jamaica, Eugenia Charles of Dominica, and Tom Adams of Barbados invite the U.S. not only to crush Grenada but also to put on a show of strength for the Caribbean left, lest Grenada fuel their aspirations.

And these U.S. allies are rewarded for their 'internal initiatives' as well — such as the open-fires on the Walter Rodneys of their countries. "What a privilege to hold a scotch/simpering for the dollar bill/from the C.B.I. and USAID", men "who knew no more than the route to Miami."

...And of the people? how do they live? what can they hope for?... "in a place with so much swamp/no rice/and everybody has been to prison and we must write on toilet paper/or eat it or hush".

And finally, back in Canada... where Dionne must encounter (and counter) the myths and lies which are everywhere, about the popular struggles in the third world and about the 'freedom' available to us in this liberal democratic society...for the referees

of world socialism, who sit and distribute points to the 'correct' type of socialism in the third world:

stay at home  
where you are free to be a consumer  
where you are free to walk the street  
where you are free to demonstrate  
where newspapers print what they like  
even if they are lies  
you will not know  
truth is free to be fiction  
counting is not an exact science  
...

We are not yet sure of what is to become of Grenada. For the present, it seems that much has been destroyed. With Bishop dead, many imprisoned, U.S. forces everywhere, people intimidated, we cannot know what the pre-invasion differences were. The spectre of communism and the Soviet Union have been raised again and plugged into the cold war channel which has all of North America in its mind-numbing grip. When the U.S. provides the bulk of information and when, as Dionne has put it, they assign to every Grenadian who resisted or died in the invasion, an honorary Cuban citizenship, it seems that the only proof of 'innocence' and defense is in a defenseless death — "with the silence of our bodies".

The invasion of Grenada is a mirror and a warning for all of the third world countries which get too big for the boots of economic slavery. Dionne's poem on the death of Walter Rodney provides us with the most appropriate statement on the danger and anger present in such a struggle:

and never, never for walter  
no words for walter, no forgiveness  
every bit of silence is full of walter

These poems of Dionne's gave names and sharpness to our thoughts as we read the newspapers or marched in front of the U.S. embassy, but too few people heard what should have been shared by many. For those interested, however, the reading was video-taped and the tape can be tracked down by contacting V/tape for distribution information (V/tape, P.O. Box 171, 55 McCaul St., Toronto, Canada M5T 2W7; Tel: (416) 595-9750).

Himani Banerji  
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## Music Notes Iconolatry in Motion (Part I)

LISA STEELE

IF YOU HAVE HAD EVEN THE most minimal contact with North American mass media within the last six months, you will know at least some of 'the facts' about music video (a.k.a. rock video).

- how much Michael Jackson's *Thriller* cost to produce (\$1.1 million for 14 minutes);

- how Music Television — MTV — was begun (with the most extensive pre-broadcast survey of potential viewers ever undertaken);

- that many major Hollywood directors have already produced or are going to produce 'videos' (Bob Rafelson — *Five Easy Pieces* — did Lionel Richie's *All Night Long*; Tobe Hooper — *Poltergeist* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* — did Billy Idol's *Dancin' With Myself*);

- that music video is money in the bank to the music industry (after a 10.2% plunge in revenues in 1978, the industry has begun to climb again; this year should show another 5% gain in overall revenues).

You came to 'know' this, of course, in the same way in which you recently came to 'know' about Cabbagepatch dolls or, in 1980, came to 'know' about Dallas — through exposure to the incessant and pervasive channels of banality transmission reserved for those topics which the mass media categorizes as "popular culture". You are familiar with the list: the hoola hoop, Rubick's Cube, Twigg, jogging, pet rocks, Farah Fawcett, Princess Di, aerobics, disco, Tom Selleck, health foods, punk and finally — music video.

Now when these topics are hot, space allotted for coverage proliferates quicker than *E. coli* in a petri dish. You wake up one morning and gosh everyone is talking about the same

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thing. Is this the Global Village when the New York Times and the National Inquirer are printing the same story? I sincerely hope not, but it's hard to examine music video without entering the Land of Trend.

But in this instance I've chosen to sidestep the phenomenology and concentrate on the content. To many people, this is a contradiction in terms; they maintain that there is no content in music video, that it is "eye candy", background or ambient visual information; that it is strictly



Sheena Easton's *Telefone* almost seems progressive, at least compared to the competition.

promotional and as such cannot be subjected to a content analysis as could a film or a television show. I disagree. I figure that somebody must be saying something in these hours of broadcast — MTV is on 24 hours a day in many parts of the U.S. and Canada. In Toronto, even without MTV, there are upwards of 5 hours of music video available on weekdays and an all-night show on Saturdays. That's a lot of hours.

When I first undertook this content analysis I decided to concentrate on the image of women present in music video. But even with a somewhat nar-

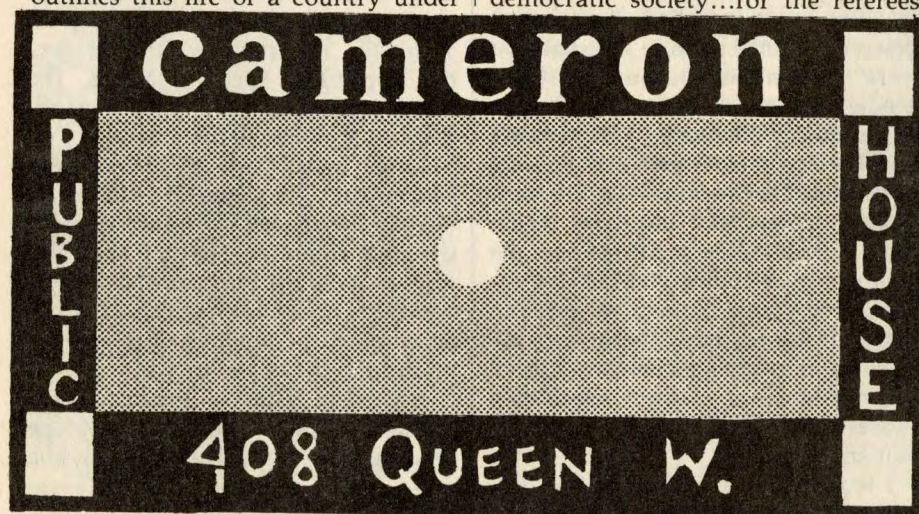
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rower focus, the content of the tapes still eluded analysis. So I developed another method: I conducted a random survey. By this, I do not mean that I watched an hour and then made notes on the pieces which stuck with me. Instead, over a period of three weeks, I viewed music tapes for short periods of time — usually 20 minute stretches — and wrote comments on each tape as I viewed it. I did this to avoid a "best/worst of" type of list; and also to ensure that I wouldn't be dozing during Anne Murray's *A Little Good News* or Helix' *Heavy Metal Love*, two examples of the many tapes I would not have gone out of my way to see. Based on these written comments for over 80 individual music tapes, I then defined 9 categories for my analysis. They are:

- 1) recession imagery
- 2) music is revolution
- 3) domestic relations
- 4) power of women
- 5) post-apocalypse imagery
- 6) older women
- 7) surveillance
- 8) no women
- 9) women as props

These categories are, of course, just a device to organize what is basically personal opinion because I found that at first viewing, many of these tapes could mean anything. They could be progressive, they could be reactionary; today they're trendy, tomorrow they're dated; they're state of the art, they're d.o.a. But most of all they're coded. Deeply coded. They sit, like bloated little sponges, having

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soaked up any and all visual icons in their immediate vicinity, and given the pervasive teleculture, that's a big tidepool indeed. Squeeze these mini-movies and most will ooze television, popular magazines, Harlequin novels, black magic and quack psychology, among other things. And most are not so much raw as they are half-baked.

In this issue, I will examine the first of 4 of the 9 categories. The second part of this survey will be printed in the next issue of FUSE.

### Recession Imagery

I classified tapes into this category if the imagery presented at all referred to contemporary economic circumstances: i.e., unemployment and underemployment; widening economic class differences; urban decay and poverty. Some of the 16 tapes which I placed into this category are less charitable in their illustration of the effects of bad economic times on humans. Duran Duran's *Hungry Like A Wolf* makes anything John Waters every produced look like Charlie Brown's Christmas in comparison. This is bad taste. In *Hungry Like A Wolf*, third world poverty is a backdrop for 'primitive', 'instinctual' behaviour (that's sex, of course). Crowds of hungry children abound (the effects of sex); a 'beautiful black woman' becomes a killer cat (the cause of sex); and the lead singer, a white man, makes his way through this 'jungle' relatively unscathed, sustaining only a scratch on the cheek during a tumble with the cat/woman — a small price for such a good time no doubt.

All the while, the lyrics — "In touch with the ground...I'm on the hunt...I'm after you...and I'm hungry like a wolf" — trot on, erasing any touch of ambiguity. The message is trite but clear: It's better in the Bahamas...or the Phillippines...or Sri Lanka...or any other piece of plunderable paradise real estate. To me, it is a disquieting thought to imagine all those young people bobbing to this particular visual beat this past fall as U.S. Marines landed on the beaches of Grenada.

Other tapes, though less extreme, show a similar self-satisfaction with current economic times. Culture Club's *Church of the Poisoned Mind*

winds up with Boy George and the gang commandeering a jumbo jet to "get away from it all" — in this case they're fleeing a group of pushy Japanese tourists armed with (do I need to tell you) cameras. And the Eurythmics, an androgynous duo in black suits, go into a yoga trance in front of a wall of gold records while chanting "...some people want to use you, some people want to be used by you...some just want to abuse, some want to be abused by you". Oh the problems of the very, very shallow.

Joe Jackson takes another approach to illustrate that this is after all 'the best of all possible worlds'. His tape,



Joe Jackson revives turn-of-the-century class divisions in his *Into the Night*.

*Into the Night*, is a succinct little narrative featuring two women, a society dame getting ready to go out and her maid. After the woman leaves, the maid enters to clean up her room and in the process gets one of her boss's dresses from the closet, puts it on and dances around, entering Dreamland where the boss's gentleman friend waltzes her around the dancefloor. In the end, the 'natural' order is restored: the society dame and her boyfriend return; the maid resumes her duties. Jackson, not unexpectedly, has written himself into the economic order somewhere near the upper end: in the beginning of the tape the maid had been tidying up his apartment. The only mild surprise in this pillar to the status quo is the rigid stratification of the women's costumes: the society dame is so done up that she could only be from 'old money', having, as she obviously flaunts, not worked a day in her life; while the maid, in white cap and apron, is right out of *Upstairs, Downstairs* — Born to

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Serve.\* Rebellion is not on Joe Jackson's agenda.

Not so for Donna Summer. *She Works Hard For Her Money* manages to provide an almost complete context for what it means to be a working woman today. It is, essentially, a visualization of the feminist anthem *Bread and Roses*. There are women from almost every female-ghetto job represented: secretaries, garment workers, waitresses, laundresses, exotic dancers, with a few 'non-traditional' types like construction workers, thrown in to up-date the picture. But the lived conditions of working women, working mothers, mother-led families are also present: housework, children crying, low pay and exhaustion. But, of course, this is Donna Summer, the disco queen. So at the end of the tape they're up and dancing as the women take to the streets, high-stepping and marching to what have become increasingly militant lyrics, "she works hard for her money, so you better treat her right". And here the tape almost begins to speak to the need of the unionization of women workers. I'm not saying that they're chanting "organize... organize" or anything like that, but it does start to look like International Women's Day. And in spite of the overwhelmingly female presence of this tape, it is not really a surprise when, in the last few seconds, a young black waiter joins the women's demo. Service, after all, is service; and underemployment 'respects' racial as well as gender lines.

Within a narrower frame, Pat Benetar's *Love Is A Battlefield* presents the economic realities of women — specifically younger women. This tape opens with a domestic argument between a girl and her parents. She leaves home and travels somewhere by bus, ending up in a grungy bar as one of a group of 'bar girls', all dressed in tattered, New Wave outfits. Telescoped into quick-cut shots, the young women revolt as a group, repelling a sleazy, would-be pimp, physically mowing him down in their choreographed exit from their particular "battlefield" which is the sex-for-sale trade. Once outside, their aggression dissolves and they truly 'act their age', embracing, saying good bye, going their separate ways; they

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could be any group of high-school girls after class. And in spite of its unremarkable tune, this tape holds a sense of what it is to be a young woman and also be independent today: having cut family ties, the traditional 'protection' — and prison — offered to girls, and also rejected a traditional occupation (that of a prostitute), the young women in this tape face a desolated post-urban landscape of crumbling roads and freeways — no jobs, no future and "no promises", as the lyrics say. It's a harsh and unromantic vision of the ties that bind; a reminder that for women, emotional bonds are frequently economic as well.

### Music as Revolution

In this category I included 10 tapes which seemed to me to indicate a belief that music and/or dancing can be in and of themselves political acts. Some are quite blunt. Def Leppard's *Rock of Ages* is a heavy metal anthem with lyrics that go "I want rock and roll" over and over while one of the band members acts the role of Lancelot, trying to extract a huge sword from a rock. There's a chorus of monks, a woman manacled to a tree and a generally 'ruined' background. Finally, the woman's wrist irons drop away — quite miraculously — during a guitar solo. Six-string salvation, I guess. And in Billy Idol's *White Wedding*, a huge crowd of dancers 'salute' as he sings "it's a nice day to start again". These two examples hardly seem excessive when viewed in terms of the mass hysteria which rock music has generated in audiences over the years, but they're specific nonetheless. The former no doubt reflects the tendency in this type of music to both celebrate and dominate physicality — the human body in particular — at once. They don't call it Heavy Metal for nothing. And what better vessel to contain this double whammy within than the good old female form. The latter, Billy Idol, is just stylish cynicism; a 'fuck you. You don't control me — I control you' aimed at the audience. It's of course an impotent gesture considering the precarious position of most musicians — no audience, no go.

The other tapes I included in this category all refer to the revolutionary

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The Parachute Club's *Rise Up* has a celebratory quality without cynicism

potential of music by locating it within a social context — usually a party or on the street — where races, genders and ages intermix, participate and, most importantly, celebrate each other's presence. Some lyrics speak more directly to issues — Donna Summer's pointedly pro-women workers' demonstration and The Parachute Club's *Rise Up*, which says, "We want power...we want heartbeat...we want freedom for living in peace", as a multi-ethnic street parade dances in time. Others are just parties — Lionel Ritchie's *All Night Long* ("We're going to party...carumba...fiesta...forever...") and Gladys Knight and the Pips' *Save the Overtime For Me*. Both feature lots of fancy choreography, breakdancing, children and a mixture of races — Ritchie's within a highly stylized rooftop set, Knight's on a realistic-looking city street. And one — Big Twist and the Mellow Fellows' *300 Pounds of Wonderful Joy* — sees a more-than-slightly overweight group of blues musicians crash a staid country club tea party and boogie it up with the elderly women there.

In isolation, these tapes might appear to err on the side of naivety, but within the context for which they were produced — MTV and video clubs — surrounded as they are by banal performance tapes and overwrought, over-edited little narratives which compress a lifetime of disconnected events and opinions into a

form no thicker than a communion wafer and no longer than 4 minutes, these Music-as-Coalition-Politics tapes are a welcome relief. Not unexpectedly, these kinds of tapes are being produced primarily by women and/or blacks.

### Domestic Relations

I included tapes in this category — 11 — if they contained direct references to some form of domestic relationships (lover to lover, parent/child, husband/wife). Two of these — *White Wedding* by Billy Idol and *Wrapped Around Your Finger* by The Police — quite definitively reject these sorts of relationships. *White Wedding* opens with the shattering of a church window, followed by a bride cavoring in a kitchen which gradually self-destructs and ends with the bride throwing herself off a cliff. All of this is supposed to lead us, I guess, to the opinion that social conventions such as marriage and domestic routines aren't worth shit and should be smashed. But when you add the lyrics — "there's nothing safe in this world...there's nothing pure in this world..." and the previously mentioned scene which features a crowd of dancers saluting the lead singer, a slightly different picture emerges. Now the male point of view presented in this tape seems more defensive and less confident. Maybe the guy's got a Samson complex. Seems to need to

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have his virility and male power worshipped. Anyway, the whole tape is so cracked, I might as well add my two cents worth: seems a typical case of womb envy to me.

The Police, on the other hand, don't beat around the bush. This tape has only one image: Sting, the lead singer, singing in the middle of a spiral of lighted candles. In the beginning the lyrics refer to a woman who wants to get married. "I'll be wrapped around your finger", he sings; at times the candles are shot to look like prison bars. Towards the end of the tape he's turned the tables. "You'll be wrapped around my finger", he sings, and promptly knocks the whole spiral down like a house of cards, which seems an intensely aggressive act in response to the threat of marriage. Whatever happened to Dear John letters.

A number of tapes take place within domestic settings, such as the country-western group The Statler Brothers' *Guilty*, the funk/soul group Klick's *Can't Stop* and the Stray Cats' *I Won't Stand In Your Way*. But none of them use the settings as anything more than that; the quality of the relationships which occur within 'the four walls' never surfaces. Unlike the Donna Summer and Pat Benatar tapes already mentioned, the transit from the private to the public never occurs. Both Summer and Benatar see domestic relationships as operative forces which must be included before any political actions are going to happen. In *She Works Hard For Her Money*, women recognize the conditions of their work and see this to include their domestic labour; in *Love Is A Battlefield*, young women see the conditions of their family life as forming the basis for their socialized behaviour in the sphere outside the family. The recognition of this personal/political integration makes both of these tapes more truly radical than any of the others which I saw, including *London Calling* (The Clash), *Undercover of the Night* (The Rolling Stones) and *Synchronicity 2* (The Police), all of which strive for that 'political look', using after-the-holocaust imagery, chic Big Brother references and tough, informed 'modern' lyrics, but fail because, quite simply, they're heartless.

## Power of Women

I included 27 tapes within this category but the large number is misleading because I included *any* tapes with implicit or explicit references to women's power and over half — 14 — directly refer to a fear of this power. In fact only 3, the previously mentioned Donna Summer and Pat Benatar tapes as well as The Parachute Club's *Rise Up*, can be viewed as manifesting Sisterhood is Powerful; that is, they explicitly celebrate women taking power — not individual women being powerful, but women as a group acting together.

Not surprisingly, the tapes which present a fear of women are all produced by men. Within heavy metal it seems almost a requirement to abuse the image of women if not real women at times. But all this domination seems well-rooted in general fear of women and a specific fear of female sexuality. The need to produce images of this classically ambivalent fear/attraction is present in Helix' *Heavy Metal Love*. Here a woman body builder flexes up while another dances, clad in skimpy s/m gear — chains, black leather, the works. In the background the all-male band gyrates. As the tape goes on, the body builder stations herself over the reclining figure of a very pallid man — he's either dead or doing a Snow White. Her body is now smoking. As she continues to display her powerful muscles, straddling his supine and apparently helpless body like a latter day Colossus of Rhodes, the man awakens with a start. The last shot in the tape is the man's terrified face. (Gee, what's he so scared of...being sucked up into her powerful you-know-what, I guess.) Of course, all the while the s/m woman is still there, covered in chains, an image which almost neutralizes the strength of the body builder by re-establishing the possibility of control for the (male) viewer.

*Mean Streak* by heavy metal group Y & T takes a more direct approach. This tape opens with a woman's legs occupying the periphery of the screen. She's standing, legs far apart. The band is stationed between her legs, downstage. Big woman; little men. Cut to the woman's face; she opens her mouth in a cross between a scream

and a smile and out comes a huge, long, snake-like tongue, pink and forked, which wraps around the neck of the lead guitarist's instrument. The last shot is of a normal young woman's face, smiling. There's little ambivalence here: women are schizophrenic; they look normal but act like witches and will 'steal the power of men' whenever they damn well please.

One interesting development on this heavy metal preoccupation with 'strong women = trouble' motif is offered by the Headpins' *Just One More Time*. Here the lead singer is an energetic, tough, young 'chick', complete with tight jeans, high heeled boots and a long blond perm. She's recently been dumped by her boyfriend and hell hath no fury, as they say. Singing, "I need to feel your arms around me just one more time", she demolishes her ex's car while he's trying to neck with a new girl. The unusual aspect of this tape is the clear depiction of class distinctions. The ex and his new girl 'wear' their status, he in a dinner jacket, she in a fur, they drive a white sports car. In contrast, the singer's display of passion exudes, not conspicuous consumption, but rather her undoubted ability to open a beer bottle with her teeth. She's crude but effective — at one point literally pushing the couple out of the frame through the use of a split-screen special effect. The reactionary aspects of this tape are evident, but it seems understandable, located as it is within the Realm of the Crucified Female that is heavy metal.

But back to fear. In Dr. Hook's *Baby Makes Her Blue Jeans Talk*, the power of female sexuality is raised to the level of natural disaster. Here a woman walks down the street in tight jeans and creates, literally, a tidal wave of 'admiration'. So overwhelming is the response to this woman's ass that life around her is disrupted. She, of course, has in some way solicited this reaction (just asking for it, or so the argument goes). Why else would she be so at ease at the end of the tape as she leads a huge group of male 'admirers' into a bar? This tape is more realistic in its street setting and less symbolic than the previously mentioned heavy metal examples. It also conflates issues which I presume exist

within many men's lives: that is, the response which is acceptable when consuming pornography or attending strip shows becomes confused with the possibility of response to perceived sexual stimulus in less structured settings, i.e., on the street. The disturbing part about this tape is that it presents as normal an exaggerated response to a woman's body which would seem more appropriate within a strip bar, where at least the woman performer would have the protection offered by the setting (the other performers, bouncers, managers, etc.). Women alone on the street seldom, if ever, 'solicit' the kind of attention which occurs within this tape, unless they are truly 'soliciting' and that's another story altogether.

But, lest I forget, even being in a public setting offers no guarantee of safety for a woman — a fact very nastily illustrated by British electrobeat group Trio in their tape *Da Da Da*. Set in an English pub, this tape shows a cross-section of drinkers, young and old, skin heads and labourers. One male customer slaps the waitress on the bum; she gives him the finger; he retaliates by throwing a knife; it hits her in the back; blood gushes from her mouth (this is shown via a television set in the pub); and, one can only presume, she dies from her wound. The tape ends with all the pub goers joining in on a primitive type of polka, oblivious to the previous violence. If this tape's intention was to show how 'insensitive' and boorish the average pub scene is, it did so only at the expense of women in general. Its message to women is deadly serious: don't talk back; it's dangerous to your health and safety.

I included *Da Da Da* in the section on the 'Power of Women' because any images of women as victims are produced out of a fear of female power — sexual, social and political. Given the continued presence of violent imagery within pornography and advertising, it's not really a surprise that some dippy electrobeat group makes a tape which normalizes the conditions under which women workers are murdered. But it is surprising when Michael Jackson "...soul's youngest past master" as Time magazine called him, repackages the woman-as-victim theme as a sanitized *Night of the*



NO-NAME VIDEO? CTA Video Distributors (Toronto) have just opened the first home video 'supermarket' in North America.

*Living Dead* for the very impressive pre-teen set.

This is precisely the effect of Jackson's megabuck project, *Thriller*. I won't belabour the content of *Thriller*; you can buy it for \$39.95 or see it on television almost any night of the week. The plot is simple: a boy and girl in a car (Jackson and unnamed female); boy changes to a werewolf, attacks girl, who assumes the traditional about-to-be-raped pose; cut to movie theatre, boy and girl (again Jackson and unnamed female) watch a horror movie, leave theatre, boy joins forces with the living dead (unnamed collection of dripping faces and stumps), all chase girl who enters deserted apartment; tape ends with the legions of undead, lead by Monster Mike, breaking into the apartment. Unnamed female's fate left to the well-primed imagination.

