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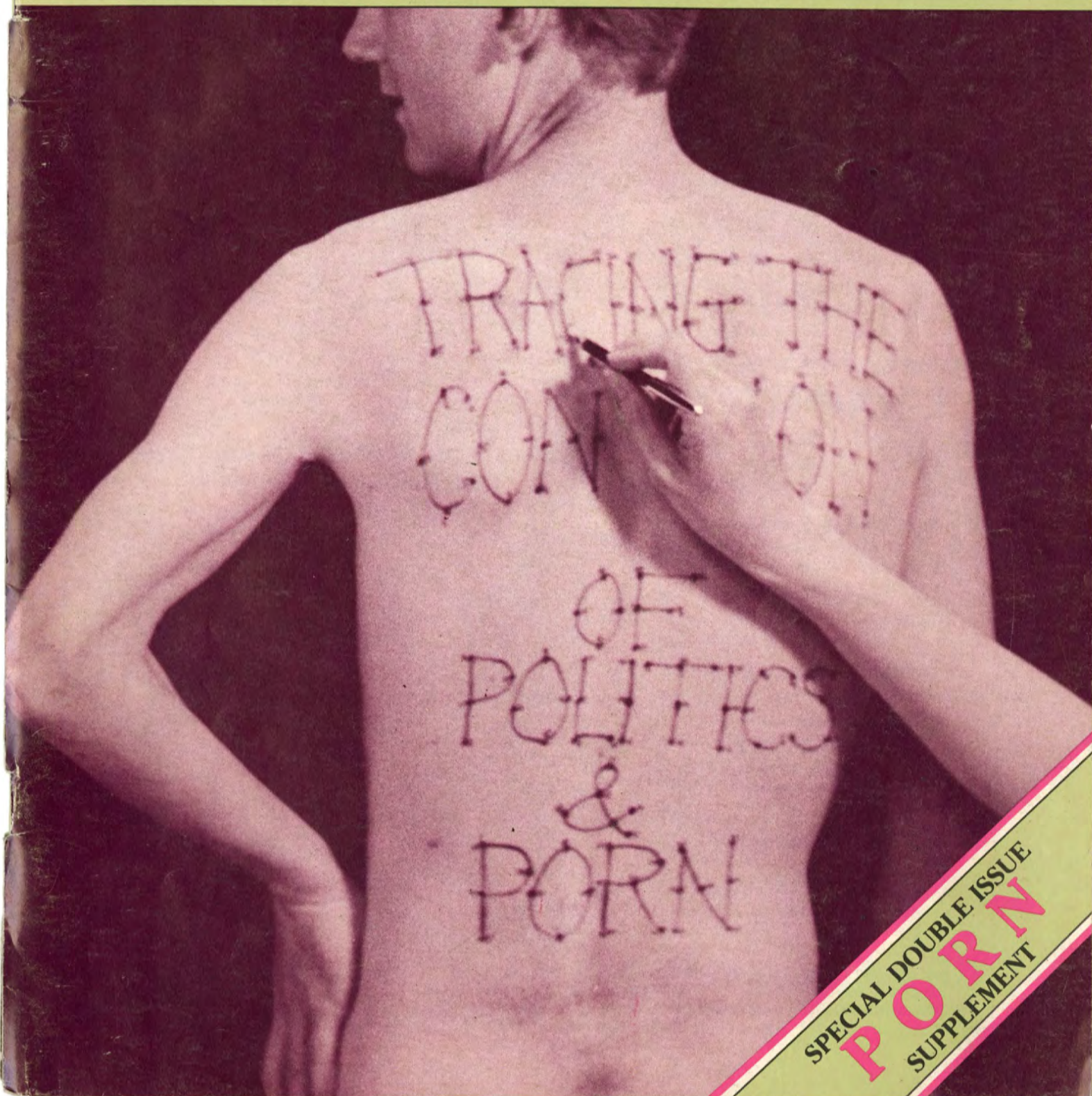
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