Personally I regret having seen this tape more than any of the others which I saw. I mean, I really liked Michael Jackson. But seeing *Thriller*, I can only wonder what North America's foremost androgyne has to add to the annals of pubescent sexuality. Give me *Beauty and the Beast* any day. At least there the young woman has some chance for exerting power within the strictures of hetero-

sexuality. *Thriller's* message to young women is very reactionary: alone you're vulnerable, open to attack; your only protection is with a man (the lyrics say "I'll save you from the terror of the screen"). Sexual arousal emanates from terror ("I'll thrill you more than any ghoul can...") for the young woman in this tape — a classic argument to keep women passive within sex. Broken away from the ever-ebullient I-gotta-dance style of production, this tape bears as negative a message as the Rolling Stones' song *Under My Thumb* ever did.

The only remotely positive counter to *Thriller* comes, without surprise, from a woman performer — Sheena Easton's tape of her song *Telephone*. The lyrics are fairly standard 'girl waiting for guy to call' but the images quite consciously invert the myths of the monster movies which Jackson has so lovingly reproduced. In *Telephone*, Easton is done up in classic romantic gear — long dress, flowing ruffles, etc. And one by one, she confronts Dracula, Frankenstein, King Kong and a host of other creeps, dispensing with them not through strength necessarily, but rather through her own self-centered concentration (she is, after all, waiting for a call). In the end, she reclines in King Kong's huge paw, and rather than writhing around helplessly like Fay Wray, she sings. It's a triumph of sorts as she rises above the cemetery — and all the myths which have been used to terrorize women throughout history. Only in contrast with such a reactionary tape as *Thriller* does this tape assume any radical context, because she really is nothing more than a typical 'tough cookie'. But it's not a bad visual metaphor of what it must take to be a woman and survive within the phallogocentric world of rock music today.

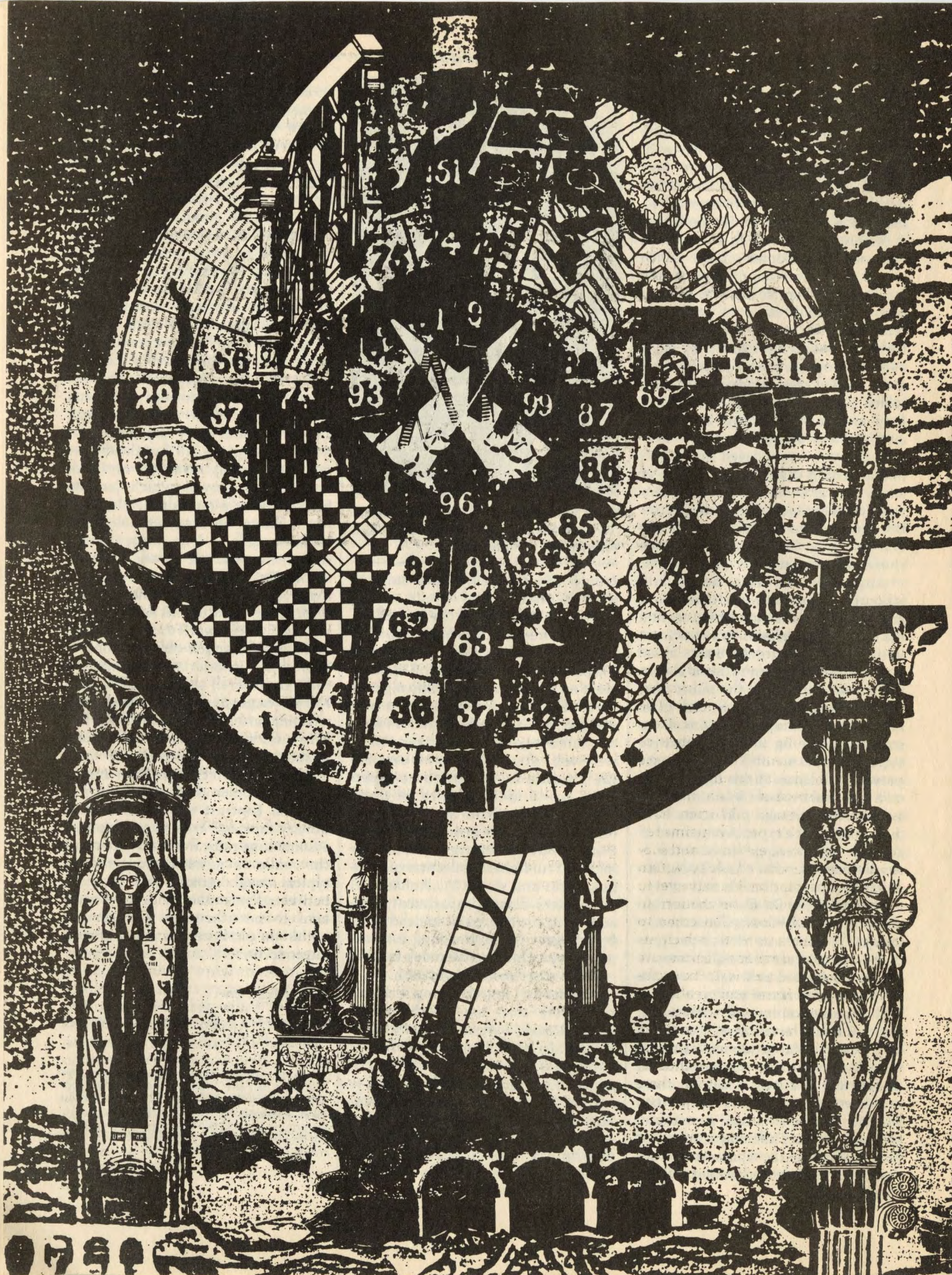
End of part one.

(This survey will continue in the next issue of FUSE)

\* I am, of course, ignoring for the moment the obvious 'erotic' denotations of these costumes which have been with us at least since *Fanny Hill*. Jackson's tape just offers a romanticized version of this very durable scenario — the cold-rich-bitch versus the innocent-but-about-to-become-hot-young-wench.

—Lisa Steele





# SHAKING THE FOUNDATIONS

FEMINIST ANALYSIS  
IN THE WORLD OF ARCHITECTURE

PAULINE FOWLER

THE MEETING OF FEMINISM AND architecture can be viewed as part of a wider collision between feminism and patriarchal culture, although the development of feminist analysis in the realm of architecture lags far behind other cultural disciplines. The Women's Movement has called attention to the political significance of culture and pointed out that women's absence from the dominant modes of creative expression is an integral aspect of oppression. Women have been excluded from "legitimate" creative traditions, exploited and subjected to patriarchal ideology within formal representation. We have yet to formulate a feminist opposition to sexism in architecture, and come to terms with the extent to which its traditional or dominant forms are inextricably associated with the exclusion of women from their creation.

I have called myself a feminist longer than I have called myself an architect. The two perspectives did not seem to touch each other; indeed, it seemed for a long time that there was no need for them to intersect. More recently, though, I've found myself realizing that some synthesis is absolutely necessary if I wish to continue the practice of architecture in a

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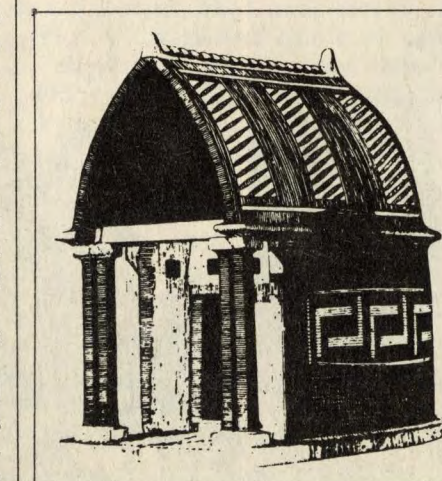
state other than a kind of schizophrenic madness. The problem of reconciliation of these perspectives seemed to focus itself around the status attached to the concept of "public and private", a concept which is integral to current architectural practice and one which has been the subject of investigation by feminist theorists. And so, the application of a feminist analysis of the hierarchical value and power systems which are

attached to the public and private spheres has formed the beginning of my critique of architectural theory. In order to lay the foundation for the suggestions and conclusions at the end of this article, it's necessary to investigate some of the concepts of classical Greek civilization, as these are the source of Western civilization as it is represented in the writings of mainstream architectural theorists, to the present day.

## Divide and Rule

In her book, *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt, a political philosopher, defines the distinction between the public and private as analogous to the political realm, or *polis*, and the household of Aristotle's Greece. For her, "public" is essentially synonymous with "political" and has remained largely distinct from the "private" realm, the household. The *polis* in the ancient public realm was the locus of value, since it kept the Greek separate from the barbarian and allowed him to escape from the everyday necessity of the household. The *polis* was characterized by an artificially-created equality among male citizens. The activity which occurs in a public realm made up of

Aspidal temple — "the first rationalized temple" opposite: Entry by S. Spiegel in "Ideas Competition" sponsored by W.A.L.



FUSE





one's peers is what Arendt calls "action". It is that activity which goes on directly between men<sup>1</sup> without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to plurality, and consists of speaking and fighting. It was only in the *polis* that "full humanity" could be achieved; thus anyone whose presence was barred from the *polis* was considered less than fully human. The household, in contrast, was ruled by the necessity of life processes — eating, sleeping, cooking, child rearing — and the women, children and slaves who spent most of their time there were governed by the master. Arendt calls the activities which predominate in the domestic realm "labour", and this term corresponds to the biological processes of the human body and its products — food, clothing, etc. — which are consumed even as they are created. The household was seen as a necessary prerequisite to citizenship in the *polis*, but it was considered strictly a means to that higher end.

Arendt also designates a third activity fundamental to the human condition — "work". She uses this term to describe the making of an artificial world of "things" which are distinctly different from natural surroundings and which outlast the immediate life cycle in which they are

made. She considers tools, art, poetry and architecture to be the products of "work" and as such, that they create a durable world which is the setting for action. Thus *labour* and the space where it occurs are inherently processual, private, and impermanent; *work*, which creates the necessary setting for full human action, is defined as static, public and permanent.

These philosophical concepts of Arendt's form the basis for mainstream architectural theory. The theoretical work of Kenneth Frampton,<sup>2</sup> one of architecture's most eminent and influential theoreticians today, is based on Arendt's definitions of public and private. In two of his major essays, he establishes that Arendt's descriptions of "labour" and "work" parallel the dual definition of "architecture" in the Oxford Dictionary: 1) the art or science of constructing edifices for human use, and 2) the action and process of building. The phrase "for human use" refers to the creation of a specifically human world, whereas "action and process of building" alludes to a continuous act which is never complete and is comparable to the unending process of domestic labour.

It is these definitions which expose the conferring of both "value" and importance in the field of architecture,

for if "architecture" as "the art or science of constructing edifices" is for human use, then presumably "architecture" as "process of building" (which houses the processes of biological labour) is *not* specifically for human use. For whom, then, is it intended? Part of the answer to this question is the fact that in ancient Greece, women, children, and slaves who inhabited the household were considered less than fully human.

### Excluding the Other(s) — by Definition

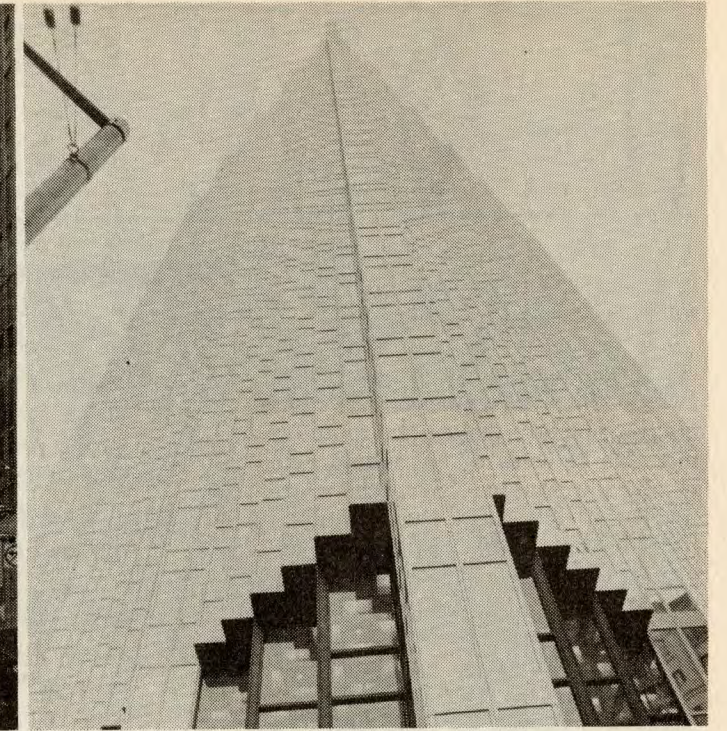
Frampton goes on to argue that domestic buildings are not architecture at all. One of the sources he invokes is an essay from 1910 which describes the constructions of the peasant whose aim is to house himself<sup>3</sup>, his family and his livestock, and who succeeds in the way of an animal following its instincts. "Rooted vernacular" is the term used for this construction; Frampton considers it not to be architecture because it has "nothing to do with the traditionally representative role of architecture". Yet, it must represent at least shelter, and these civilizations have structures which house and represent collective life as well. Such structures are also "traditional" in the

### Regents Park and St. Jamestown, Toronto: failed social experiments of the modern movement



Ric Amis

Left: Old City Hall (now the Toronto Courthouse) — reflecting "traditional values, permanence, durability"  
Right: Royal Bank Tower, a gold-windowed monument to Commerce — "the new institutions are essentially consumer items."



sense of being connected to ways of building them in the past. Thus, this "vernacular" is traditional and representative. But because Frampton never defines these terms, we must assume that he considers the particular traditions represented inappropriate for inclusion in the realm of architecture.

It can be safely inferred from Frampton's work that what he is calling 'architecture' roughly parallels the course of Western Civilization; that is, it begins with the Greek classical civilization and continues to the present day. The first classical Greek temple was in fact born of the vernacular forms which surrounded it and in which people lived, but according to Frampton's argument, there was not 'architecture' in this vernacular. What is it that makes architecture where there was none before? It must be the point at which 'building' also becomes 'art' and has a purpose beyond being merely useful. As Frampton quotes: "Only a very small part of architecture belongs to art...everything which serves a purpose should be excluded from the realms of art." (Frampton, 1982, p.7) It is obvious that in Frampton's mind, nothing before this point can be considered to be architecture, that is, not

relevant to the development of western architecture as he means it.

We now know that 'architecture' of the public realm (Arendt's space of political action and human appearance) assumes for Frampton a position which is clearly superior to 'building' (the private realm, the sub-human domestic household). This hierarchical relationship, he claims, has been lost in the twentieth century, creating a crisis of identity within the discipline of architecture. His arguments are essentially twofold: first, that there is today unprecedented emphasis on "the life-bound values" of the domestic realm and second, that architecture is "largely divested of culturally valid institutions for its embodiment", which institutions, he suggests, find their archetype in the *agora*, the public space of the ancient *polis*. While he does discuss the private realm, it is only in the context of establishing that its "inferior" values have contributed to the demise of true architecture. This attitude is illustrated quite clearly in an editorial comment at the end of "Labour Work & Architecture": "As I understand *The Human Condition*, the victory of *animal laborans* [Arendt's term for the inhabitants of the domestic realm]

would render architecture utterly obsolete."

The values of *animal laborans*, Frampton maintains, have diminished the capacity of public architecture to create the space of human appearance. He invokes Arendt's writing on the rise of the social in the industrial age, arguing that "social concerns", as "private" interests at a public scale, have no place in public life. The proliferation of low-cost housing, for example, represents two such "social" issues — housing and cost — which have profoundly affected architecture. Traditional ideas of permanence and durability have been replaced by the abundance ideal of *animal laborans*: the high-rise megaliths of the modern city are essentially consumer items with their potential for rapid amortization and convenient demolition.

But for Frampton, it is not industrialism alone which has diminished architecture as a public art: "Where in the 19th Century the public institution was exploited as an occasion on which to reify the permanent values of the society, the disintegration of such values in the 20th Century has had the effect of atomising the public building into a network of abstract institutions."





"...the gradual eclipse of the ancient humanist ideals led eventually to a total devaluation of the *agora*."

Throughout both of Frampton's articles, he refers again and again to the *polis* as the archetypal form of public life for which to make great architecture. He believes that it would help resolve the crisis in which architecture finds itself to restore the traditional order between public and private: the private to a supportive and secondary role, and the public as it once existed in ancient Greece: "...we shall need to distinguish carefully both culturally and operationally between acts of 'architecture' and acts of 'building' and to discretely express both 'labour' and 'work' within each building entity irrespective of its scale. Only in this way perhaps can we hope to eventually evolve and impart to the society a coherent structured language of the environment that is both operationally appropriate and a true reflection of our human consciousness."

But we should remember here that "our human consciousness" refers to the concept of *polis*, and that citizenship was barred to all but a particular class of Greek men — women, slaves, under-classes, and *barbaroi* were excluded. If architecture indeed has a dimension which is akin to art, that is, the representation of common values, we must examine what those values are and who they serve.

### Feminist Analysis

The public/private dichotomy has in recent years drawn the interest of feminists in philosophy and political theory as one whose hierarchical order is bound in Western metaphysical thought. Hannah Fennichel Pitkin, a political theorist at the University of California, is one such thinker. Her article "Justice: On Relating Public and Private" (1981) takes the position that the hierarchical split which has traditionally existed between the two spheres is artificial, crippling, and ultimately untenable to a feminist position. In particular, she

**"As in other disciplines, traditional values which purport to be for 'human' use and which are, in fact, for only an 'elite' group of humans, need to be exposed and transformed."**

takes issue with Arendt's exclusion of "social concerns" from the public realm. Arendt articulates "the social question" simply as "the existence of poverty" and argues that such an issue has no place in public debate. Pitkin's view of Arendt's public life is best expressed in her own words:

"Can it be that Arendt held so contemptible a doctrine—one that denies the possibility of freedom, a truly human life, and even reality, to all but a handful of males who dominate all others and exclude them by violence from privilege? ...What keeps these citizens together as a body? And what is it that they talk about together, in that endless palaver in the *agora*? ...Arendt's citizens begin to resemble posturing little boys clamouring for attention and wanting to be reassured that they are valuable, even real. (No wonder they feel unreal: they have left their bodies behind in the private realm.)"

Pitkin proposes that we find a way of conceptualizing the public that recognizes its root in human need and its consequences for power, privilege, and suffering, and that the concept of justice is central to such a theoretical task. According to Aristotle, justice belongs to the *polis*, and consists in what tends to promote the common interest. Unless public life actively engages with prosaic concerns — like economics — which shape most people's lives, it is an empty form representing not collective concerns

but those of a few privileged individuals. In opposition to a mythical and mystical vision of "public life", it is important that we begin to evolve other ways of making the transition from the realm of the self — the private — to that of membership in a society. The distinction between public and private, as it now exists, is not a useful one for a majority of the population. In fact, it ensures their disbarment from the realm of public action.

### Politics of Compassion

Another political theorist who has examined the public and private spheres of human life is Jean Bethke Elshtain, a professor at the University of Massachusetts. In her book *Public Man, Private Woman*, she exposes the deficiencies in traditional considerations of the two realms and offers her own positive vision for their reconstruction. For her, also, the present disjuncture between public and private is unacceptable to feminists; we must have instead a commitment to public discourse which is shaped by the values and ways of seeing within the private realm. As the primary inhabitants of the domestic realm, she believes women can bring a set of concerns to public discourse which come out of the particular and concrete experiences of daily life: concern for others, responsibility, obligation, and a fundamental respect for human life, beginning with that of children. Elshtain advocates a "politics of compassion", very much in and of the world, instead of one which is cut asunder in a presumption of its own uniqueness, or one parasitic on spheres of necessity, peopled by "exhibitionistic warriors".

The world of the ancient *agora* which Frampton romanticizes is as unrealistic a vision for public life as a return to pre-industrial society. Elshtain maintains as her ideal, instead, a richly complex private sphere, free from some all-encompassing public imperative, and a public world which

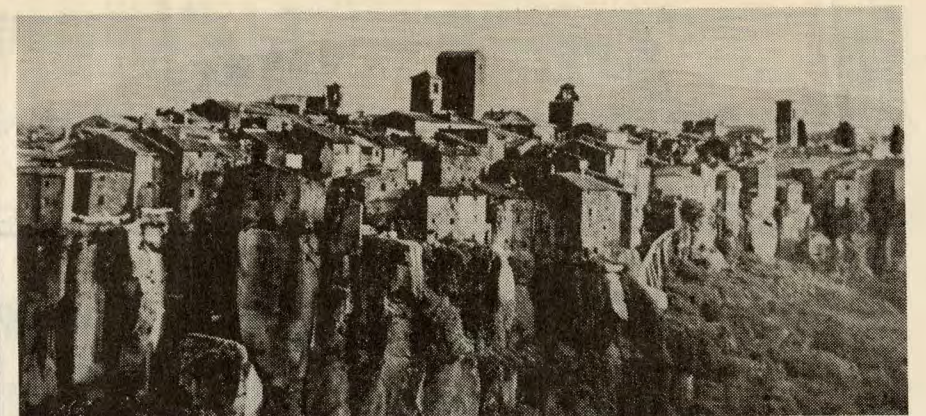
nurtures and sustains a set of ethical imperatives — what she calls "the ethical polity". She continues to advocate a sharp distinction between public and private, in spite of her suggestions for some integration, some cross-fertilization. But her ethical polity is a beginning, perhaps, of a more radical deconstruction and reconstruction of the concepts of public and private.

At the time I decided to become an architect, my understanding of architecture coincided roughly with the Oxford Dictionary's definition which Frampton cites: the construction of edifices for human use which perform a traditionally representative role. This seemed a perfectly reasonable and innocuous definition. But on closer examination, I've found that what is really meant by this concept is the construction of public edifices which provide symbolic representation for a small elite group of white males, and that the values underlying this definition of architecture exclude me along with the majority of the population. I think there is a great need for architects to be and to make buildings for those Others.

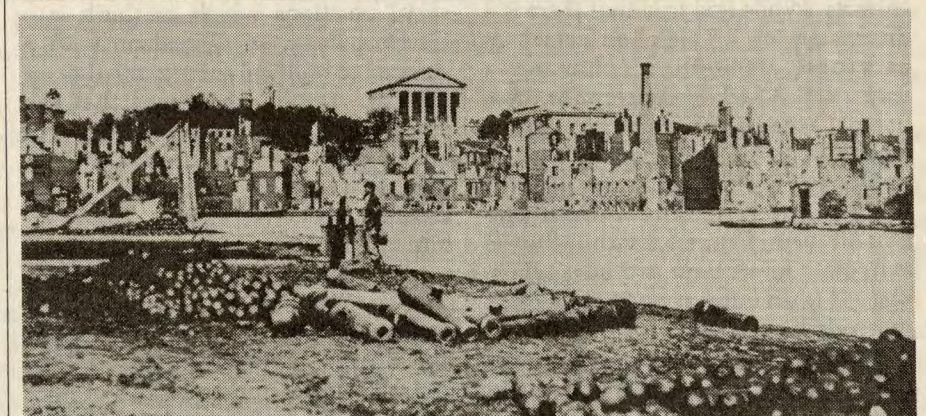
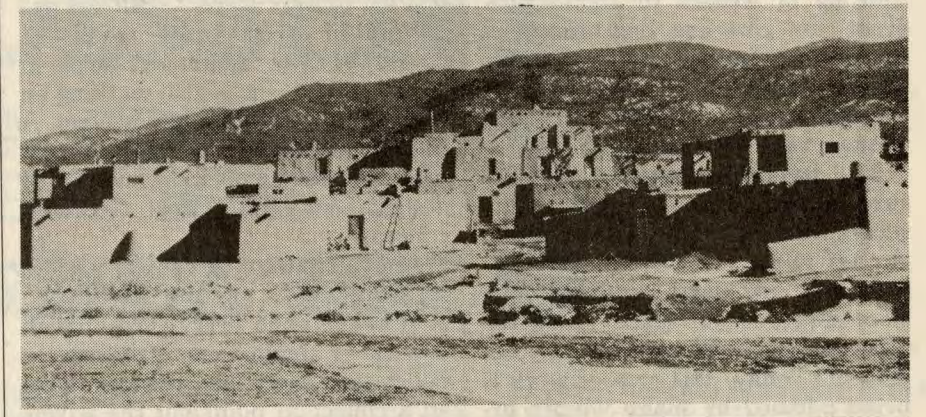
### Rejecting Domestic Disdain

Architecture purports to be a public art, representative of the collective values of our society. It is, in the main, paid for by public funds or by corporate profit — the surplus of collective labour. As in other disciplines, traditional values which purport to be for "human" use and which are, in fact, for only an "elite" group of humans, need to be exposed and transformed. As a feminist, I propose that we need to formulate expanded priorities for practising architecture which may or may not overlap with the traditional definition.

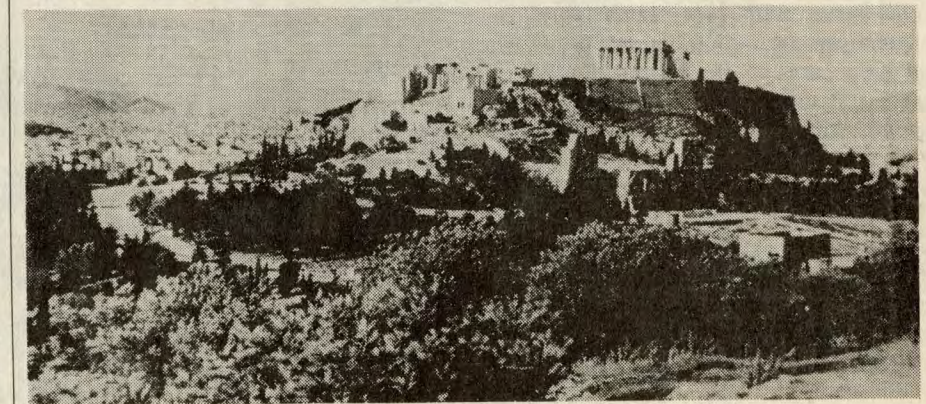
First of all, we need to prioritize the architecture of the domestic realm — housing. Frampton notes that "the repetition of this [domestic] unit today inexorably determines large tracts of our 'public' environment." The fact is that this type of construction occupies the major component of architectural practice. Why is it considered, nonetheless, to be less worthy of architectural concern than public building? The answer, of course, lies in the hierarchical relationship bet-



Above: Vitorciano, Italy. Below: a Pueblo Village. "Vernacular building" in such striking harmony with its landscape is surely more than "animal instinct".



Below: Richmond, Va. & the Capital. The imagery of Western architecture, from the Greeks, seems based in the domination of landscape.







ween the two which, as I've pointed out, is culturally defined. Women architects have traditionally been assumed to be best suited for the design of domestic environments; their contributions, therefore, have remained unacknowledged in architectural histories. The dominant relationship of women to architecture, since the obscure beginnings of humankind, has been the relationship to the domestic, including everyday caretaking and maintenance labour. Women were the original builders.

The disdain for domestic architecture expressed by Frampton and others who share his views generally carries with it a disdain for programme, or "user requirements": floor space, use of space, functional relationships — all social concerns in general. Today, this area of work is being pursued by many women architects. While it is true that there is a dimension of architecture which is akin to art, architecture is ultimately a *useful art*. A lack of concern for these useful aspects of domestic environments has led to the construction of millions of houses which are ill-suited to the people (primarily women) who inhabit them. Domestic architecture is extremely important; attitudes which place it in an inferior position need to be eroded.

As to art, that is to say, "as to the symbolization of common values and the manner in which they might be represented", I agree with Frampton that architecture has such a role. My difference with him stems from the questions of which values of which society are to be represented and, accordingly, the forms of that representation. Precedents, therefore, must be found beyond the traditional bounds of the architectural discipline.

The formal traditions of vernacular architecture (at least within a homogeneous culture) can inform our work. The Pueblo civilizations of the American Southwest, for instance, provide a useful backdrop for the consideration of 'true' American imagery

presented in architectural histories, which is derived from Greek sacred architecture. Italian hilltowns are another such source. An exhibition in Toronto in 1981 of traditional women's textile arts drew attention to a particular formal motif which has existed in these arts for eight thousand years. Professor Mimi Lobell at Pratt School of Architecture teaches a course on "The Feminine Principle in Architecture"; she is also working on a book entitled *Spacial Archetypes*. A number of women architects in recent years, including Lobell, have explored designs based on "Great Goddess" concepts.

Another intriguing source of ideas is people who are not architects. Almost everyone, everywhere, has an opinion of architecture: everyone experiences it every day. It doesn't take an architect to point out the adversarial positions which are built into Queen's Park. In discussion with a student of political theory one day on Hannah Arendt, she noted that she always imagines that an ideal polity would meet in a circle, small enough to be able to make eye contact: a very architectural observation. Architecture has traditionally been maintained as an elite precinct, with a discourse so esoteric as to make it virtually inaccessible to anyone but the initiate, and there is a corresponding disdain of input from non-architects. There needs to be a much greater exchange between architects and the people they profess to represent.

### ***The Unknown Iconography of Dissenting Buildings***

The recent competition to design a Women's Cultural Building can be considered as one example of the ethical polity. As a project unlikely ever to be built, sadly enough, it can be inhabited by a social order of our imaginations, free of the constraints which a real building would impose. Such an undertaking becomes a way of exploring, in visual form, the issues raised by looking at the discipline of

architecture from this shifted perspective: the restructuring of public and private, the relationship of "nature" to culture, the reappropriation of fragments and symbols from women's past, the consequences of decentralization for a cultural institution — and for architecture — the seemingly contradictory notion "centre", "making rooms" which are appropriate for us to occupy, the vertical forms which we present to the rest of the world and how to make real and apparent that which at present only exists inside us. We are dealing with an unknown iconography, and the most we can do at the moment is experiment and discuss the many questions in our minds, including the question of "a women's architecture".

Finally, I suppose, there must be the commitment to work at a theoretical level. I don't believe that architecture alone can create a new politics; our cities are already littered with the uniformly unsuccessful social experiments of the Modern Movement. However, if we are to work toward Elshtain's ethical polity or some other model of transformed collective life, explorations in the field of architecture can serve as a vehicle. The architect can clarify the situation theoretically, design dissenting buildings, provide alternative models and wait for the propitious moment.

1. 'Men' is the term Arendt uses in all her works, in its generic (i.e. human) usage. I think it will be shown, however, that what she means is "males".
2. Kenneth Frampton is Professor at the Graduate School of Architecture and Planning, Columbia University. Early in 1982 he published the first significant book-length history of architecture to appear in some years. His two major essays which are based on Hannah Arendt's concepts of public and private are "Labour Work & Architecture" (*Meaning in Architecture*, 1969) and "The Status of Man and the Status of His Objects" (1982).
3. The writer of this essay was obviously unaware that "peasant" families who inhabit these vernacular settlements both in the past and present are sometimes headed by women and that many of the best examples existing today (for example, the Pueblo settlements of the American Southwest) were actually built by women.

**Pauline Fowler is an architecture student at University of Toronto, and is a member of the Womens Architecture League.**

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# DESIGNING DISSENT

A COMBINATION . . .  
CIRCUS TENT, BEEHIVE & OCTOPUS  
BRENDA MILLAR

**THE WOMEN'S ARCHITECTURE LEAGUE (W.A.L.)** has had a continuous, albeit distant, relationship with the *Women's Cultural Building Collective (W.C.B.)* since its formation. Several women involved in architecture in Toronto were approached by members of the W.C.B. early in 1983 with a suggestion of mounting an exhibition of work by women architects as part of the W.C.B.'s spring Festival. "Architecture — Work by Women" was the resulting show. This collection of work, gathered from practising professionals, recent graduates, and students was non-curated; its single most unifying thread being that all work had been produced by women. The installation (at A.R.C. Gallery in April '83) brought many women involved in architecture together for the first time. Some were interested in exploring these new relation-

ships further and W.A.L. was born.

The League was formed primarily to provide a forum for discussion of architecture, of women in the profession, and of women in society. The emphasis was on establishing a dialogue rather than a polemic. Most women felt hesitant to declare allegiances to any social or political 'camp'. It was the first time for many to be identified with an exclusive-

ly female group. The territory was still uncharted and exploration was necessary before stakes could be set down.

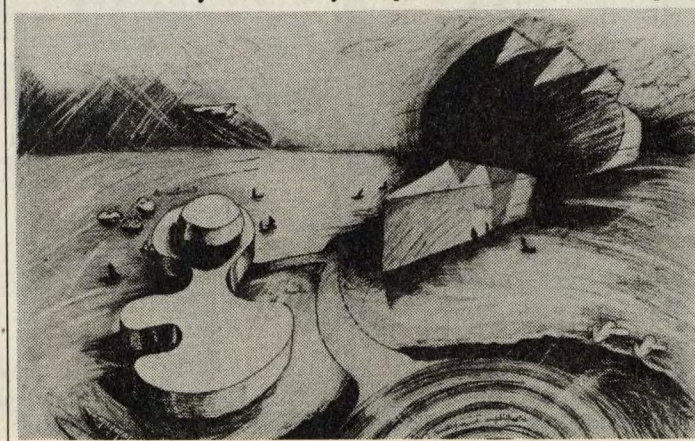
Thirty (and more) women began meeting monthly. Responding to the support of WCB, *The League* decided to sponsor a public competition as its first public venture. The appeal for W.A.L. in having the WCB as a client was the opportunity to explore questions of how to express

feminist ideologies through architecture.

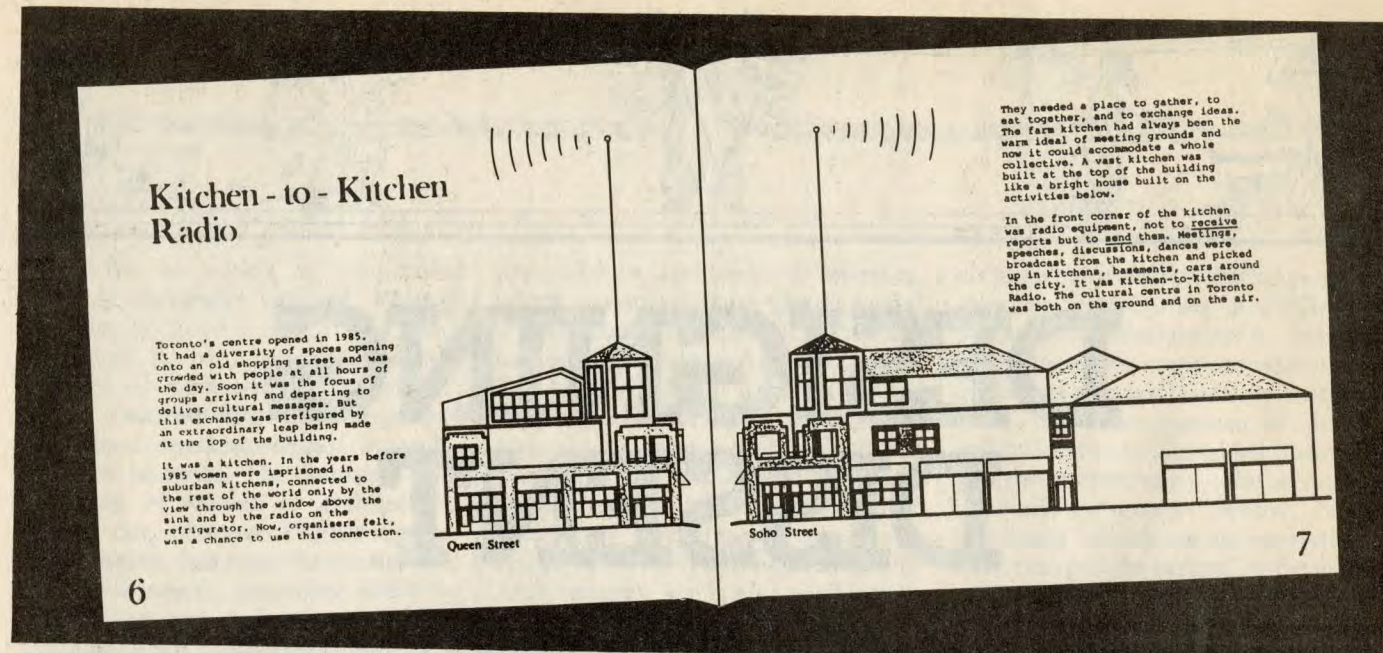
To elicit a broad range of participants and solutions, the competition was specifically formulated to be an "Ideas Competition", with minimal restrictions on presentation requirements. The competition was seen as a vehicle to bridge the gap between architecture and the arts community, through the exploration of a feminist vocabulary. Artists and architects were encouraged to make submissions.

Notice of the competition first appeared in July with an official deadline for late September. The competition brief consisted of interviews with five of the members of the WCB collective and was distributed through Toronto bookstores. Entries were received from across Canada (the majority being Toronto-based) and 'judging' took place over a weekend in October.

C. Moskowitz' entry is a visionary interpretation of new relationships







B. Vertes & C. Wolfe's 'Kitchen to Kitchen Radio': a solution most successful in the nature of its parts — a building block

Question:  
How does one design a building for a group who isn't looking for one?  
Answer: Why does one try?

Although this dilemma was present from the outset of the *Women's Cultural Building Ideas Competition*, the full implications became evident most clearly in post competition discussions both formal and spontaneous). The problem stemmed from the basic reluctance on the part of the 'client', the WCB collective, to identify themselves with a built image. As an alternative, the collective issued the mandate to the *Women's Architecture League* to design a public image (or images) that could serve as a vehicle to their presence in the city.

In looking at the work submitted the jury identified four major issues that were being addressed by the twenty four entries:

- images of decentralization or "the takeover of the Network"
- an initial centre — the centre and circles as providing a core to feminist im-

agery and feminist theory of imagery.

- issues of 'image' — or public manifestations of women's culture.
- 19th century clubhouse (and variations).

A public panel discussion with members of the jury and of W.A.L. concluded the weekend of judging. The show itself was mounted at ARC in November 1983. Rather than identifying

"winning" entries, five schemes were cited for general awards for their successful resolution of intentions. The quality of the work submitted, the range of solutions — from the real to the ideal — and the level of discussion indicated positive reactions to the event.

"Defining the Problem" became identified as a central and recurring issue of

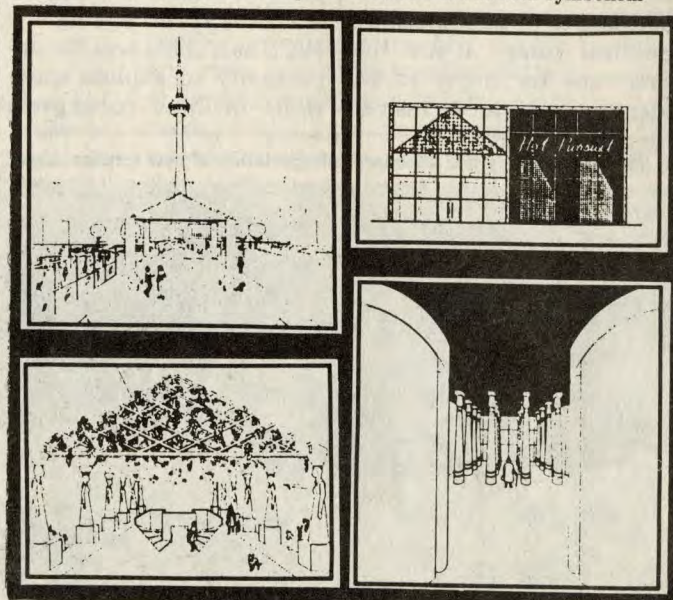
the competition. Around it, two main themes were gradually distilled.

### I. Images for New Meaning

The ability of architecture as a language to express an ideological framework came repeatedly into question under various headings. The brief had suggested a need for new imagery to suit a feminist ideology — a need that 'coded images', such as the traditional club, could not fulfill.

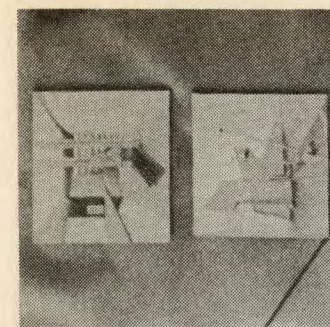
The appropriation of old symbols for new uses — thus rendering new meaning to old faces — was one solution, perhaps best illustrated by an entry that converted old gas stations and car washes into WCB outlets. The practicality and humour of this solution held appeal, yet there were questions to be raised in this regard. Residual associations have deeper roots than may be immediately apparent. Questions regarding the nature of these associations, both positive and negative, in terms of their impact would have to be ex-

B. Fitz-James and L. Chapman reclaim matriarchal symbolism



FUSE

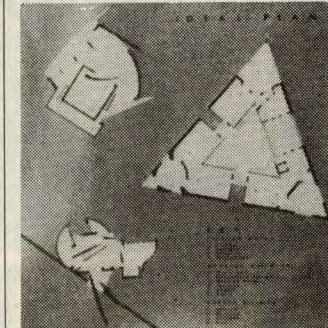
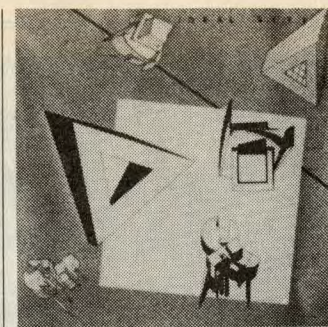
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plored,\* as well as the (perhaps unanswerable) question regarding time — that is, how long will these 'old associations' in the public mind endure?

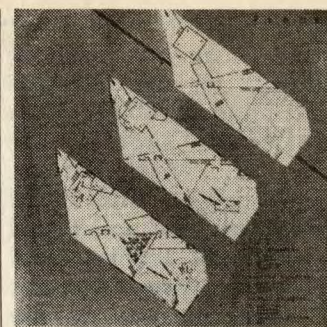
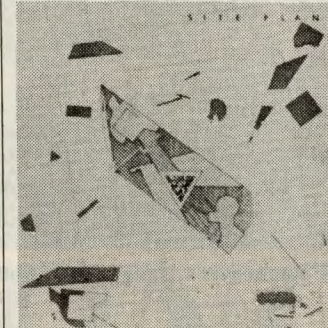
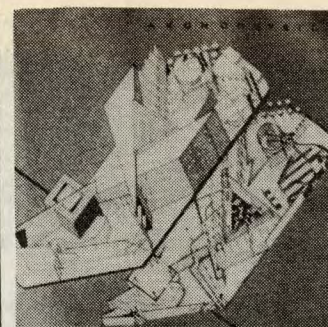
Solutions that were more architecturally stylistic also were similarly provocative. Such designs, in providing new images or ones not already included in our everyday vocabulary, may be regarded as "unclaimed" or "neutral of meaning" and thereby available for new associations. And yet, how

\*An example of unfortunate associations lingering on after co-opting an old building for new use, was that of the *Pauline McGibbon Centre* (a women's cultural centre in Toronto) which was housed in the old *City Morgue*. It has not been generally perceived as a dynamic force in the community.



J. Brown, and K. Storey, and P. Heywood embodied the Ideal and the Real into a contemporary architectural vocabulary

new are they? — most being outgrowths of the 'traditional avant garde' (if that's not a contradiction in terms). These remain, to a great extent, an outgrowth of or 'reaction' to a patriarchal order, rather than a development of a feminist order. Is 'newness' alone



cle: how to design a building for a group who doesn't want one.

### II. Access to Architecture

This inclination of the W.C.B. for a nonbuilding solution to the problem of group identity raised the second fundamental theme (as well as the ire of many entrants!): Access to architecture. The need to make architecture more accessible to the public is a topic of constant concern in the profession and one that arose in the competition directly from W.C.B.'s regard for built images. The mounting of this show and the ensuing discussions were an at-

As part of the exhibition, a number of workshops addressed the issues of architecture and feminism



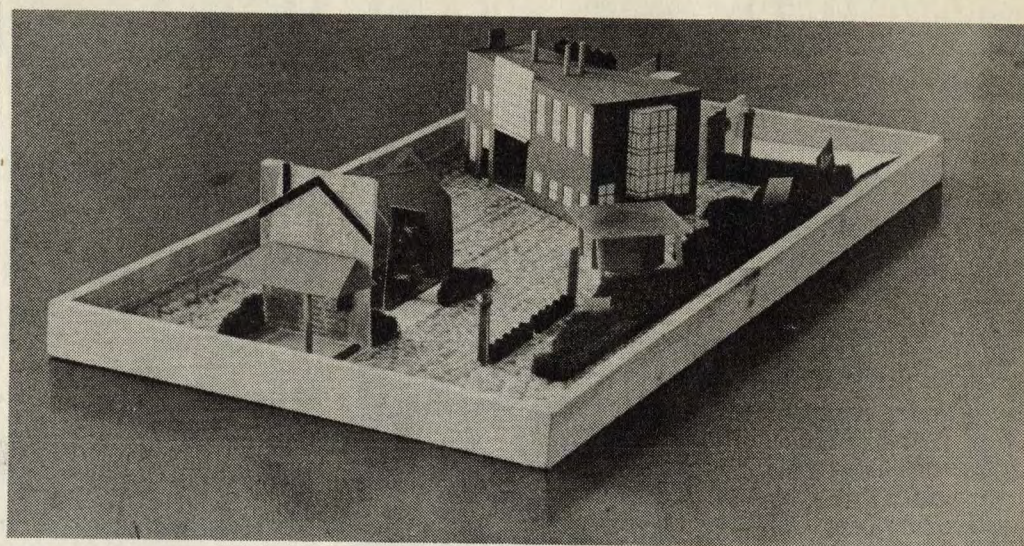
FEBRUARY 1984

FUSE

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tempt, on the part of W.A.L. to begin dialogue around this problem. For a collective such as the W.C.B., with distinct philosophical and social platforms, the anticipated traditional architectural responses seemed to present as many problems as they might solutions and so these responses were no longer adequate. The situation provided an opportunity to ask new questions and to find new solutions to architectural expression. Any such solutions cannot be imposed and so, success must be measured in stages. In this respect, the competition's greatest success was in highlighting important questions. For some, as members of a profession that is highly product oriented, questions alone may seem a vague and incomplete achievement. The frustration of this may



A MacKenzie's trilogy (this is one part) presented images of woman's cultural/physical presence

be the source of a current rumour among the *League* of the competition becoming an annual event, which could precipitate the finding of solutions traditionally bound by a slow evolutionary process!

In any case, resolution of

questions regarding access to architecture, implies a movement in both (or all) directions — that is, in considering a client's wish not to be confined by its architecture, the architect is challenged to explore more flexible solutions and in the

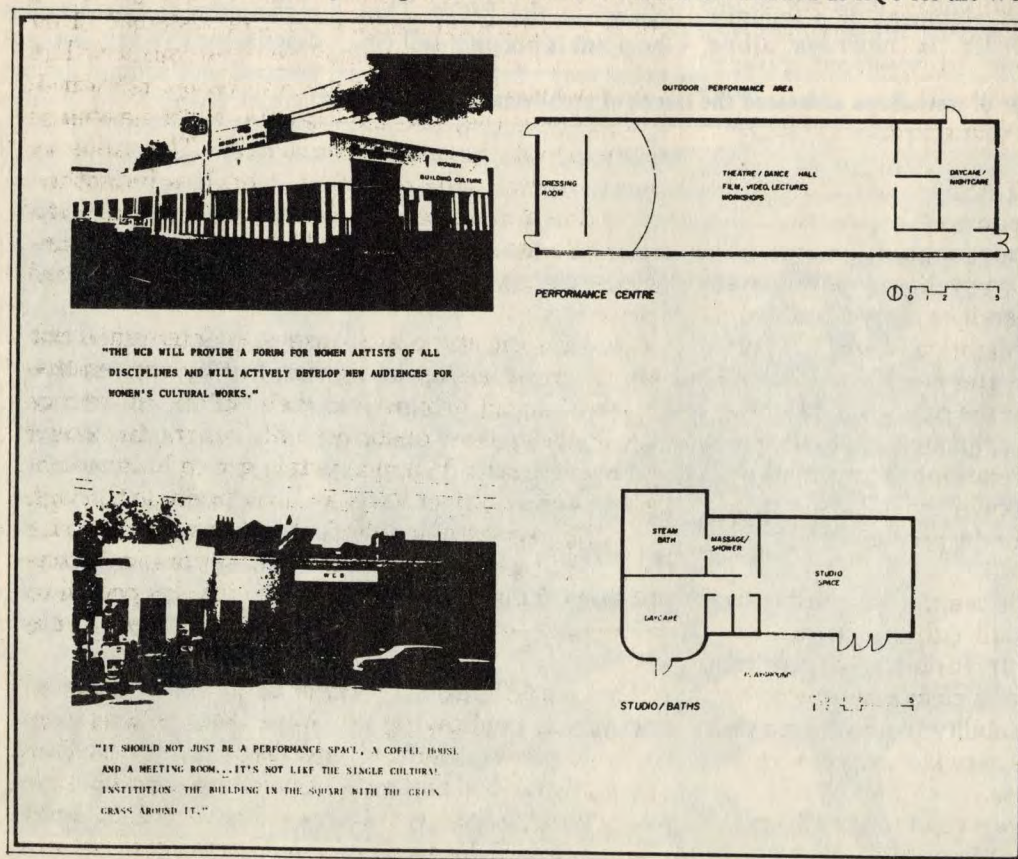
process, architecture may become more accessible and less 'limiting' to the client, as well as to its public.

### Women in Architecture

As the discipline of architecture has been balanced historically between the arts and business communities, depending on both sectors for its survival, women in architecture find themselves caught between an additional two forces. It is virtually mandatory to conform to established roles, in education and in early professional years, in order to gain credibility and experience in the field. Yet, from this position, women in architecture are beginning to recognize their commonality with women producing culture in the broader community context. We remain cautious by professional circumstances and it seems (taking example from the competition) that W.A.L. may remain unaligned, for the present, to any particular 'solution', choosing the path of investigation rather than resolution.

Brenda Millar is a graduate architect and member of The Women's Architecture League, living and working in Toronto.

In A. Sinclair and J. Walker's piece, gas stations and car washes are claimed as HQ's for the WCB



# CLASS & WOMEN'S WRITING

SARAH DIAMOND

WE NEED POETRY THAT REFLECTS THE quality of our people, working, loving, fighting, groping for clarity. We need satire — fierce, scorching, aimed at the abuses which are destroying our culture and which threaten life itself.

—Dorothy Livesay, *New Frontier*, 1936-37

THERE IS A VALUE IN CLASS ANALYSIS, in general, when applied to women's experience. It allows us to comprehend our oppression not as timeless, not as biologically or psychologically fixed and determined, requiring endless individual adjustments, but instead as an historically specific and changing result of economic and social structures. These are, in shorthand form: the patriarchal family system and its various forms through class society and unequal economic class relations determined by divisions between those who own the means to produce wealth and those who are the producers (for the most part, that's us).

Class analysis has specific value for both the criticism and production of all cultural forms, including women's writing. It forces a dynamic, historically based perspective; a clear vantage point from which we can affirm the ability to change reality as we know it, to shape it. There is a potential role for culture within that process.

Art and ideas expressed as art represent particular forms of consciousness. What is consciousness but

an individual's expression of their relationship to reality, produced by membership in social grouping which is in turn created by existing systems? Marx states, "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.", by the real living individuals themselves as they are in actual life. Within a shared reality people have individual lives. The value of consciousness is the way that it bridges individual perception and expression of experience, making it a social phenomena. It is the linkages and the similarities which are of interest, not the exceptional story.

In a class society, consciousness is determined not only by membership in a group but by the relative power of social groups and their ability to enforce their consciousness of society onto others, by covert and overt means. When a certain group holds social and economic power its ideas also dominate through its ability to control ideological systems and organize the goals of a society: it often makes promises it cannot keep. Culture plays a key role: it helps people to understand, place, rationalize their experience in the world.

The contribution of class analysis to cultural criticism is in showing the ways that cultural concepts are perpetuated and made legitimate. Criticism can also uncover and comprehend the conflicts, the ways that people within oppressed groups internalize social values while at the same time, or at a



## **"Writing can be subversive in form and content without specific reference to class struggle."**

later point, they may resist them. For example, a critique based on working class women's experience of family and workplace set against existing concepts and idealizations of childrearing, secretarial work, shopping, sexuality, can bring a recognition of conflict — a recognition of existing constraints and the ability to overturn these limits. Thus criticism can show that rebellion against control is not only a response to conditioning, but also the possibility of a union of many rebellious acts and ideas into a culture of resistance. It shows the role of culture within movements of resistance. It shows that, in the process of transforming society, the need to move beyond the existing terrain of culture is based on an understanding of where concrete power lies and of the ability of culture to be capitalized and coopted.

Cultural criticism within a class framework is not a fruitless or intellectual exercise. It's hard to create new visions without political momentum, but when mass movements emerge we need the tools to understand the ways that our lives are controlled. We need to be able to act quickly, to make ideas into reality. For women this means a knowledge of the gap between the stated and the felt.

### **The Context of Writing**

The value of class analysis to women's writing lies not only in exposing the absence of working class women as writers, although it is certainly necessary to recognize this and argue for affirmative action for women denied access to expression. It is also of value in recognizing class bias in both women's and men's writing and to understand the mechanisms by which this functions — how power and meaning are expressed in class terms. A piece of writing can show the ways in which women from one class view women from another; how women within the same class see each other; where women's experience bridges class division; and the ways in which class difference is passed on and enforced by women. For example, even within feminist literature, working class women are often seen as 'other'. The artist/writer is an historical person. Class analysis leads us to question the specific nature of a text: who is the writer, where is she located in class terms, how does she fit into a view of women's writing of a time period or geographical area; what is the value of her writing as such? We need to know where writing is located as commodity: who could be published, how

was writing circulated and to whom? These questions allow us to locate a work. Rather than negating work by, for example, the lesbian Bloomsbury writers of the early 20th century, these questions can give a context to their creative efforts.

Art has no autonomous reality outside of social production. It is a product of human labour which is socially organized, albeit often individually produced, and our perceptions of art work are also socially located. We need to examine critical standards, expressed in attitudes toward language and form. These are based on ideas of who 'artists' are at a given time and on ideas about the function of culture (release, escape, psychological resolution, transcendence, etc.). Critical standards relate directly to the ability of working class women to get published and their impact on readers' interest in consuming certain types of literature.

Class analysis is thus of value for the very production of cultural material (as well as in our understanding and receiving of it). Rather than dismissing bourgeois women's writing, let us see it as class specific; rather than pushing bourgeois women to include working class women characters as a token gesture, let us construct and fight for the means by which working class women can write of their own experience.

This raises the question: "Is there a working class culture?" My perception is that there is not. There is a working class experience (or rather many working class experiences with some parallels); however, much of this experience occurs within capitalist reality and culture. There is a danger in idealizing the existing culture within working class life. This can undermine dissatisfaction with life as it is now. It can feel prescriptive and idealistic, without resonance in people's real anger and aspiration. Until the working class controls and restructures society to conform with its needs and visions there can be no working class culture, *per se*.

There is, on the other hand, a *culture of resistance* which is articulated against the dominant culture. It is essential to validate forms of resistance — to express what we like about what exists and has been created. It is important to address and represent the nature of working class experience within a culture of domination. We need to record and to form the places of rupture. But let's not pretend that there is somehow an autonomous culture inside capitalist-

## **"This raises the question: Is there a working class culture? My perception is that there is not."**

patriarchy blossoming free of its roots. There is an analogy here with notions of a feminist culture. Both the feminist movement and the conscious working class movement have created critical cultural expressions. There is a hidden history of writing by working class women, though their ability to circulate their poetry, articles, etc. has been severely limited. But these (feminist and working class cultural expressions) are also specific to a lived material reality. This means that we must understand the culture 'industry' and its relation to its market place: its tendency to exclude perceptions which threaten its own continuation, the places where we can push for

### **The Revolt of Lucy the Housemaid**

Lucy this and Lucy that,  
Button my dress and get my hat,  
Some day I'm going to get so tired  
Don't even care if I do get fired  
I'm going to tell that dame:  
You may live on top of the pile, There's nothing you  
ain't got,  
You may live in the swellest style, But sister you  
ain't so hot;  
Yeah, you look so high and mighty, when you sit  
there sipping tea;  
But everytime I look at you, Boy! I'm sure glad  
I'm me;  
You got money, you got clothes, Lord! You sure  
can act refined,  
Beats me how you put on the dog, But listen woman:  
I ain't blind  
All the things you think you know, Long ago I done  
forgot,  
To me you're just a so and so, Sister you ain't so hot,  
You may look so nice and meek like a sweet forget-  
me-not,  
The mister works down on Walter Street, he acts like  
he's the top,  
But, ask me what I think of him, He's just a lollypop!  
I do all the work there is, while you raise all the  
Cain,  
Ev'rytime I look at you, Woman, you give me a  
pain;  
You can yell like bloody murder, you've got me in  
a spot  
But, someday I'm gonna yell right back:  
SISTER YOU AIN'T SO HOT!

*The Fisherman, March 28, 1939*

publication because of the demands of consumers; the ways that we, as women, can create our own publication networks; and what that might include.

### **Realism, Fantasy and History**

Cultural production is essential in order to validate resistance, to develop an understanding of our experience and to raise questions. There are many forms that our writings can take. There is a valuable tradition of realism within women's writing. While much of this production was not by working class women, it was linked to working class movements and based on the documentation of working women's experience. This work has an important role in both entertaining and instructing. Examples include: Dorothy Livesay's writing; *Waste Heritage*, written in the '30s by B.C. novelist Eileen Baird; work by the *Workers' Theatre* and work by little known women published in the workers' presses.

But there are limits to realism. Pleasure and fantasy empower us as well. Writing can be subversive in form and content without specific reference to class struggle. There is an important place for the erotic and a subversive value in breaking down assumptions about women. Marge Piercy's poetry is a fine example of such work.

There is another level of women's expression which has great value. These are the word-based though 'non-literary' forms such as oral culture (stories passed down from woman to woman), lyrics to songs, nursery rhymes, etc. These are both a valuable repository of our lost history and artistic expression in themselves.

Consciously sought oral history from working class women provides individual stories that can be melded together into a vision of women's lives. Oral history is important in representing women without literary tools. There are different levels to oral history. Individual testimony on its own is often inspirational as well as entertaining; when amalgamated, women's recollections transcend the individual; when coupled with analysis, women's views of their own experience can be underlined, showing the consciousness that is implicit in daily life. When pooled together, these contributions contradict history as told by (mostly) bourgeois men — a telling which is incorporated into the dominant culture's view of its own development. Oral history



allows us not only to relive and to be inspired; it shows the conflict between women, past mistakes and their repercussions, the process of change over time, and lends a perspective not always visible from inside a lived reality.

Because of the power of the written word, the recording of oral history in written form forces a respect and recognition of women's view of the past. As an interviewer and writer it is essential to understand one's difference from the speakers. When writing with the voices of working class women we must also recognize the ways that bourgeois culture traditionally caricatures working class people, defining them as "other", and when taking spoken language into written forms we must be wary of grammatical style that may overpower perceptions

of content, as well as changes in rhythm and pacing.

Lastly, as women writers we must note and consider the importance of mass culture as a reference point. Mass culture is oriented towards working class consumers. Though there is value in producing for a limited, defined community, it is also important to develop forms of accessible, critical culture.

In this piece, I've touched on some ideas regarding the importance of class analysis in approaching the task of cultural criticism specifically for those who, as feminists, are concerned about understanding and transforming the culture in which we live, as well as for those who are creating visions of alternatives and of resistance. For the feminist writer, reader and critic, class/female consciousness is invaluable.

Sara Diamond

## Myrtle Bergen: Oral History Excerpts

*"...because I didn't have a clue about politics. But I knew about class struggle."*

YOU SEE, WHAT OPENED MY eyes was when I had it explained to me what the role of unions is. And it was just the greatest thing that had ever happened to me in my life. I saw the light. Where I had been ashamed to take any boyfriends to the home of my mother and father because they were so poverty-stricken, I saw where they fitted into a class of people who were exploited. (She cries) When I saw the class structure of society, I knew right away. (cries)

When it was explained to me that my former friends were on the other side of the fence, they were not going to be my friends anymore. First of all, I knew this before I gave my notice to the courthouse. But all my mail came to the courthouse, where I worked and they had sealed letters with International Woodworkers of America on the bottom. I can remember one day after I had given notice and I'd told them I was going to work for the IWA and why: because I was going to get more money — thirty-five dollars a week — I can remember one of the policemen coming down the hall singing that Russian boatmen's song: "Yo ho heave ho". It didn't mean a

thing to me until afterwards when I realized what he was doing. He was red-baiting me, you know. And little did I know, because I didn't have a clue about politics. But I knew about class struggle. I had just learned about it.

OUR LITTLE HOME WAS THE union office and I was the secretary for the union and I used to do the books for the union. And so we had loggers in our house most days and when the lay-off season came, they'd be around there all the time, because it was the union office. And weekends they'd be at our place, they'd come down on the Friday night and they'd have a bottle and they'd want a place to drink it so they'd come to our place. Then we'd have somebody sleeping on our chesterfield or somewhere else and in the morning, Saturday, we'd have the union meeting and I'd have all the books done up and ready and then that night the auxiliary would put up a dance and I'd be working on that and then after the dance they'd all come over to our place again and we'd have a party. And so it got so that I got so tired of all this business,

that sometimes I'd think, "oh boy, it's Friday, I won't have to get up early tomorrow", because I used to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning to get Bergie (husband) off to work, and then I'd think, "Oh no, they'll be coming in from the camps". I'd say, when Bergie would get home from the camps, "Let's hurry up and go to Victoria tonight, and stay in a hotel and they won't know where we're at." Because we got tired of it, but I used to love them too, because I heard so many good stories and they were great people. Just the greatest guys.

I cooked for them. You did everything. I can remember one night they all came over to our house for a party and little simple things wouldn't do me. I had to do something fancy, do it up, so I was cooking waffles for about 20 people. And you know, after I'd worked all day on the dance and danced all night too. And Bergie, well, nobody helped me — just Owen Brown. So after that, I figured he'd (Bergie) better help too, because to me, socialize meant equality, and it didn't mean that the women did all the work while the men sat around, you know.

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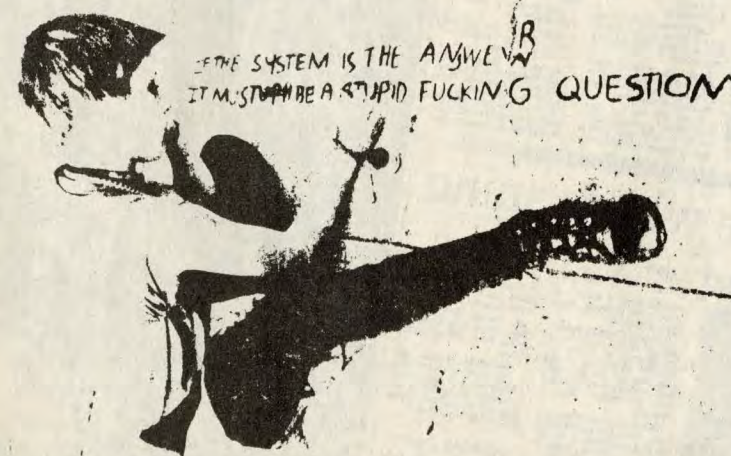
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# Hero of a deadly ambush

young lieutenant who defied Swapo bullets as his men fell around him

THE early morning South West Africa calm was shattered by the scream of Swapo rockets, the deadly rattle of machine-gun fire, the thump of mortars.

It was Wednesday. Swapo was ambushing a South African patrol about 100km east of Ondangwa and 15km inside SWA territory.

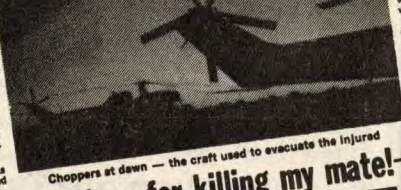
A young South African lieutenant was flung to the ground. Eight bullets ripped into his back-pack.

Another bullet tore through the upper part of his right arm.

But bravely he joined the battle, firing at the enemy with his R4 rifle.

A Swapo bullet shattered his right hand.

Li Jan van Deventer refused to give up the fight. He grabbed his rifle in the left hand and continued to return fire.



Choppers at dawn — the craft used to evacuate the injured

**I'll get them for killing my mate!**

BLOOD poured from Lieutenant Jan van Deventer's badly wounded right arm.

He looked across at the body of his dead friend and corporal.

"There's one thing you can be sure of," he said. "I'm going to get them for killing my mate."

He had been the leader of the patrol, and killing my mate.

He had spent the night at a temporary base in the bush and moved out early on Wednesday morning.



Wound

A chest drain was inserted into the rifeman. The two bullet holes were stitched.

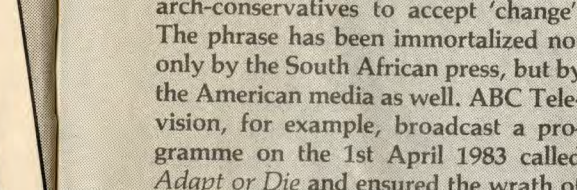
The rifeman was loaded into the same chopper as the man with the stomach wound.

The following day Dr de Villiers told me that Brigadier R. "Witkop" Barendse, officer in charge of the area, said the ambush was carried out by Swapo.

"I was hit on the top of my right arm but still managed to return fire," he said.

"It was my job to patrol a certain area," he said. "I was hit on the top of my right arm but still managed to return fire."

"The battle lasted about 15 minutes before Swapo decided to run for it," he said.



49 Swapo raiders shot dead

SECURITY forces have shot another 49 Swapo guerrillas infiltrating South West Africa's white farming areas in the past two days.

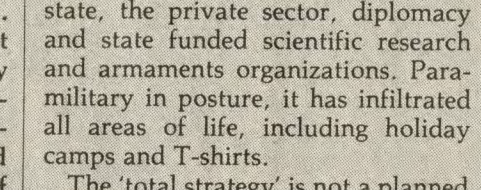
This was announced yesterday by a spokesman for the SWA Territory force in Windhoek.

Three weeks ago Swapo raiders began their push into the "red line" in the "triangle of death".

Since then, 49 Swapo raiders have been shot dead, nine members of the security forces were killed and at least five wounded.

The "red line" is the border fence separating the former homelands from the former white farming areas.

The "triangle of death" is the area between Tsumeb, the coast town and Otavi, which annually faces infiltration by Swapo guerrillas at the end of the rainy season.



Armed

Swapo are cowards. They don't like to meet us in a straight encounter because they know who will win.

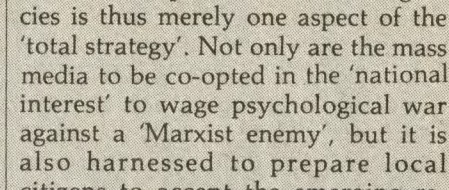
"I can assure you, however, that we will chase them wherever they hide," he said.

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**Liz's aide ill after overdose**

Sunday Times Reporter

## Ex-detainee who is suing Minister vanishes

By WILLIAM UTTING and NEIL HOOPER

A FORMER detainee and student leader who is suing the Minister of Police for R150 000 for alleged poisoning has gone missing from his home in Port Elizabeth.

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# ADAPT OR DIE

## MILITARIZATION & THE SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIA

### KEYAN TOMASELLI

The title of this article is taken from a phrase constantly used by the Prime Minister of South Africa to persuade arch-conservatives to accept 'change'. The phrase has been immortalized not only by the South African press, but by the American media as well. ABC Television, for example, broadcast a programme on the 1st April 1983 called *Adapt or Die* and ensured the wrath of the South African ambassador in the USA.

THE MEDIA ARE A PRIME SITE OF ideological struggle in South Africa. Press, film and broadcasting have, since the turn of the century, provided the motor for the growth and acceptance of the Afrikaans language and its associated Nationalist spirit.

More recently, with the fall of white rule in Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe, increasing pressures on South West Africa, and a growing internal resistance, the media have been progressively co-opted by the South African Defence Force (SADF) both in terms of what they report and how they report. This co-option is not wholly coercive for the commercial media which, with vested interest in economic and commercial stability, articulate the ideology of organised capitalist interests. These interests (whether national or international) and those of the SADF and of the state began to converge after the Soweto uprising in June 1976.

## The 'Total Strategy': The Socialization of Danger

To understand the relationship between the military and the media in South Africa, it is first necessary to discuss the ideological rhetoric of what the state terms the 'total strategy' and its related catch-phrases: 'total war', 'total onslaught' and 'total survival'. The aim of the 'total strategy' is to prepare South Africa militarily, economically, politically and psychologically to fight what is seen as a 'total war' against the 'total onslaught' waged on South Africa not

only by communists, leftists and liberals, but by America and the West as well. This strategy encompasses the state, the private sector, diplomacy and state funded scientific research and armaments organizations. Paramilitary in posture, it has infiltrated all areas of life, including holiday camps and T-shirts.

The 'total strategy' is not a planned conspiracy but is the result of a new balance of forces deriving from changes in the political economy, South Africa's relationship to international monopoly capital, politico-military initiatives and the restructuring of the class alliance. These elements coalesced at more or less the same time (the mid-1970s) and led to the convergence and cooperation of previously conflicting interests. The emerging hegemony consists of the white bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie (as well as remnants of the white working class), the rural black bourgeoisie (the black homeland leaders and businessmen) and the new urban black middle classes. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the rural proletariat, peasant farmers and the working classes who now face a doubly articulated repression: from the white governed South African state and the apparently black governed 'national' states which nestle within it.

As a military doctrine, the 'total strategy' is not the brainchild of the National Party, nor the SADF. Its origins can be traced to the 18th Century writings of the Prussian military philosopher, Karl von Clausewitz. The concept has been adapted by the PW Botha administration and punted under the guise of 'democracy' and 'survival'. The basic aim is to engender voluntary — as opposed to coerced — support for racial capitalism through the restructuring of fundamental economic and political relationships between and within classes, between classes and the state, between the state and the economy, and within the state itself.<sup>1</sup>

Or, as the Prime Minister put it: "We must adapt or we will die".<sup>2</sup>

State manipulation of media agencies is thus merely one aspect of the 'total strategy'. Not only are the mass media to be co-opted in the 'national interest' to wage psychological war against a 'Marxist enemy', but it is also harnessed to prepare local citizens to accept the emerging realignment of social classes, the restructuring of the economy and a revised set of social relations in the workplace. Since 1977, white viewers have increasingly been exposed to black faces on TV1 (the so-called white channel) and black viewers of TV2/3 (the 'black' channels which have been broadcasting to urban areas since 1982) are being subtly persuaded to accept their new class positions in an urban, industrial economy. Simultaneously, they are persuaded of the 'fact' of the homelands and are continually reassured that the people 'back home' are being adequately cared for by the homeland governments. Radio Bantu caters primarily for this latter audience, as well as for school children, to persuade them to become "economically dynamic persons" who must learn to earn their "daily bread by performing labour".<sup>3</sup>

Recent years have witnessed a shift of power from the police to the military. This was inevitable given the growing intensity of the guerilla war on South Africa's borders, the extent of internal dissent, the arms boycott which stimulated the growth of a military-industrial complex, and the assumption of the Premiership by PW Botha, previously Minister of Defence. News manipulation — especially in police, military and security matters — is now a matter of course, enforced by draconian legislation and the threat of vicious penalties guaranteed to intimidate the most courageous newspaper or journalist.

Along with the militarization of South African society has occurred a quantitative increase in the mass



media of images of the military and security forces. Three examples will be discussed: cinema, broadcasting and the press.

### Into Battle: Border War Films

Whereas it took the American film industry more than ten years to come to terms with the Vietnam War, the South African film industry followed the troops into action with no qualms at all. The first phase initiated by *Aanslag of Kariba* (Attack on Kariba -1973) fully identified with the South African police presence in the Rhodesian bush war. A second category portended the conflict that was to come in the mid-70s: *Kaptein Caprivi* (1972), *Ses Soldate* (Six Soldiers - 1975) and *Hank, Hennery and Friend* (1976). The second phase includes films like *Terrorist* (1978) and *Grensbasis 13* (Border-base 13 - 1979) which reflect the bush war more accurately than previous films. The third phase relocates the struggle to the city. While the emphasis on the Border War is maintained, films like *40 Days* (1979) and *April '80* (1980) reflect the context of the 'total onslaught' from the perspectives of civilian life, and urban terrorism. This thematic line is developed in television.

Although reflecting different phases and categories of internal and external attacks on South Africa, all these films interpret reality through a simplistic reduction to binary opposites: good vs bad, war vs peace and blacks vs whites. More specifically, the oppositions are: terrorist (black) = bad; soldier/policeman/student informer (white) = good; and 'loyal' black (especially those on the side of the South African forces) = good & bad (a sort of reformed black). Indeed, scriptwriters find it necessary to include a few token blacks on the side of the South African forces to mask the racial character of the slaughter they perform. These themes are not restricted to film. They recur in television series like *Taakmag* (Task Force), and in the way the news and documentary material is presented by the broadcast media, the press (including the English language press), radio soap operas (particularly those in Afrikaans), and magazines. Literature has offered a fer-

tile source for film scripts: *Whispering Death* (1977) and *Wild Geese* (1977) by Daniel Carney, and *Game for Vultures* (1979) by Michael Hartman.<sup>4</sup>

The military themes in cinema take for granted a number of basic assumptions which later permeated other media as well. First, as in *Terrorist*, for example, the guerilla war is unmotivated: it involves a mindless racial slaughter where black must kill white.

The second point concerns the ubiquitous references to 'the Border'. Like the 'total strategy', 'the Border' is a state of being. It is geographically locatable within the 'total strategy': it's there, omnipresent and continuous, a state to be expected, inevitable — like sleeping or death. The term, 'the Border' has seeped unconsciously into our quotidian linguistic patterns: it is found not only in the media, but in everyday conversation from radio broadcasts of *Forces Favourites* to the assumption that anybody in the army is 'at the Border', irrespective of his actual location.

Thirdly, whites are, of course, dominant. While black soldiers are seen, they are rarely heard. Where they are cast in roles which command respect, they are still 'kaffirs', as in *Wild Geese*. Here, the African President to be rescued by the mercenaries, one of whom is an Afrikaner, is repeatedly labelled as "the best there is". But "the best there is" is shown as sick, tired and dying, literally carried on the back of whites, and the Afrikaner mercenary in particular.

The relationship between the police/military and the ordinary population is the fourth point. Seen in *Grensbasis 13*, *40 Days* and *April '80*, it privileges Institutionalism over Individualism. The dialectic in *40 Days*, for example, is blatant: Police (good) vs disco sub-culture (bad); Defence Force (good) vs personal chaos (bad).

The police are portrayed as charming, friendly fellows, and with the SADF are seen as the only viable agents of stability, law and order. (This uncharacteristic image of the Police also surfaced in an incredibly amateurish television series called *Big City Beat*.) In the cinema films and documentary television series, the way in which the news of the troops in action is shot and the style of press

coverage are a deification or, at least, hero-building of 'our brave young boys in action'. This romantic image is contrasted with the population back home who are untroubled by the Border War. They are shown merely getting on with their lives as if nothing serious — apart from inflation — is happening. The implication is that nothing is wrong. We are in the safe hands of the Police and Defence Forces.

Unlike television, the film industry does not have financial links with the state, although feature films do get a subsidy based on box office income. Only one film on the Border War, *Escape From Angola* (1977), was financed directly by the Department of Information in conjunction with an American company. It failed and was withdrawn. In any event, the relationship between the film industry and the state is a cooperative one. Film scripts, for example, are usually submitted to the police, security police and military for comments and suggestions and their sanction.

### Television: Spearhead for the Cooption of English Speakers

Despite the gathering momentum of the 'total strategy', liberal English speaking South Africans remained sceptical of the 'total onslaught'. The massive mobilization which followed South Africa's invasion of Angola in 1975 did little to reassure them. Inept television propaganda re-enactments of the key battles of the war such as *Bridge 14/Brug 14* did not stem the growing incidence of draft dodging. The established media have been prevented from reporting on the thousands of male South Africans (mainly English speakers) who have fled the country. Most were students or graduates and it is not surprising therefore, that universities have become prime targets for SADF attention.

The introduction of a state controlled television service as late as 1976 coincided with a crucial historical conjuncture: the invasion of Angola, the restructuring of capital and the class alliance, the adjustment of the political economy from competitive to monopoly capitalism and the attempts by a clique of power hungry elements within the National

Party to secure control of the media through the secret acquisition of shares through front companies led to a 'bloodless coup' with the military faction ascendant. Rhodesia became Zimbabwe in 1979 and the Namibian question retained a high profile as did the escalating war with the increased presence of Cuban troops in Angola.

According to General Magnus Malan, Minister of Defence, the 'total strategy' "means a national reorientation aimed at survival while at the same time ensuring the continued advancement of the well-being of all South Africans".<sup>5</sup> English speakers, it appeared, were resisting the "national orientation". Hence, the SADF apparently decided to place pressure on the Television Service of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC-TV) to produce and relay propaganda programmes to English speakers to convince them of the economic basis of the 'total onslaught' as well as to glorify the various arms of the Defence Force. In 1978 the English Documentaries Department was instructed to cease production of current projects and to concentrate on "a top priority documentary that would portray South Africa's military preparedness in the face of 'events to the north' which would restore confidence and build up 'the will of the people'".<sup>6</sup> Faced with the refusal of all seven producers, the SABC tried to legitimise its action by comparing the present South African situation with propaganda films which had been made by notable directors during the Second World War. The producers remained unmoved and fought back with demands to make "socially relevant" films. The SABC responded by shifting the producers sideways into non-contentious departments like Variety and Sport, banished one to a technical job, while another, Kevin Harris, was fired for surreptitiously broadcasting a programme on Soweto's Baragwanath Hospital which he had been instructed to censor.

During the next two years the SABC broadcast at least eight documentaries on different divisions of the armed forces, made by a private contractor. One Afrikaans drama series, *Opdrag* (Mandate), was set in an army barracks and *Taakmag* was described as an 'anti-terrorist' series.

Beautifully romantic, the series by Al Venter is purported to have been made with the troops in action. The actuality, however, was not supported by the measured photography and the cutting techniques evident to the more experienced eye. That Venter was wounded during one of the scenes added a spurious authenticity. Similar images recur in press reports and pictures, dealt with in the next section.



Further direct intervention by the SADF in 1980 calling on the SABC to "nullify" the Opposition attack on the Defence Force budget during the Parliamentary session merely confirmed SABC-SADF links. Images of the military and the police now recur constantly on magazine and news programmes and the viewer is only reminded of their subtle intrusion when confronted with the crude representation of these agencies by less experienced producers.

### The Press: Folk Heroes of Battle

Other than *The Citizen*, initially set up by the Department of Information, the press has no financial links with the state. Being liberal in orientation, apparently anti-apartheid and undeniably critical of the government, one might have expected the English language press to be against the war effort. Although critical of some general aspects of the war, it is uncritical of military action itself. This supportive stance occurs because the English press is as much part of the System as its Afrikaans counterpart. While it wishes to see the end of apartheid, it remains wedded to the class structure which underlies racial capitalism. Although scornful of the politics of 'total strategy', it is tied to it

because the strategy is designed to ensure economic stability in the face of change.

The English press' attitude towards the war can be illustrated by means of a content analysis of *The Sunday Times* of 2 May 1982 (see reproduction). The "ambush" story is clearly prominent. Underneath it is a seemingly less important story about the disappearance of an ex-detainee. The three war pictures are in colour, connoting realism which naturalises the war situation. These photographs are starkly contrasted with the monochrome shot of the missing ex-detainee, who is downgraded in terms of news value.

The photograph of the helicopter tails against the yellow-orange sunrise recalls the prime-time Venter documentary series and suggests a romantic, even poetic, interpretation. This picture is indexical of beauty, peace and tranquility and symbolic of a well-equipped 'ready' Defence Force. The romanticism is reinforced by the left photograph of the "hero" and the right one of a black "troopie" being attended to. The suggestion is one of racial cooperation and a unified South Africa in the face of an external enemy. This unification is enhanced by the newspaper's identification of the wounded black soldier as a "troopie" — he is one of us — skillfully treated by his white comrades. The inference is that South Africa is fighting a 'just' war, not against anti-racist blacks, but against communists whose aim is to enslave both whites and blacks.

The main headline establishes a dual theme. The first is the legitimization of military action! "I'll get them for killing my mate" says the "hero", threatening the "deadly" SWAPO. The second theme is the affirmation of the superiority of the SADF: "The young lieutenant who defied Swapo bullets". (emphasis added) The photograph of the wounded lieutenant is symbolic of 'the best of South Africa': 'young', 'brave' and strong, a "walking wounded". The affirmation of the SADF is further reinforced in the headline "49 Swapo raiders shot dead". Although these "Swapo guerillas" were not involved in the ambush, by placing this report under the main heading and right hand



photograph, the newspaper emphasises retribution. The sub-headings "Armed", "Horrors" and "Wound" suggest a continuation of the "Hero" story. This terse report defends South Africa's presence in Namibia. Despite its more sober style, the much higher number of dead and wounded (68 in all) this news is given less prominence (even though in bolder typeface) than the relatively less important "ambush" story. The use of attributive verbs such as "guerilla" and "insurgent", however, clashes with the main story's description of Swapo as "terrorists" and "cowards". This inconsistency is because the shorter report was written by a different journalist and is indicative of the contradictions of journalism practice. It is, in any event, overshadowed by the sensationalism and prominence given the "ambush" story.

The credibility of the main report is emphasised by the bold type and mugshot of the news source — the military correspondent — a new beat on the South African press scene. This identification not only tells the reader that he is reporting on a 'proper war', but it also identifies him as 'one of us' who is 'out there' with the troops in the front line. He too is a hero. His use of "us" and "we" tells the reader that he was in the thick of battle. He knows. His report must be the 'truth'.

The various elements of the page cohere to suggest that the SADF is 'professional' and 'efficient', 'ready for action'. It is simultaneously 'humane', suggested by the romanticization of the "Choppers at dawn — the craft used to evacuate the injured" and the tears that "welled into (the lieutenant's) battle-hardened eyes" when he looked "at the body of his dead friend and corporal".

Connotations of illegitimate violence are associated with SWAPO, who are seen as inefficient and cowardly. In contrast, the South African troops are courageous and well organized. Where SWAPO drag their dead and injured with them, the South African troops evacuate theirs. Emphasis is on quick, professional and reassuring medical care.

The theme of security is further evident in the story underneath the "ambush" report. The ex-detainee was

allegedly poisoned while held in prison by the Security Police. The inference that he has skipped the country is clear.

### The Silverton Seige: from Folk Devil to Folk Hero

News relies on events which draw attention to themselves. News practice encodes these in a manner which reflects the dominant interests of society. Although the media are influential in naturalising a dominant ideology its influence is not absolute.

One example is the media's response to the 1980 hostage drama when ANC gunmen occupied a Silverton bank. A poll conducted by *The Star* showed that despite screaming headlines of "Deadly Amateurs", "Terror Shootout", "Bank Seige" and "I'll avenge her", about 90% of Sowetans actually responded positively to the ANC action. Yet, despite this, and despite the availability of alternative nouns such as 'guerillas' and 'armed men', the South African media, (with the exceptions of the black oriented *Post* and *The Star* which used the terms "gunmen" and "gang" respectively), painted the insurgents as folk devils and persisted in describing this event as a challenge to social stability and a violation of the accepted means of communicating opposition.

In contrast to the "terror" perpetrated by folk devils is the legitimate violence of folk heroes, like the lieutenant in the *Sunday Times* story. By venerating folk heroes and vilifying folk devils, the media have the effect of strengthening public commitment to dominant social norms and creating a climate of opinion which supports the actions of the repressive state apparatuses.

'Law and order', however, can only be maintained in a society where there is a strong degree of consensus about social norms and when those failing to obey them are seen as 'outsiders'. In the initial reporting of the Silverton incident, the media reported graphic details of the event and the police allowed press photographers to take pictures of the dead 'terrorists'. The result of these reports was to arouse white public antagonism and revulsion. Subsequent to the trial, however, the government realised

that the folk devils characterised by the press had, in fact, been interpreted as folk heroes by Black South Africa. This is precisely the interpretation that the government was hoping to avoid. Realising that public outrage at deviant acts can only be sustained where there is a large measure of consensus about what constitutes social norms, it has moved to strengthen its censorship of the media.

As the Minister of Defence stated on 14 August 1981: "The primary aim of the enemy is to unnerve through maximum publicity. In this regard we will have to obtain the co-operation of the South African media in not giving excessive and unjustified publicity to terrorists and thus playing into their hands".

Another Defence Force General was not so subtle: "The media will be used and abused". The "abuse" of the media may not be necessary, however. As the Mazda advertisement in *Paratus* (the SADF sponsored journal) clearly illustrates, the media have been captured through advertising interests. Mazda is not alone. *Paratus* is not alone. The images of militarism in the media are indicative of the alliance between the military and monopoly capitalism.

The 'total strategy' has unveiled the mask which blames apartheid on Afrikaners and not capitalism. The rule of capital depends on stability and limited reform. The military is a prime agent of that reform: it not only protects capital but aims to shape an ideologically conducive environment for a class alliance which would sanction that reform.

1. "Total Strategy", by Glen Moss in *Work in Progress*, 1980, No. 11.
2. *The Star*, 7 August 1979.
3. *The Establishment and Expansion of the School Radio Service of Radio Bantu*, by GS Strydom (HSRC Report No. 0-53, Pretoria), 1976.
4. These books have been disseminated worldwide by paperback publishers. The films are mentioned here because, although not produced by South African companies, they were partially financed by South African capital and used Southern African locations, defence force personnel, etc.
5. *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 September 1979.
6. *Sunday Express*, 30 March 1980.

Keyan Tomaselli teaches in the Dept. of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University, South Africa. He wishes to express his indebtedness to Don Pinnock for his critical comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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# The Pelican Paradox

Community Theatre:  
A Laboratory for Class Consciousness?

Kate Lushington

PELICAN PLAYERS THRIVES ON paradox. This self-described "urban, working class, multi-ethnic, popular theatre" is not a theatre at all, according to its founder, Robin Endres. Herself a playwright, feminist and Marxist, she conceived and directed a show about a spiritual journey which toured Toronto parks last August. Both rough and holy in style, *Ancestor Stick* was written and performed by ten young people from almost as many ethnic backgrounds. It seemed both in form and content to mark a profound departure from the company's previous work.

Josef Markmann



Formed by Endres in 1981, *Pelican Players*' original objective was to train five community amateurs in theatrical techniques and play creation, to work with groups in her neighbourhood, a heterogeneous racial mix, predominantly West Indian and Italian, around Oakwood and St. Clair. The pilot project did produce one person interested in work of this nature, Elizabeth Cinello, who together with Lina Chartrand, a long time community activist and now administrator of *Pelican Players*, shares with Endres the planning and artistic co-ordination of the troupe. Subsequently, in collaboration with a shifting population of community volunteers and local unemployed youth, funded variously by Canada Manpower, Theatre Ontario and the Secretary of State, *Pelican Players* has produced an impressive array of company-created shows committed to social change. Among them, *Every Mushroom Cloud has a Silver Lining*, an anti nuclear "theme" show with a large cast ranging in age from fourteen to forty, played last Christmas in a church basement transformed into a display model government bomb shelter for three nights, and *Subject to*

*Change*, a play directly confronting racism through personal experience and cartoon humour, toured high schools for as many months performed by four young actors.

Endres describes her approach: "There have basically been two theatrical methods that I've used in rehearsal: one is out of the Viola Spolin school of games and skits and improvisation, and the other is mask work and internalisation, a deeper kind of imaginative work. In the past it was the first type of exercises that produced the play, and this time it was the second type, and that was a transition for me."

In *Ancestor Stick* (structurally a kind of Pilgrim's Progress) the actors as themselves — eager to discover or contemptuous or scared — meet the Mother of the Gods, who leads them through a series of rituals encountering their own demons, guardian spirits and eventually their ancestors. No literal narrative line, but a sequence of experience unfolds, focussing now on one person's story, now on another, then coming back to the group. Ceremonies were borrowed from Native Americans, the Brazilian Macumba, or invented by the par-

ticipants through theatre games and the exploration of their own resonant images.

Playing out of doors demands special focus, to hold attention among the myriad distractions of a summer weekend in the Park. *Ancestor Stick* successfully took chances with some slow, spare, almost sombre moments — of water pouring from a cup, or a flower being presented — utterly compelling an audience swelled by passers-by with kids and dogs. In contrast the spell was often broken, as when the shrieking clashing demons descended, deliberately invading people's individual space to startle and cajole. This kind of overt interaction between actor and audience can be risky, but again it was beautifully handled, and the demons, composed of the performers' own negative aspects, were wickedly funny and engaging.

The casual use of electric guitar, song and dance; the sudden appearance of flaming torches; the procession of ancestors to their chosen places in the gathering crowd; this blurring of the boundaries between performer and audience: all contributed to a powerful sense of com-

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munity, of a shared present emerging from totally separate pasts. I found the event of *Ancestor Stick*, and the means whereby it came into being at all, an exhilarating experience, moving beyond a certain unevenness of style, of ideas and of talent in the work itself. I asked Endres how she initiated the piece.

"I write plays and I have performed; there was enough of a high involved in that to satisfy me for a number of years and suddenly that high was gone and I found theatre itself to be a ridiculous activity. I couldn't understand why people would dress up and pretend to be somebody else; it just seemed completely ludicrous to me. So when I started *Ancestor Stick*, I had no desire to create a play, and the paradox was that what came out was more theatrical than anything that I had done and more ritualistic. I found it, in that respect, deeply satisfying to work on — to just trust completely to the more archetypal aspects of theatre. And insofar as I did that I think the show succeeded, and insofar as I didn't, I think it failed...I like to sit behind the audience and try to intuit what they are experiencing. Sometimes they are hostile. You cannot get away with any artistic pretensions, the slightest whiff of it will throw that kind of audience off, and you certainly can't get away with any political didacticism, they'll just walk away. It's quite a challenge to try and grab people who have been so culturally abused that their cultural responses are defended mightily."

This challenge was certainly well met in *Ancestor Stick* which for the first time in Pelican history drew large crowds from the community. But the questions remain as to what exactly the piece is saying despite the undeniable effectiveness of its methods. It seems paradoxical for a Marxist to be exploring the world of the spirit, let alone for a white director to do so in the context of a working class multicultural theatre company. In a prosaic world we may well hunger for a sense of meaning and connection, but the very presence of the Mother of the Gods as omnipotent leader and guide strongly implies that there is an answer to this lack somewhere outside ourselves, for instance in another culture's customs or

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symbols — a kind of 'National Geographic' approach.

"Some of the actors raised that same point, in the rehearsal period: 'I don't know who my ancestors are', or like the character Rodney, who was really cynical about it all: 'Well I don't want to know about this and don't give me all this bullshit about spirits, I know what I like and what I'm going to do.' Well, that was all incorporated in the play."

"I think it's good to always question yourself about what you believe...To maintain some kind of Marxist analysis and continue to challenge your own views. I'm interested always in the things that people aren't talking about...I was reading Gorky's *The Mother*, and I could say that that was what started the show, because I was struck by how consciously the early Russian socialists took spiritualism, and how they understood that socialism had to be spiritually uplifting for people and that you could not only not achieve socialism without it, but it wouldn't

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be worth having without a spiritual revival. And I think that that understanding has been buried by the way the left thinks and operates in the West. So when I went into this show I said to the actors: 'I'm only going to give you one word and that word is spirit'. We worked around the word for a couple of weeks, and people had different ideas of what spirit meant, then somebody came up with the suggestion that the common link was the concept of ancestors. That was really a light bulb going off for me because it

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meant that what I was doing in this show was of a piece with all the other shows that I had done. They play their different spirits, their demons, their guardian spirits, but at the end the ancestors come up, and they are human beings, not spirits at all, they are real people."

Endres has believed for some years that there is "a profound dichotomy between the political alliances which are necessary for any kind of social change, and cultural allegiances, which are far more powerful." This is a dichotomy she confronts every day in *Pelican Players*, and from that perspective she doesn't really see it as a theatre.

"I think my premise is not theatrical at all. Theatre happens to be a useful means to explore in practice certain theoretical questions that I have about Canadian society, so I think of it as a laboratory for class consciousness, for figuring out just how complex the con-

traditions are of sex, race and class, and national identity. And they are inordinately complex, and we take them all on at once, in a bundle, in any given project."

These contradictions were noticeable in *Ancestor Stick*, since the innate sexism of each different cultural heritage was left unchallenged. While Caravan-style ethnic stereotypes were exploded with perceptive good humour, certain sexual stereotyping remained apparent in the show. In relation to their backgrounds and their fears, the women tended toward a more passive, submissive attitude, and the men toward a kind of macho bravura. In the choice of what their ancestors had to say, there were clear divisions along gender lines. It is indeed hard to resolve culturally embedded contradictions of sex, race and class in a three week rehearsal period for a collective creation, especially when the participants begin

as strangers and are not hired for the level of their consciousness. It is a perennial problem in the theatre, when groups continually form and disband, to create a common language for investigating deep-rooted concerns and conveying them to an audience. Endres' conception of her theatre as a laboratory implies immersion tactics through many experiments over a long period of time; and, as with all scientific metaphors applied to the arts, tends to collapse when the unruly human material refuses to stay in petrie dishes.

"This is all premised on a long term policy...in a sense we are a theatre, by, for and about the people in this neighbourhood. And that's a tall order; it will take a long time to really establish a group."

Meanwhile, out of their paradoxical bundle of issues, is there one that *Pelican Players* would choose to tackle more than others?

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"Although sexism is always confronted in our working process, we have never made it the primary focus of the content of our plays, dealing more directly with ethnic and class relations. I would ultimately like to be able to talk about class, but there is absolutely no context to discuss it in. Class relations are never overtly seen, that still remains the big taboo. As soon as we start discussing class it just becomes polemical. There's no viable left wing movement that creates any consciousness, like the women's movement created consciousness about gender. It created a language, a context in which to discuss relations between men and women. There's been no movement that's given us the possibility of discussing class in those terms, subjective emotional terms, which is the material of theatre. We can discuss class in an abstract Marxist way, but that won't give you theatre...I start out with the premise that creativity, the acknowledging, recognising and expressing of one's creativity, is the same thing as class consciousness; that you can create the conditions for people to undergo a transformation from passive to active, and theatre happens to be the way, the medium, because lots of people can get involved at the same time, not only the participants, but in their interaction with an audience."

If the aim is to explore contradictions as a long-term process, and theatre is the means whereby this can be accomplished, *Ancestor Stick* is an intriguing beginning. When the ancestors do emerge, they bring a message to the person portraying them. And yet these are not stirring words of strength and joy to sustain us through the ages.

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"I think the idea of ancestor is very painful because our ancestors didn't leave us anything, they didn't tell us what we needed to know to get by. But still, there were these ancestors and they were multi-ethnic ancestors, and I think that what is important is that we are all here at this time, and there's an infinity of pasts, a historical infinity."

This concept of history as the collective pasts of the people right here sharing the present moment is an important one, and will be expanded in the show Endres plans with *Pelican Players* for the spring: a neighbourhood oral history project involving research with the entire community.

"The history that is embodied in the neighbourhood is the human history, and is embodied in its resonance. There may be someone who has spent most of their life in another country but now lives in this neighbourhood, so their personal history is part of the history of this neighbourhood. And there are oldtimers who have lived most of their lives here, who

remember playing hookey from school and sitting on the banks of the ravine where my house is now. We hope to have three weekends on three or more sites, three different shows going on at the same time, so over three weeks people can see all of them. The idea is to create a theatrical map, like a geographical grid, that would be surfacing literally what is underneath the neighbourhood both geographically and in time."

And so, for Endres, the paradoxical task is to provide English Canadian theatre that is both popular and avant-garde: "a near-miraculous feat" in her opinion, "since avant-garde theatre is watched by twelve friends of the artist". But for this particular artist, "a step was made in the right direction with *Ancestor Stick*" while for the unprecedented crowds drawn from the neighbourhood, as well as many friends, the show was a provocative offer to grasp a common present, one rooted in our disparate pasts.

Kate Lushington





# The Repertoire of Rose English

## Vampish Tiaras & Mickey Mouse Ears

MARTHA FLEMING

### Plato's Chair

Rose English  
D.B. Clarke Auditorium  
Concordia University, Montreal  
November 4, 1983

"Ladles and Jellyspoons, I come before you to stand behind you and tell you of something I know nothing about."

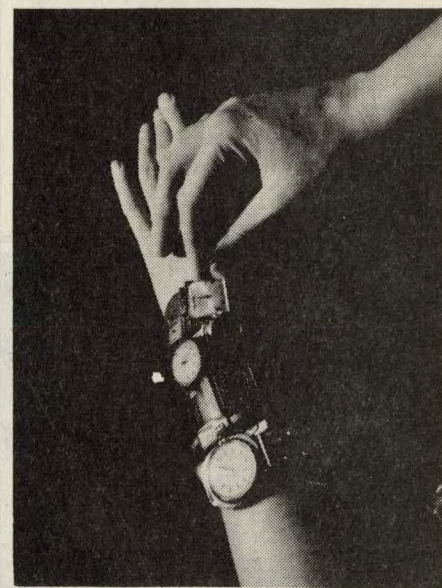
HAVING SEEN ROSE ENGLISH perform a few times, this phrase, the opening line of a longer limerick which I had memorized as a child, means a great deal more to me. What it means simply is that the performer's authority is artificially constructed. Artaud's grandiose attempt to combat this authority, the Theatre of Cruelty, was in mounting a work about the conquest of Mexico by the Spanish — the interest being in the question of colonization. He wrote: "It will stage events, not men." Regardless of Artaud's oversight that men are responsible for events, Rose English decided to take this project seriously, and her spectacle about colonization is in fact (about) a woman — that is to say, "not men." That woman is Rose English.

And here I hasten to further differentiate English from Artaud. English has the courage to reject theories of totality. We are fortunate to have people working among us who do not think that their work tells the whole story. Nor does English consider her work reductively to be an experiment, a proposition, or anything abstract. As Tony Whitfield has written (*FUSE*, Nov/Dec 1981, p. 265), "Baring the underpinnings of theatrical illusion...[English's] 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."

Colonization and consent go hand in hand. Perhaps for Europeans like Artaud the exotic horror of a physically extracted consent of a distant people is more 'spectacular' than the pedestrian consent of democracy's teeming millions to the rulers and merchants who perpetrated (and continue to perpetrate) the bloodshed of an inter-continental colonization. Rose English's fastidiousness contrarily sees colonial parallels everywhere. From the condition of women, to the problem of representation and even, gasp, in the accession of audience to performer.

Rose English seems to know that theatre is a physical paradigm of the institution of representation, of which it is a part. Once you have manufactured people's consent to sit tight for a reasonable length of time in a place which you have designated, you are in a



The program for Plato's Chair

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position of speaking for them by merely speaking to them. This is the metonymy of theatre — this rescinding of responsibility to the performer is the embodiment of representation.

Public life is organized around the mutuality of rescinded responsibilities, usually acceded to the state. Representation involves a similar transfer. Grief, that peculiarly theatrical display, is both public and representational: loss its incitement, being terribly private. This is the nexus of ideas with which English is presently preoccupied, and her current performance work twists them up into a Möbius strip of the technics of the delegation and recuperation of power, the loss of responsibility and the problematic of a public grief for this loss that ultimately signifies the enforced investment in the construction of that-which-is-public.

### Responsibility bartered for Organised Pleasure

But Rose English refuses to speak for her audience. Gently bringing us back and forth, Dante-like, over the borderline between presentation and representation, eventually we realize that even though we have consented to sit still before her, English is giving us the opportunity to take back the responsibility we thought we had bartered to her for some organized pleasure. This is an extremely empowering revelation, and English is somehow capable of making this understanding of the consent mechanism and the right to be responsible resonate at many levels of social interchange.

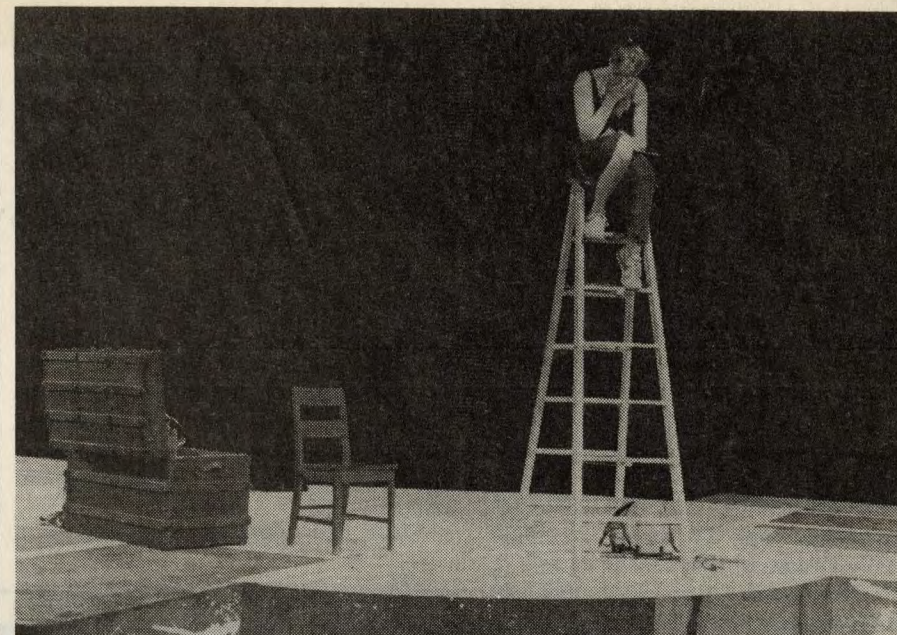
Her performance this November began with a commanding gesture of complicity with her audience. In an already silenced auditorium, she somehow managed to render informal

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the rigid relation between proscenium and seating merely by taking off a rhinestone tiara. Shadowing her gaze with her arms, English raked the audience. "Bonsoir," she said, as if Sarah Bernhardt had been blessed with the eyes of Louise Brooks and the guts to take on the part of the Bride of Frankenstein. Her first and most potent spoken sentences contained the double negative which haunted the performance. "The very last thing I want to talk about this evening is death." Thus began a windy but minimal — breathless? — soliloquial aside to the audience in which English tested her mettle against that of the other character — the stage.

But this is not a dry formalism of the theatre — the delineation of its limits do not end with the topography of the stage and its technical satellites. Though she exposed lighting, wings and stage properties as a series of articulated phonemes, she also cut them down to size. In fact, a size that fit her stage trunk, which came to personify the problem of repertoire. English's vampish tiara dropped to the floor and out of the trunk beards began to appear. Almost forgetful of her dress, she put them on, one after another. But if the tiara had been too much, even in their plenty the beards were not enough. English paced about snapping her fingers as if trying to think of what was missing, and then let drop animatable and fleeting gesture of absence around her crotch. Long after they had recovered from an anxious guffaw of laughter, the audience was still trying to decide if they had actually seen what they thought they had. At the end of this performance, English recognized and forced us to recognize both genders as roles by clambering into the wardrobe trunk from whence both 'costumes' came, thereby turning herself into 'role' itself. After all, gender is merely another form of representation, the socially structured enfranchisement of sex with sexuality to which we consent in order to legitimate pleasure. As an aside, I find it personally heartening to learn from this that there are other individuals working in contemporary art who differentiate between gender, sex and sexuality, and who realize that a radical analysis of that triangle by artists will not be effected through their uses as 'representable' subject matter, but rather through

**Ruthless and True Feminism**  
But far from the ritual action school of feminist performance, nothing stands for anything else here. This is a ruthless and true feminism. There are no veils,  
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Rose English in Montreal: Dressing the stage and her personas with little more than the contents of her trunk

a recognition of the mechanisms of representation at work in their organization.

Closing the trunk lid over her head, English also silently remarks that in fact it is role, character, repertoire — representation in short — which boxes her off from her audience.

With the amount of energy and concentration that English puts into her work, Yuri Geller could go through the entire cutlery closet of the Royal York Hotel. Fortunately, she has better things to do with that force than bend spoons. English's effrontery included a combination of a visible dissatisfaction with the flexibility of the lighting and an irritated desire to show the audience what lighting is capable of and how they had heretofore been duped by it. As she ran backstage to change the spots, their disparate pools became a character, or at least an aura. And in fact, she had already confided in us that what interests her most at the moment is the notion of the void, and that of the soul. They met in her manipulation of the stage lighting, where the indicated absence of the material indicated also the presence of the spiritual.

### Ruthless and True Feminism

But far from the ritual action school of feminist performance, nothing stands for anything else here. This is a ruthless and true feminism. There are no veils,  
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moons or other cultural double hooks and blind spots. In fact, everything is merely representative of the last time it was performed. This is the paradox of repertoire. Though it was not necessary to have seen "Adventure or Revenge Part I" to have remarked that English was purposely flogging dead horses to make her point about repetition, many of the key gags from this earlier performance were subjected to a truly brutal examination.

The big shift in English's work between 1981 and 1983 is that what was once prescriptive had become descriptive. That is to say the biting satire about contraception, so-called non-sexist men and the scrapes that drag gets one into, all of which were ultimately the exposition of a world-view, are now treated with a kind of distance. "What does it mean to tell people what I think?" English seems to have asked herself. Her response takes the form of a question as well, as she objectifies her old material and kills joke after joke before her audience. English is now concerned with emptying her audience of the very laughter she incites them to. Our attention being held by the psychic force of the performer long after the laughter has died down, we are able to arrive at the realization that what we are looking at is not the garishly transgressive spectacle of a woman dressed up as a man, but is in fact merely a per-

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former wearing a couple of beards.

The theatrical time and narrative that jokes require are thrown out the window with the larger framework and English is true only to her friendship with her audience and their mutual consternation over this problem of repertoire/representation and the habitual negotiation of audience/performer relation through it. One may, of course, take this relation to be metaphoric, and perhaps English does — I certainly did — but it does not assume terms and take off from there into show and tell (not that English has to my knowledge ever preached to an audience or left it behind). Rather, she starts from the very root and, under the materially analytic assumption that it is the *relation* that will determine the content that is exchanged, puts it before the tribunal of her audience, helping them to examine and describe it, and to negotiate it constantly side by side with any other pleasantries they might also 'exchange.'

Among other things, this involves a complex and concurrent self-objectification and self-subjectification. English's comments on her own performance served to remove her from the framework of 'authority', but they also subjected her to a closer observation from her audience. She did not allow her subjective relation with her audience to disguise the fact that her body is rendered an eroticized object by the surrounding convention of the moment, and her almost offhand allusions to this fact at once drew attention to the convention and defused its effect.

Starting where most others leave off, English rummaged in her trunk and dragged out a toy rifle. As if confronting a mouse in a Disney cartoon, she climbed onto the chair centrestage and matter-of-factly aimed and shot — clickplunk — into the heart of the very wardrobe box in which she had found the ammo itself. The safetylight hanging menacingly over the void between the stage and audience was the next victim in this ceremony. Having thus proven it to be as alarming and ridiculous as the toy rifle she had used to point out its extremities and blemishes, the stage shyly disappeared in the face of its own props. It was a masterpiece of character assassination.

Curled up onto a folding cot which she had placed at the feet of the first

row audience members, English arranged around her a heavy woolen Hudson's Bay blanket and held a blue hot water bottle in the form of a kitten to her breast. Belting out wail after exaggerated wail of tears into a carmine red handkerchief, this display was at an almost unbearable proximity. In spite of its vaudeville hoariness, we were obliged to remember having cried like that, and the tension, over several minutes, of failing to take some action to comfort her brought the convention's constraints into sharp relief, clearly showing how the alienation of being spoken for renders one unconsoling and inconsolable.

English is capable of haunting us with

these Chaplinesque crocodile tears because she is somehow able to fragment the actual experience of grief and its externalization and some of the vicarious necessities of its memory, exorcism and relief into a kind of retributive axonometric plan.

This is English's form of suspense: her ability to work contradictions into a synthesis without blurring their edges, homogenizing them or fixing them into the rigidity of theory. Suspending the responsibilities she seduces out of every audience member in a kind of colloidal solution between seats and stage, she is able to point them out and then volley them back to us gently.

—Martha Fleming

## Rose English Interview

GILLEAN CHASE

ROSE ENGLISH IS A BRITISH theatrical performer, dancer, film actress and script writer. Her credits include her roles as Mimi/Musetta in Sally Potter's film *Thriller*, distributed in Canada by Vancouver's *Women In Focus* (204-456 W. Broadway, Vancouver, B.C. V5Y 1R3, (604) 872-2250); co-scripting of another Potter film called *Goldiggers* which had its premiere at the *London Film Festival* on November 29, 1983; and a series of comic presentations of *Plato's Chair*. *Rose English performed Plato's Chair* at Vancouver's *Western Front*\* on November 19, 1983 during her solo Canadian tour. She was interviewed by Gillean Chase at *Women In Focus* on November 21, 1983.

**Gillean Chase:** Recently feminist artists have been representing a new set of images and styles of presentation to portray women's culture. Do you see yourself as revealing a feminist cultural aesthetic in your work?

**Rose English:** Feminism is so multifarious that describing a feminist aesthetic is impossible. We all come from different cultures and national backgrounds, so although feminism informs everything I do, I can't describe it for anyone else.

**G.C.:** Suppose we start at the point of feminism. Does your feminism create a

different aesthetic structuring for you than already existing conventions?

**R.E.:** My feminism allows me to examine forms and cultural practices and to locate myself within them. At the same time as I must examine how women have been located in these forms, as a performer located within these traditions, I have to question the role of women historically and in the present.

**G.C.:** And in fact create a place to be as a woman performer?

**R.E.:** Yes, especially being a solo woman performer — trying to locate myself within epic space, literally taking the stage and querying what I am to do in relation to this space. My reference point is Western theatre, and my indebtedness is to the space created for me by the tragedienne and comedienne roles of that space, even though I don't want to perpetuate these roles.

**G.C.:** In "Plato's Chair", you make the statement that form reveals the soul of things, just as tradition can both conceal and reveal the soul of things. Do you utilize traditional symbols and the comic mode in revealing the soul of your art?

**R.E.:** Let's talk about the comic mode first. An audience enabled to laugh arrives at understanding as a result of laughter. Laughter is prompted by sudden understanding, or by recognition of something being represented that hasn't been represented in that form before or which has been kept out of it. Laughter

may also result from delight, or absurdity about things which seem incredible, or relief that things are verbalized. **G.C.:** Can you describe — in *Plato's Chair* — the ways in which the unexpected "understanding" came?

**R.E.:** I tried to undermine what I was doing by overtly referring to it rather than just presenting it. After about fifteen minutes of prepared presentation, I turned to the audience and actually said that I didn't think things were going very well. The audience is then drawn into evaluating and delighted about being included in the process. I think that engagement in a performance relieves an audience and allows for their enjoyment.

**G.C.:** I want to discuss the ways in which the roles of Mimi and Musetta in *Thriller* perform the function of breaking through tradition, as well as whether Sally Potter influences the bases of your work. How much is symbol or archetype a part of what you're doing and what role does Sally play for you in the adaptation of archetype to your own work?

**R.E.:** The interchangeable roles of Mimi and Musetta in *Thriller* was certainly the method Sally used to describe the role of the characters in *La Boheme*. I certainly enjoyed this structuring device. As to how that device informed my work, yes it has, but Sally and I had worked out that way of structuring a performance in collaborative performances prior to *Thriller* — particularly in *Berlin* and in *Mountain* and in *Rabies*, all pieces of work concerned with restructuring, and prepared for particular contexts. For instance, *Berlin* was presented in a theatre, *Mountain* was presented in an art gallery, and *Rabies* was presented in the area of a swimming pool in a private home.

*Rabies* was intended for performance in an arena which is supposedly outside the access route for art in the first place, because it was in a 'private' rather than in a 'public' arena. The act of being seen as a woman performer is problematic. A woman cannot stand up in front of an audience and be seen clearly. So *Thriller* was an important way of establishing new patterns of seeing.

**G.C.:** Working in collaboration with other women performers is therefore helpful to you?

**R.E.:** This process has been important in three areas for me — in terms of col-

laboration with other people on my own productions, in terms of being directed as a performer, as well as in doing my own solo performances. There is always a creative interchange that goes on.

**G.C.:** How much is an interdisciplinary approach a style of innovation for you?

**R.E.:** My reference to being "interdisciplinary" in *Plato's Chair* is ironic. I use very little high tech in my performances. Although I respect the performers who combine film or video with live performance, I am a bit of a purist. I like to use one medium or the other, even though I work within the conventions of both film and theatre at different times.



Rejecting the idea that women performers are either 'heavy' or 'light-weight'

**G.C.:** Yet you certainly have an interdisciplinary background — as a dancer, film actress and stage performer. There are dance movements in *Plato's Chair* for example.

**R.E.:** Oh, surely, my work is informed by my background. For instance, seeing myself on film in *Thriller* was very shocking for me. I had to deal with appearing as the "Other", the mirror-image of myself, and that was disturbing to me. But there is still another Other, regarding myself as a performer and seeing myself on the screen — both the shock of recognition and the sense of looking in a mirror seeing what I usually see in completely private moments. I found the experience profoundly moving, seeing a reflection of a reflection, me on film looking into a mirror — and I was reminded of how many performers see images of themselves on the screen in

the iconography of being a star and how these images become iconic resonances on their image which they are asked to replicate over and over on the screen.

**G.C.:** Yes, you've referred to the different imaging of Julie Christie in Hollywood movies and in Potter's latest film, *Goldiggers*. Do you want to discuss the content of Sally's new film as a means of exploring your remarks about iconography? What role did you play?

**R.E.:** Well, I was one of three script writers for *Goldiggers*. In terms of the images in the film, they are multifarious, from early silent screen models of a Lillian Gish variety — images of pioneers, gold-mining, images which are contained in epic cinema, in film noir. In terms of the conventions of the film, in the fact that it is black and white, it is attempting to emulate some of the film noir conventions of light. The heroines are re-working images of women by entering the scenario without being accoutrements of the hero. There are no heroes as such in the film although there are men playing parts. But the epic space of the film is taken up by the heroines; this epic space for women is built into the intentions of the script.

**G.C.:** Can you describe what you mean by scripting women in the epic space?

**R.E.:** The history of the epic has been to cast a hero in relation to heroic actions and death, with women in the background of these concerns. In *Goldiggers*, Ruby uses flashback to reveal her history and her role as a heroine of the cinema, taking her place within it rather than being occupied by the epic form. Her part is central, not peripheral.

*Goldiggers* does not tell a traditional story — it is not a traditional narrative — it's more heightened memory and flashback, not necessarily even personal but generic memory.

**G.C.:** What is the role of an audience to your development as a performer? Does their response validate you?

**R.E.:** It is a crucial element. Validation is an acknowledgement of their presence, and I therefore wish to engage an audience in what is taking place.

**G.C.:** And the role of critics in drama? In *Plato's Chair* you have some fun playing with the role of the critic in

\* The Vancouver performance was documented and is available through *Western Front*, 303 East 8th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C.



making or breaking a performer. Do you see an audience as operating out of this critical role, and are you poking fun at audience conventions of critiquing a performer's work?

R.E.: Yes, but again I was being ironic because I completely respect the role of the critic even if I want to break through conventions to new ways of seeing. I want to include the audience in my own critical assessment of my performance, to get them to think critically about whether my performance is working at any given point. Criticizing my own work is a means of arriving at new understandings and new directions — in *Plato's Chair* I was doing it in terms of "writing" a review of the performance. Critical reviews of one's work are absolutely crucial to hear and to read, particularly about a performance, which exists only as it is happening. Whatever the parameters of the critic's individual perceptions, and whether the review is good or bad, the process of criticizing is important.

G.C.: Does a community of creative people criticizing each other's work also serve this function?

R.E.: Yes, although the role of publishing this criticism is even more fundamental. This documents a performance in a very helpful way. However, the comments an audience makes afterwards are extremely helpful to me.

G.C.: Here's some audience feedback. What I found curious was the dialectic tension you used in *Plato's Chair* — by stating that you were not going to discuss death and then discussing life and the Void. The result was curiously funny in an inexplicable way, perhaps because of the inherent contradiction of the position you pretended to adopt. It fascinated me that you could get an audience to concentrate on the theme of death by pretending that you were going to evade the subject.

R.E.: Yes, turning on a paradox or making references conjunctly was something I quite consciously did.

G.C.: Do you feel by and large that death is a subject you cannot approach directly with an audience?

R.E.: No, sometimes I deal with it quite overtly, because in many scenarios women have been portrayed as victims who lose their lives "so that a man can be heroic in his grief", as Potter states in *Thriller*. But my presence in Canada made me acutely conscious of

the threat to my survival because of the nuclear policies of the United States and the proximity of the States to Canada. I was acutely conscious of my position, as a European, in relation to nuclear buildup in Europe, and in *Plato's Chair*, I was indeed nervous in regard to talking about death.

G.C.: So the victimology you're talking about is global, not only gender-specific.

R.E.: Yes, it is.

G.C.: Improvising must be a threatening process even within the structures that you are comfortable with.

R.E.: It is within itself an actual void, but I have forms to fall back on, like the music, and the subjects of death, the Void and the soul; a working method I can use on the stage as I discuss the nature of form. The fact that I've been here for a week is also very nice, because I was able to explore the physical possibilities of the space in which I would perform; whereas in other places I've had two hours and less to locate myself within the performance environment. I had the opportunity to place lights with a great deal of care and to assimilate information about Vancouver and the network here. That has been a luxury, to have even a peripheral idea of the culture of this audience.

G.C.: Do you see the potential for stasis arising out of original work? Can you in fact limit your growth by this means?

R.E.: I am excited by doing solo work. It is pleasurable to perform, pleasurable to interact with an audience. Because of that, I want to do it again and again. An audience continually helps me uncover and discover new potentialities.

G.C.: Do you find that comedy is essential to the relationship you have with an audience?

R.E.: Yes, absolutely crucial. An audience has the right to expect enjoyment from a performance. So even though I don't offer the same conventions of entertainment, I know that an audience expects excitement and enjoyment. Interestingly, laughter and tears are quite close. Some people came up to me after *Plato's Chair* and said that I made them want to cry because of the potential within the form I created, and because the subject of death, the Void and life evoke such powerful responses in them. The possibility of change, of meaning,

is what an audience is so powerfully wanting.

G.C.: Pathos was especially strong for me when you held the wet log so lovingly, evoking the form it did not yet have although its potentiality is there. Shaping this object, treasuring your art and shaping it out of hard wet wood became a symbol of the potential in all of us to take other forms; and a statement of the love it needs to engage in this process. To me this was a very exciting image of yourself as an artist at work. Carrying a heavy log became a symbol of the conventions of theatre history and of your attempt to shape your own conventions from these. Somehow pathos is so inextricably linked with comedy, I wonder if they are separable.

R.E.: In terms of any emotive response an audience makes, pathos and comedy are closely connected. Unfortunately, these responses have been manipulated and used in the conventions of theatre in such a way that I am quite leery of similarly manipulating them. I take seriously the possibility of evoking such responses and try to apply my integrity to the process of evoking them.

I apply my politics. I appreciate certain traditions of comedy like the Marx Brothers, who never fail to make me laugh. Still, I don't want to utilize their comic methods in my own work... In relation to what you asked me earlier about whether there is a feminist aesthetic and cultural practice, your reference to the log makes me want to share some of the expectations audiences have of female performers, particularly the expectations of males in an audience. References from males that my work must be "extremely heavy" or "extremely light and fragile" because I'm a woman. Completely ridiculous ideas, because it supposes that any political reference must be "heavy" and that any spiritual reference must be fragile and feminine. The concern of women with spiritual matters has been regarded as light-weight. The idea of actually carrying around a log was a means of making this idea ridiculous to an audience — the idea that women performers are either "heavy" or "light weight".

Gillian Chase is a writer, working at *Women in Focus*, Vancouver.

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## Sticks and Stones

### Elements, Meaning and Function in Art

GEOFF HANCOCK

#### Overlay

Contemporary Art  
and the Art of Prehistory

Lucy R. Lippard  
Pantheon Books, New York  
\$22.95

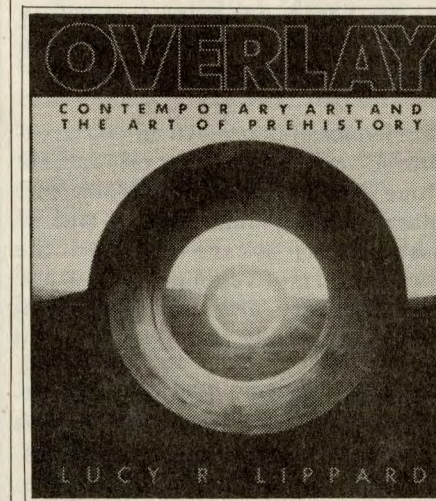
LUCY LIPPARD'S MOST RECENT book is an innovative and groundbreaking achievement — in every sense — of conceptual art criticism. The New York City art critic, political activist, feminist, and art show organiser draws parallels between the megaliths, petroglyphs, and prehistoric art with the earthworks, rituals, and performance art of the past two decades. Her method merges criticism and mythology, leftist politics and archaeoastronomy, speculation and feminist analysis in a spirited inquiry into the meaning and social function of art.

Indeed, at times, *Overlay* is an information explosion — a montage, a collage of fragments intended to connect the personal, social, and natural worlds across five hundred centuries of humankind. Lippard skips across the centuries and around the globe, and even into outer space, following her intuition as much as her wide-ranging intellect. *Overlay* is a discovery (or re-discovery) of the human experience in art. The discovered network between stone rows in ancient Brittany, baskets, ritual dances, and much contemporary art make *Overlay* a book to experience and contemplate.

While her method has an occasional lack of focus, incomplete thoughts, and shifting frame of reference, it does draw attention to Lippard's concern with the wider experience of art. She sees art as providing a communal sup-

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port system, with moral dimensions that suggest a spiritual community. In the layered patterns of *Overlay*, she sees art as a shared experience. She avoids compartmentalizing, organizing *Overlay* on a framework of stones, feminism, time, maps, rituals, and homes, graves, and gardens. By juxtaposing the past with the present, she shows the "primitive strain" running through much of modern art — specifically, conceptual pieces that include fire and ice, communal procession, earthwork constructions, labyrinths, and performance pieces based on the symbolism of antiquity.



Lippard raises many questions, and providing an approach rather than answers, she suggests new ways to look at artists, art, culture, and nature. Lippard suggests that an artist is a shaman, who works out of a sense of tribe. For too long, she says, artists have been separated from the community. The artist who will contribute most to society will draw people away from the substitute-object towards ancient memories of life and productivity. This generates many

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new questions. Does the artist in isolation still feel that need to make a private symbol or gesture? Or will an intuitive need serve a larger social and communal function?

*Overlay* in part derives from the spirit of the 1970s when artists worried about the fate of the earth, about ecology, about social change, about the collective unconscious. All the works shown in *Overlay* are part of nature. The artist is working in collaboration with, not domination of, landscape. Nature is in fact made more conspicuous by the artwork in it, whether this be standing stones, cloths tied to trees, smoke whirls in the desert sky, or patterns made in fields, on lakes, in snow, or cow pasture. The artistic self is reduced, and art no longer becomes a consumer object. What dealer could handle Stonehenge? Or a design drawn by torch in the evening air? Or a performance piece of arranged stones by the seashore? In some ways, *Overlay* reminds me of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*. The book, like the film of the Great Salt Lake sculpture, exists as the memory of an event — the attempt to document an event. And, like Smithson's theoretical work, *Overlay*, from one perspective, deals with the big events of concept and idea; while from the cosmic perspective, it is itself a small speck — as small as a gene in a DNA molecule.

#### A Lateral Speculation

Lippard's textured mosaic of ancient ruins, site art, contemporary earthworks, and modern rituals invites an inquiry into the conceptual and practical aspects of art. *Overlay* differs from most art histories. It is not a linear history of art, nor a didactic text, but a lateral speculation.

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From Overlay



Nancy Holt



Ideas flow or spiral (her organizing principle) in several directions. Her images have long, informed captions, quotations, and they complement the subjective and personalized text.

Art may well be at a turning point, Lippard suggests. Art used to advance into the unknown, anticipate and create the new. But artists may no longer be committed to the new (at least for the time being) and are not as obsessed by innovation. So what's the point of looking backward? History could be wrong. Perhaps we need to re-examine, re-create, or re-volve our view of the old, and see where we have come from. Paradoxically, the making of a new past with something old gives us a new beginning. By looking back, Lippard suggests artists and society may once again be connected to eons of human history. Lippard argues persuasively that artists need to create works that will have a ritual or even spiritual role in our lives. Countering current post-war (pre-war?) anxiety which would insist that art has replaced the spiritual, Lippard is convincing — positing that collaboration, collectives, and the wide cross-cultural approach will take us back to the original gestures of art, and reconcile "high" and "low" cultures.

*Overlay* is a provocative book that intends to run contrary to intellectual trend — at least, mainstream. Her method includes an autobiographical framework. To explore personal history is to participate in the re-creation of history (and the recreation — art can be fun). Lippard's own inquiry began with a trip to England

**Centuries of matriarchal inspirations:** Frida Kahlo's *My Nurse and I*, 1937, Mexico (top left); Nancy Holt's *Annual Ring*, 1980-81, USA (top right); Neolithic statuette, 2200-2000 B.C., Eleusis

that led to an interest in largely unexplored or misunderstood ancient stone monuments at Dartmoor. Her initial investigations drew a web of associations as she explored the themes and motives of prehistoric and contemporary art, conceptual and performance art, and symbolism in art.

With a global curiosity, she examines the way in which various cultures use stones, calendars, clocks, numbers, astronomy, homes, graves, gardens, sculpture, drama, labyrinths, maps, masks, baskets, circles, zigzags, and fire. (Curiously, she has nothing to say about fossils or obelisks.) Her method is invigorating; making stones and stars seem alive, monoliths expand and contract as she explains or guesses about their multiple purposes.

Even more important to *Overlay* is a re-making of history from a feminist art perspective. A key chapter is "Feminism and Prehistory". The ideas generated here radiate through the

rituals, mounds, pocket sized talismans, Great Goddesses, and performance pieces which are cited. She notes (and we should feel enraged by her truth) that Horst Janson's standard text, *History of Art*, does not include a single woman. "This absence of women from art history, added to emotional needs for gender affirmation, is one of the reasons feminist artists have taken the conventional history of art with a massive grain of salt. Searching for models of female experience, many have turned to prehistory (which has been colonized, but not yet conquered by patriarchal scholarship); simultaneously, women artists are reinserting themselves into history as a whole."

She writes that women longing for a "history and mythology of our own found an outlet in a revisionist view of prehistoric matriarchies"; she explores concepts of the Great Goddess, moon goddesses, household and fertility deities; she examines how women's "social, biological, and political experiences" are different from those of men, and how "art born of those experiences must be faithful to them to be authentic". She adds, "Artists can help change the dominant culture's view of women by changing the context in which the deeply engraved connection between women and nature is perceived." Her comments on Emily Carr, Frida Kahlo, Ana Mendieta, Carolee Schneemann, Judy Chicago, and Mary Beth Edelson, as well as Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Morris, Richard Long, and Charles Simonds examine closely the use of prehistoric motifs in their

work. She concludes that these motifs, especially in this overurbanized and anxious times, testify to the basic need "to re-evaluate the socio-esthetic structures and values of the society in which we live."

*Overlay* has a background that began in the 1970s. At that time, Lippard, along with several other women in New York, took on three tasks — to discover and present art by women, both past and present; to develop a new language for writing about this art, which could be poetic, polemic, but always anti-Formalist; to create a history of art theories about the forms and meanings of the rapidly growing and astonishing quantity of art by and about women. To these, Moira Roth (in *Artforum*, Nov. 1980) added a fourth task: to undertake a far more critical mode of writing about this art than had been possible or necessary in the past decade.

While *Overlay* notes numerous contributions by and about men (including many pointed barbs at some of their writings), the book can be seen as an outgrowth of some of the feminist writings of the 1970s: Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature*, Merlin Stone's *When God Was A Woman*, Judy Chicago's *Through the Flower: My struggle as a woman artist*, and Lippard's own *From the Centre: Feminist Writings on Art* (among her fifteen or so other titles) — all explored the mystical side of feminism. They argued for a different reading of history and nature, exploring the unique relationship of women with nature, and invoking the Great Goddess as the literal or symbolic statement of women's ancient powers and future destiny.

Lippard was also a frequent contributor to *Heresies*, *Artforum*, *Chrysalis*, as well as to the *Village Voice*, and other magazines which examine questions about women in art history. Women have led the way during the past decade in their use and exploration of unorthodox materials, autobiography, ritual, politics and process and the connection of these with art. *Overlay* is itself a project in process; its complexities are open-ended and it is not intended as a final

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OVERLAY

statement. Lippard has fittingly chosen the spiral as her structural motif. Wheels within wheels, the spiral is a regenerative image, linking all cultures, and showing a multiplicity of relationships within the work and its subjects.

### Circumventing False Boundaries

*Overlay* breaks with the conventional ways of looking at visual arts. Facts, evidence, and scholarship can be false boundaries, she suggests, inadequate to reveal the invisible bottom layer of the overlay. Lippard fuses archeology, astronomy, anthropology with mythology, speculation, theory, and intuition based on visual evidence. She also exposes some passionate assumptions about the mysteries of art, and strong worries about the threats to sites by tourists, oil companies, and insensitive people. (Montreal mayor, Jean Drapeau, is criticized for destroying a Bill Vazan work commissioned for the Olympics.)

Lippard states that she doesn't understand completely the strong appeal which the primitive past has for her. But she doesn't side with academics who remain silent on matters unprovable. In working out the relationship between ancient sites and new art, she has to admit there may be psychic connections. In our biological relationship with the earth, such skills as dowsing cannot be explained. Water and the shape of some prehistoric sites which follow underground springs are tantalizing described, as are the high magnetic fields that surround some menhirs, or stone needles.

*Overlay* can be understood in several ways. Lippard describes an overlay as "temporal — human time on geological time; contemporary notions of novelty and obsolescence on prehistoric notions of natural growth and cycles. The imposition of human habitation on the landscape is an overlay; fertility — 'covering' in animal husbandry terms, is an overlay; so are the rhythms of the body transferred to the earth, those of the sky to the land or water; Christianity is an overlay on "paganism", urban on rural, stasis on motion." A

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subject can be an object in an overlay.

Beneath this is yet another level of *Overlay*: "the sensuous dialectic between nature and culture that is important to me as a socialist/cultural feminist, and the social messages from past to present about the meaning and function of art, exposed by the tensions between two such distant and disparate times."

For Lippard, feminism includes changing the negative impact of notions such as 'primitivism as retrograde' which lead to stereotypes. Feminism "is about controlling our own lives and products and public images, within a framework of social responsibility to all people." In this context she discusses how revolution means retaining individual choice to change some things while keeping others in one's personal life.

She encourages the relationship between women in North America and the Third World and then asks "we should be questioning why we are so discouraged from thinking about this, why the 'nature-nurture' syndrome is anathema to the patriarchy as well as to some feminists."

*Overlay* looks for what cannot be known, and in the search challenges what must be changed. Certainly, in the works of Mary Beth Edelson, Judy Chicago, and Michele Stuart, the models of ancient matriarchies broke down the barriers between personal and political, nature and culture. As Lippard explores and examines the works of woman in primal society, she clearly insinuates that the male and female roles of our society need to be re-evaluated. And *Overlay* is clearly an assault on a patriarchal authority that separates women from culture and creates a class system for art.

### Reclaimed Meanings

This is also a book about revitalizing language, a theme that runs parallel to a re-evaluation of social roles. A bone-fire was once used to ritually cleanse a skeleton of flesh. "underdeveloped" or "uncivilized" means closer to nature; "pagan" actually means a rural or agricultural country or village; a "revolution" is a dance term, meaning to return. These terms, now often used disparagingly, are reclaimed as virtues. Lippard,

drawing upon the ideas of Claude Levi-Strauss, Otto Rank, and others, suggests that language evolved not as communication, but as art. The roots of written language preserved collective values. Only later, did pictographs "degenerate" into ideographs, and later, "external characters" no longer part of ourselves. One of Lippard's more challenging statements is that writing



Ritual in street-performance: Betsy Damon's 7000-Year-Old-Woman, 1977

might be blamed for the human race's loss of memory, loss of archaic cosmology, loss of the analogies between nature and human life, and distortion of our sense of history.

*Overlay* invites contemplation, argument and participation from the involved reader. I started to add my own overlay, thinking about sites I've visited: Xian, Chichen Itza, Machu Picchu, dolmens in France, even a *Black Sabbath* concert that used Stonehenge as a set. *Overlay* works in many directions. How to appreciate a past culture, nature, ourselves? Do we long for that art which is absent because something is missing from us?

*Overlay* is neither a balanced nor a critical book. Lippard chooses artists she happens to like and often has written about in other periodicals. But she does not always let us know if the

work is successful or not, nor the basis or criteria by which she includes or omits artists. Also, she is not always clear about how she evaluates artists whose works draw upon the past. Is the partially successful event (or even failure) to have the same meaning as a fully realized work? Is art only to be process oriented? How can we communicate with the spiritual in our past when all that remains are the shells of ancient cultures? Lippard argues that art is process as well as product. But she is silent on such matters as how an artist transforms that yearning for the communal past into art, or how an artist makes the past relevant to our fragmented times instead of merely reinstating megalithic forms and rituals. She also ignores the too obvious question of how artists in the industrial first world can relate to or change the third world, and how that relationship will affect the art.

Lippard presents us with the importance of art as ritual. Ritual involves change. New meaning and rebirth is part of the vision of *Overlay*. The spiral is also a labyrinth. The initiation process is in part to get to the centre, and then change direction. *Overlay* is a book about a history which remains to be written.

In many ways, *Overlay* reveals and conceals simultaneously. As we follow the patterns of two systems of art, both change over the "experience" of reading. Our imagination is redirected towards the vast untapped forces and resources — nature, rocks, tonnage of imagination that should not be confined.

As Walter de Maria said of his own work, *Lightning Field* (in which 400 steel poles were placed in an area over a mile square in New Mexico, to be activated by thunderstorms), "The sum of the facts does not constitute the work or determine its aesthetics...no photography, group of photographs, or other recorded image can completely represent the *Lightning Field*."

Likewise with *Overlay*. The book refuses to be contained by its pages. It must be experienced with explosive jolts.

Geoff Hancock is the editor of *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, and is currently writing a critical book on contemporary Quebec fiction.

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## Womb at the Top 'Politics is Thicker than Blood'

PEGGY THOMPSON & PETER ELIOT WEISS

### Top Girls

by Caryl Churchill  
Tamahnous Theatre, Vancouver  
director: Larry Lillo  
cast: Gillian Barber, Corrine Koslo, Donna White, Susan Astley, Brenda Robins, Susan Williamson, Kim Horsman

IN OCTOBER 1983 CARYL Churchill's brilliant new play *Top Girls* had its Canadian premiere, in an exceptional production by Vancouver's Tamahnous Theatre. The play, acclaimed in London and New York, was met with surprisingly negative critical response here.

Although senior reviewer Max Wyman called it "the best thing to happen in Vancouver Theatre in ten years", others virulently criticized it for "demanding too much" and rehashing "outdated" feminist issues. Lloyd Dyck in the *Vancouver Sun* provides an example of the anti-feminist tone: "Judy Chicago's kitsch magnum opus *The Dinner Party* had it's alimenatry...repercussions. Possibly it's biggest burp...is *Top Girls*."

In this article we will analyze the play and try to understand the reasons for this negative media reaction. (At the heart of the controversy are more

than questions of quality.) The play, which begins with a fantastic party peopled with women from history and ends with a frightening personal confrontation, is being criticized for expressing political opinions that denounce the recent trend to the right. Even the most damning reviews here, however, were forced to praise the play's extraordinary first scene.

The play begins in a fashionable London restaurant. To celebrate her recent promotion at the Top Girls Employment Agency, Marlene has invited five figures of myth and history to join her for dinner: Isabella Bird, a Victorian world traveller; Lady Nijo, a thirteenth-century courtesan turned



David Cooper



Buddhist nun; Dull Gret, a figure from a Brueghel painting, who led a charge of women fighting through Hell; Pope Joan who, disguised as a man, is thought to have been Pope from 854 to 856 A.D.; and Patient Griselda, a popular medieval figure (Cantebury Tales) also known as the obedient wife.

During dinner each woman tells her story and as they do Churchill draws us into a world of the unexpected, surpassing all conventions of theatrical form and experience: grasping our emotions and intellects simultaneously, the scene is a vivid tour de force. As the women exchange insights, Churchill distorts time, history and reality to create a powerful and disturbing vision of women's mythic and real places in history. Where she goes beyond previous writers who have attempted this challenge is in filling this clever use of form with meaningful content.

**Marlene:** Other Popes had children surely.

**Pope Joan:** But they didn't give birth to them.

**Lady Nijo:** Well you were a woman.

**Pope Joan:** Exactly and I shouldn't have been a woman. Women, children and lunatics can't be Pope.

**Dull Gret:** ...we'd all had family killed. Men on wheels. Babies on swords. I'd had enough. I was mad, I hate the bastards. I come out my front door that morning and shout 'til my neighbours come out and I said "Come on, we're going where the evil come from and pay the bastards out." And they all come out just as they was from baking and washing in their aprons and we push down the street and the ground opens up and we go through a big mouth into a street just like ours but in hell... You just keep running and fighting and you didn't stop for nothing. Oh we give them devils such a beating."

The stories continue, and as they do, we realize that these famous women, so impassioned, so impressive, had to make enormous sacrifices for the places they gained in history. From the death by stoning of Pope Joan, to Lady Nijo wandering the roads of Japan in her final years, to the sad, lonely death of Isabella Bird, we are forced to re-

examine history: what did these women gain, and how heavily did society punish them for these gains? It can't be surely, that these women, so strong, so vital, so famous, were victims too?

To follow up on the effect of this first scene would seem impossible. Churchill, wise in not trying to cap it, underplays beautifully the rest of Act One. Scene two takes us to Marlene's office and a sad, dryly witty job interview with a secretary who craves a job with "better prospects". Reality replaces the powerful dream-like vision of the past. This is followed with a standard theatrical device of future hope: children, but there is no sentimentality here. Angie and Kit are two working-class "brats" from Suffolk. Angie wants to kill her mother with a brick; Kit is terrified the bomb is about to drop. They huddle outside in the dark and cold and talk of death and despair with a frightening naturalness of innocence. Here Act One ends; where is Churchill leading us?

Act Two ties these threads together. All the parts in the play are doubled by the actresses, sometimes tripled, so that we see Susan Astley who was Lady Nijo, the submissive concubine, as the wife (Mrs. Kidd) pleading with Marlene to renounce her promotion in place of Mr. Kidd. Patient Griselda (Kim Horsman) reappears as a rising young *Top Girls* executive who still goes to outlandish excesses to please the men in her life. Susan Williamson who played Pope Joan is now a successful office manager who has sacrificed all vestige of her 'womanness' to fight for her small niche in the office hierarchy and yet is still passed by while younger men are promoted above here. Don't be fooled by small changes in economic success and status, Churchill is saying. Pope Joan didn't make it a thousand years ago and she wouldn't make it today, either.

Ultimately Churchill unites Marlene with Angie (the child who wanted to kill her mother in Act One). Like Dull Gret, Angie is a bit slow, but a fighter (both played by Brenda Robins). Angie, we slowly discover, is the child who Marlene abandoned to become a *Top Girl*, leaving her child with her sister, Joyce, a working-class socialist trapped in single mother poverty (Donna White). Joyce, explorer Isabella Bird

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from Act One, has chosen to stay with her working class origins. This infuriates Marlene, who can't understand the value of this choice. The ending of the play is a lengthy personal and political argument between the two estranged sisters. Marlene, the queen-bee career woman, forces her sister to forgive all her personal faults but at Marlene's politics (she is a Thatcher fan) Joyce adamantly balks. There is no possible reconciliation between these women: politics is thicker than blood.

### Rich and Uncompromising

*Top Girls* is an extremely uncompromising play. Yet, ironically, though the message is clear (I'm saying there's no such thing as 'right-wing feminism' — Churchill) the play escapes being didactic. In an interview with Laurie Stone, for the *Village Voice*, Churchill said, "I quite deliberately left a hole in the play instead of giving people what they like. I meant the thing that is absent to have a presence in the play...I thought, what the hell, if people can't see the values, I don't want to spell them out. I didn't want to put a feminist heroine on the stage."

And what she has refused to spell out is the sugar coating, the pot of gold at the end of the story. There isn't one in *Top Girls* because there isn't one in life. What we are left with is a bitter denunciation of success as measured by today's patriarchal standards and a grim, though always rich, exploration of the past and present oppression of women.

This was clearly a message that many critics in Vancouver did not want to hear. Refusing to meet the challenges of the play, they attacked it: the play was too difficult, it bogged down after the dinner party scene, it didn't go anywhere, that they didn't understand it. All they had to do to understand the play was ask any woman in the audience, who would have replied, "That is my life." But, it would seem that expecting these critics to extend their frames of reference to incorporate *Top Girls* was asking too much. Although, we don't perform *Macbeth* only to assassins, or *Hamlet* to the sons of murdered kings, women have, for centuries, watched plays about men and by men and extended their frames of reference, but these male critics,

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## Stories, Lighting and Symbols

### Ethics and Other Explorations in Two Current Films

BERNICE REYNAUD

#### Passion

Jean Luc Godard  
Switzerland, 1982

A SUPERSONIC PLANE TRACES A white, sharp line in a luminous blue sky, goes higher and higher, and finally disappears off-screen. The camera, that was panning from left to right to follow it, lowers itself, and the sky is empty. The next shot: a factory worker (Isabelle Huppert) pushes a cart in the plant. Third shot: another panning in the empty sky. Fourth shot: a film director (Jerzy Radziwilowicz) is seen from the windshield of his car. Fifth shot: the plane reappears in the sky, this time in the direction of threatening black clouds. Sixth shot: in the semi-darkness of their hotel room, the hotel owner (Hanna Schygulla) finishes zipping her skirt next to her husband (Michel Piccoli); there is some tension between them. Seventh shot: we are in the sky again, where the plane still traces its impeccable white line. So far, the movie has been "silent", meaning that the only sound we heard was that of a splendid, triumphant orchestral music. The first "real" lines of conversation we'll hear — and, like most of the lines of the film, they are recorded "off-sync" — come after the peaceful seventh shot, in confusion, in disorder, and making it impossible for the viewer to identify who speaks: "Let me talk to you!" "Jerzy, come here!" "Stop it!"

Such is the beginning of *Passion*, the last of Godard's movies currently showing in North America.<sup>1</sup> These first shots and sounds give the rhythm and the "story" of the film. The rhythm will alternate between a more contemplative mood — the moments when the "tableaux vivants" are set and offered to the "pleasure of the viewer"; Jerzy and

Hanna tenderly looking at a recording of the latter's face on video; the love scene between Jerzy and Isabelle (although these moments themselves are masks hiding another kind of violence) — and a noisy, disorderly, disturbing, quotidian violence — lovers' quarrels; physical fights between technicians and extras; picket line in front of the factory; bodily struggle between Isabelle, the police, and the factory owner (Michel Piccoli); the same Piccoli trying to run over his wife and screaming at her, "I, too, wanted to love you passionately!"; Isabelle and Jerzy's cool and cruel rejection of Hanna standing in the shadow downstairs while they are preparing to make love; the tradesman's awkward and frustrated requests for his cheque as well as the Italian producer's histrionic demands for "A storia! A storia!"

For, if there is no "story" in the film-within-the film, which Jerzy is supposed to direct in the expensive Swiss studio,

and no easily identifiable 'story' in *Passion* itself, there are (in the latter) three strong narrative lines and they are given away from the beginning:

1) the characters are always trying to speak to each other, and that usually does not work: they don't have the time, they don't speak the same "language", they are too angry at each other to "have a talk", they don't always tell the truth, and two of the major characters have speech problems: Isabelle stutters, and Michel swallows his words in a persistent cough.

2) Everybody makes demands on Jerzy: three women fall in love with him, his production assistant (Sophie Lucachevski) wants him to get to work, reminding him how expensive the studio is, his producer wants a story, his best friend (Lazlo Szabo) wants him to go to America with him when the Italian deal falls through, the extras want direction and recognition, everybody wants him to make a com-

*Passion* examines class through the reconstruction of classical paintings.



Courtesy NY Film Festival



ment on the current situation in Poland (martial law has just been declared).

3) Jerzy wants to stop the demands made on him, to gain access to the world of desire and to stop shooting, to find "the right light, the right passage" — which is another form of desire.

## Passion's Logic

And what about passion in all of this? My goal here is to define the logic of the passion in *Passion*. Logical thought is linear: it is also the way a classical story functions.

Passion, however, functions otherwise. It wants to embrace everything at once; it defines another logic, one based neither on the exclusion nor the contradiction of its terms, not even on their possible synthesis, but on the *jouissance* caused by their splendid heterogeneity.

In this way *Passion* offers a possible sum of Godard's past work. As early as with *Breathless*, the hero wanted something contradictory: he wanted to leave with the girl, and he wanted to stay with her. He was shot because he refused to escape, then died of exhaustion because he tried to escape. In *Passion*, Jerzy, finding himself between two women — "one open, and one closed", is in a much more complicated emotional situation, as summarized for him by Isabelle: "You would like to go home with her, and her to stay home here with you — and I wanted to go to your home with you, while you wanted to stay home here with me."

Jerzy will end up on the roads driving towards an imaginary Poland ("elsewhere") "to keep an eye on these two broads", but without either one or the other. On the way, he picks up a young dish-washer who has a crush on him. Although she "does not like cars", she accepts to get into Jerzy's because he assures her that "it is not a car, but a flying carpet". Optimistic ending, where a word has the power to transform a plain teenager into a Princess of the *Arabian Nights*. But the reference is not likely, a simply gratuitous fantasy. The oriental story-teller had avoided the linearity of the "classical" novel through the layering of the "drawer strategy". To avoid being put to death at dawn, a Princess tells the story of a beggar who, to entertain an angry caliph, narrates how he was captured and taken away

by the fabulous Roc (bird). The narrative line is broken, the separation between the "here" and the "elsewhere" deleted. Godard's Jerzy is in a similar situation: in order not to be fired from the production and by implication sent back to Poland and martial law) *he must tell a story*.

As a film-maker, Jerzy must tell a story through the effects of light and shadow, and with bodies that will prove more or less recalcitrant (from Hanna's calm refusal to act in the film to the extras' rebellion and including Isabelle's obnoxious assertion of her presence everywhere — she wants to be on the set, in the factory, in the landscape, and finally, in Jerzy's bed). But is it not in the nature of a body to be 'recalcitrant'? A body stops the light, and stopping it, moulds it, modulates it, creates shadows, relief. An opaque body: it is the non-being of light, but its absence would make light invisible.<sup>2</sup> Its absence would also make any story impossible.

"There are stories *and* lighting there" says Jerzy while looking at Hanna's face on video. What we call a "narrative" may be nothing else than an interplay of light and shadow in a space. And so, to "tell a story" one has to solve the problems of "a composition full of holes and poorly occupied spaces". (This analysis of the reconstruction of Rembrandt's *Night Watch* in the film studio occurs early in the film, just after the first seven shots.) But, as we shall see later, one must find the "right way" for the light to pass.

The structure of *Passion* is that of stories within stories, intertwined with stories, embracing stories. So why does the Italian producer keep screaming that the "storia" is missing? Because his conventionally trained look wants a story, with a beginning, a middle and an end, instead of a multiplicity of stories, to be read not from top to bottom like the page of a book, but horizontally, diagonally, transversally, like a painting, like a landscape, whose dense texture is to be deciphered as one would look at a sculpture, listen to a symphony, to an opera.

In this multiplicity of stories, there are those from "real life": Jerzy's situation between Isabelle and Hanna; the relationship between the two women; Hanna's estrangement from Michel; the social conflicts at the factory.... There

are also stories of the "artificial" world, an "elsewhere" and "othertimes" reconstructed in the studio under Jerzy's direction. These stories intermingle not only through the technique of montage, but also through the use of deep focus and the layered soundtrack (where several voices, coming from different parts of the space, and different concerns, are heard simultaneously).

## The Tableaux

The choice of paintings for reconstruction' in the production of the 'film-within-the-film' seem at first a random selection of some of the masterpieces of classical European painting. However, the emphasis on Delacroix's *L'Entree des Croises a Constantinople* gives a key. The male extras playing the role of the Crusaders ride proudly through the sets and catch, while passing (like in *The Rape of the Sabine Women*), the recalcitrant semi-nude female extras to put them in the position which is theirs in the painting: that of frightened and already submissive victims in their city invaded by a foreign army.

The mounted extras have a particular skill: they know how to ride a horse — hence, they are better paid than the other extras in the painting, those who precisely play the role of their victims. And so the "Crusaders", identifying with the "people in charge" on the set, help the technicians to bring the extras to heel. Class struggle, within the reconstruction of a single painting. Also, while we do not know where the unskilled male extras come from, the social status of the female extras is made very clear: they are working girls picked up from the factory. They are the ones who find it the most difficult to "get to work", who feel the most alienated in their relation to the production team (see the scene where one of these extras explains why she wants to quit), who find themselves in the vulnerable situation of standing naked in front of a film crew.

For Hanna, the fear of exposing herself is also a good reason to refuse to act in the film. However, she adds: "the work you ask me to do, it is too much like love." She recognizes that, as a personally wealthy woman mar-

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Jerzy Radziwilowicz must tell a story in his film-within-a-film— if only about light and shadow

ried to a factory owner and loved by Jerzy, she would be in a position of "star", while for the young working girls who have not reached the "consciousness" of Isabelle-Jerzy-Godard, to work as an extra in a film is still and again exploitation and has nothing to do with love, but probably more with death.<sup>3</sup>

The choice of paintings becomes clear: their "stories" are of violence and parallel, the violence at work in the other "stories" of the film: violence between the classes, violence between the sexes. The most explicit is in the setting of Goya's *Tres de Mayo*, where the execution of the rebels is made even more cruel by the leisurely walk of an upper-middle class lady with parasol and little dog, escaped from some Impressionistic painting to wander among the dead and the dying.<sup>4</sup> Even the "static" compositions express highly antagonistic situations: police activity in Rembrandt's *Night Watch*, the well-fed and stupid-looking satisfaction of the ruling class in Goya's *Charles IV and His Family*, the condition of women in harems in Ingres's *Baigneuse*, or the permanence

of prostitution behind the apparently serene mask of Manet's *Olympia*: x-ray studies of the painting have proved that Manet's sitter was a tough-looking streetwalker. In Manet's time, when one wanted a not too expensive sitter, one paid a "poule"; in Godard's, one may find extras amongst the would-be actresses out of work, or young working girls trying to get out of the factory. Which reminds me of Jack Palance's vulgar laughter in *Contempt* when looking at two young extras jumping naked in the Mediterranean: "Cinema is great! it gives you the power to make girls disrobe for you!"

Godard is a film-maker who has continuously asked questions: about the violence of men-women relationships; and then, around May 1968, about the violence of the relationship between classes; and finally, with *Letter to Jane* (1972) and *Here and Elsewhere* (1974) about the implicit violence in the way industrial countries produce and propagate information about the Third World. (*Here and Elsewhere* is one of the most mature works of contemporary cinema, and it is not fortuitous if

Godard discovers the voice of the Other — the Arab — through the guidance of the voice of another Other — the Woman — in this case, Anne-Marie Miéville.<sup>6</sup>) But, Godard has never been a "feminist" film-maker, and it is now clear that he has probably never been a 'marxist' film-maker either.<sup>7</sup> I also think that in *Passion* Godard wants to go further and question his past marxist beliefs. See the scene when Isabelle answers Michel that she "does not want any more to know the difference between a boss and a worker."

## Lighting: The Ethical Problem

The strength and lucidity of *Passion* is in Godard's telling us that he has the duty to live and make movies in a world where there are men and women, factory owners and working girls, film directors and extras, Americans and Poles. What does that mean? What ethics, what esthetics may be found in such a situation? The first step is to identify the place from where one is thinking, from where one is making

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movies. The fact to be posited as a man, as a bourgeois, as a film director and as a Swiss citizen is not always comfortable at a moral and social level, but it is his position, whose liabilities and limits he must acknowledge. This does not mean he has to endorse them: Godard's ethics and esthetics in *Passion* are summarized here and there by comments made at random by Jerzy: "I am in-between, and I am searching for a solution." "An image is never strong because it is terrible or brutal, but because the solidarity of ideas is far away and just."<sup>8</sup>

*Passion* as a movie points out that lighting problems are the ethical problems of film-making: Godard's stubbornness in using natural light in alternation with artificial light is as much an ethical concern as was his decision to decipher the original sound-track of the Palestinian footage in *Here and Elsewhere*. Jerzy's decision to stop the shooting until he finds the "right" light is not a whim — finally Jerzy discovers that what he is looking for is not the "right" light in *abstracto*, but the right "passage" for the light, i.e. a dialectic between light and bodies which, if not exactly satisfactory (it may reveal a more unbearable kind of violence), is at least *just*: doing justice to the light and to the bodies. And when does Jerzy discover that? It is no pun if Godard montages this line just after the moment when Jerzy sodomizes Isabelle — and for a full comprehension of this dialectical transition, one has to remember the husband talking to his wife in *Numero Deux*: "One talks often of the violence of the river that enlarges the banks, but never of the violence of the banks embracing the river; now that makes me understand *your* violence." — Isabelle, the "maybe" virgin must have too narrow an anus; and the movie suggests that her intercourse with Jerzy is a failure. It was not the right passage. Jerzy has to go on searching...a fake Princess or a flying carpet?

The violence of the sexual and social relationships alluded to in *Passion* may indeed be analyzed scientifically — *l'impasse sexuelle*, the class struggle — and this is what a "militant" movie would do. But from this very violence emerges something irreducible: passion. *Passion* lived in three different ways: the passion to work, shared by Jerzy and Isabelle (which, by the way, makes

them both unbearable to their employers), sexual passion, and a more obscure kind of passion which is expressed by religious references. Obviously, these three forms of passion are constantly intermingled. For example, the passion of work and the sexual passion:

Jerzy: You love working?

Isabelle: Yes.

Jerzy: To love working, that comes from the word 'love'.

Isabelle: No, that goes there.

Jerzy: Well, let's go.  
(and they make love).

The third kind of passion, insidious and surprising — since the viewer had come to imagine Godard an atheist — flows everywhere, like the light. "My God, why has thou forsaken me?" says Isabelle bent at her working table (is it because she has just been fired, or, as she explains later, because Jerzy has not allowed her in the studio to watch him at work?). Jerzy finds himself, in the middle of rebellious extras, fighting with an Angel like in the Delacroix painting. Isabelle and Jerzy talk about "the grace" while discussing their relationship. And finally, Isabelle naked facing Jerzy off-screen recites with him the *Angus Dei* of the Requiem Mass. The chiaroscuro of this love scene 'in absentia' is intercut with some violently illuminated fragments of a *Virgin* by Velasquez.

But these five references do not recall an easy religiosity; in fact they allude to some of the more difficult and disturbing points of the judeo-christian religion. Christ's desperate scream at Golgotha is still a source of confusion and anguish for some Christians. After several millenia of exegesis, the passage of Genesis known as "Jacob's struggle with the Angel" (his opponent is first described as a "man", and then as "God") retains its mystery and poetic fascination. The theory of "the grace" was one of the bloodiest dividing points between various groups of Christians. The "redemption" of the sins of the world by the "Lamb of God" (Christ) is one of the three theological mysteries. And finally, the virginity of God's Mother is no less scandalous to some Protestants than to certain audiences the "may-maybe" stuttered by Isabelle answering Jerzy's question: "Are you a virgin?" It is worth noticing that the fortuitous reconstruction of Delacroix's

painting and Isabelle's answer are the two moments when I heard audiences laugh the louder — not without, certainly, some ambiguity. Because both moments are *jokes* — and we have known since Freud that jokes are one of the best ways for the unconscious to express itself in everyday life. And the viewer recognizes them as jokes because he/she partakes in the same symbolic system, that of judeo-christianism. Hence it is impossible not to perceive the iconoclastic design at work in showing a Polish film director fighting a ridiculous little extra on a movie set in lieu of Jacob's mystical fight with God Himself. But, as Lacan noticed, the iconoclasts themselves believe in God, a God who does not like images. In the same way, Isabelle's "illogical" answer becomes a quasi-blasphemy when montaged with an exaltation of the virginity of Mary, mother of God. In both cases, if we acknowledge the illusion, it means that we know how to decipher the symbol. This is the supreme 'tour de force' of *Passion*, which sends us back, disturbingly, to our own beliefs — which is probably why so many people hate this film.

Religious references, through these two jokes, lead directly to the obscene. Now the sensuous aspect of Christian religious painting, especially of the baroque age, has been recognized by Lacan: "nowhere more than in Christianity, is the work of art as such more openly displayed as what it has always been — obscenity."<sup>9</sup> Adding that in baroque Christian art "everything is a display of bodies conjuring up *jouissance*... except copulation." This is as good a description as any of *Passion*, where there is an extraordinary display of naked bodies, bathed in some of the most sensuous lighting effects of the history of cinema, but not a single embrace: Isabelle is seen naked, in chiaroscuro, in a painterly position, her body offered to Jerzy whose voice is heard from off-screen, but does not touch her; when Jerzy caresses Hanna's head we only see his hand, the rest of his body cut off by the narrowness of the video screen etc... This is because sexual intercourse is unrepresentable because the Other is a "hole" (through which the light may or may not pass, but still a hole) — or, if I want to represent the Other, I cannot put myself in the painting except as a "spot" that blocks the

passage of the light.<sup>10</sup> I can never put myself and the Other in the same painting — or in the same film, however I may try. Such is the essence of baroque art, such is the essence of passion. To actively desire embracing the Other, the impossible "hidden face of God".

1. *Passion* was completed in 1982 and shown the same year at Cannes. Godard has since completed another film, *Prenom Carmen* shown at Venice in the fall of 1983.

2. "In what is presented to me as space of light, that which is the gaze is always a play of light and opacity... And if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen, which I called earlier the stain, the spot." Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 96-7. For Lacan the existence of this spot is linked to the phenomenon of castration.

3. During a conference organized by the Kitchen Center, New York in the fall of 1980, Jean-Pierre Gorin, ex-collaborator with Godard on this 'militant' movie, and a filmmaker himself, made a very relevant comment on the scene in *Every Man for Himself*: Isabelle Huppert (who plays a prostitute) is naked next to an anonymous film extra. The two have been called to a hotel room by a rich man to have sex with him and his assistant. Gorin was remarking on the "duck-like quality" of the star, who even naked and playing the role of a girl who sells her body, looked like a 'million dollar star', in contrast to the \$20/hr extra whom the john — and the film director — forced to repeat "my teats, they aren't that great". For Gorin this scene showed how much Godard was conscious of the violence at work in a film studio, and of the "work of death".

4. An example of "collage" within the depth of field, this is probably also an historical reference. It was said that, after the repression of the Paris Commune, some bourgeois women came to "defecate" on the dead bodies of the Rebels.

5. poule: literally "hen". In 19th century and early 20th century popular language, any woman considered a 'cheap and easy lay', whether the woman was a prostitute or not. The famous courtesans, at the same time, were called "cocotte", which is the children's name for "hen".

6. *Here and Elsewhere* started with the reorganization of some footage taken in 1970, a few months before the destruction of Palestinian camps in Jordan (Black September). The movie was partially funded by the PLO and was a militant endeavour, called *Jusqu'à la Victoire*. The death of the people shown in the film raised a moral issue for Godard who could never complete the film. Four years later, he reworked the footage showing the images of the Palestinian camp with a translation of what the militants were actually saying, rather than using them as a "cover" for his own theoretical texts. The film also examined the relationship between war in the Middle East and the social/political situation in France. It was the product of a close collaboration with Anne-Marie Miéville, whose voice intervenes in the film to "reform" the political "false consciousness" of Godard.

7. I think it is time to give away political labels — to be a "marxist" means nothing in terms of marxist economics: it is an ideological statement that says nothing about the speaker's actual role in the distribution of surplus-value. It is perhaps more appropriate to say: I am an English teacher/a bricklayer/a filmmaker/a cook/a housewife/a computer engineer etc...with marxist beliefs. It would be less dogmatic and more accurate.

8. The original quotation is by Pierre Reverdy, an early French Surrealist.

9. Lacan, *Encore*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1975, p. 103.

10. Refer to footnote 2.

FEBRUARY 1984



Courtesy NY Film Festival

The curse of a fake bank-note follows Bresson's working-class victims through a tragedy of coincidences

## L'Argent

André Bresson  
France

THOUGH I HAVE LESS SPACE TO discuss Bresson's most recent film, I don't want to give the impression that it is a lesser achievement than that of Godard's. There were two — for me, only two — exceptionally powerful films at the New York Film Festival this year: *Passion* and *L'Argent*. As different, however, as their authors.

Bresson's style goes in the direction of a greater and greater terseness: very few camera movements, extreme precision of the editing, reduction of the color spectrum, "non-acting", non-professional performers. It has been said that it was Bresson's return to the esthetics of *Pickpocket*. The difference is that the hero's behaviour in *Pickpocket* was based in psychological and ideological motivations, while Yvon of *L'Argent* is no longer the subject of his own fate. This is supreme degree of alienation: the relationships between objects have re-

placed the relationships between the people as motivation.

Everything starts with an event which is neither featured nor described in the film: an unpaid debt. As a kind of 'primal scene', the origin of the debt — the origin of money<sup>1</sup> is deliberately kept 'off-screen'.

A young bourgeois, 15-17, owes money to "someone in school". He tries to talk his father into increasing his monthly allowance, but the father does not even listen, and gives him the usual sum. Panicking, the kid calls his best friend, who, for reasons left unexplained, has come across a fake \$100 bill. To change it, they go and buy a cheap frame at a nearby photo store. The saleswoman, seduced by their expensive clothes and their good manners, accepts the bank-note. In the evening, her boss furiously discovers that she has unsuspectingly accepted in the same day not one but three fake \$100 bills. How to get rid of them? The next day, Yvon, who delivers oil, presents an invoice for his company. He is paid with the three fake bills. His misfortune leads him to a restaurant for his lunch, where he



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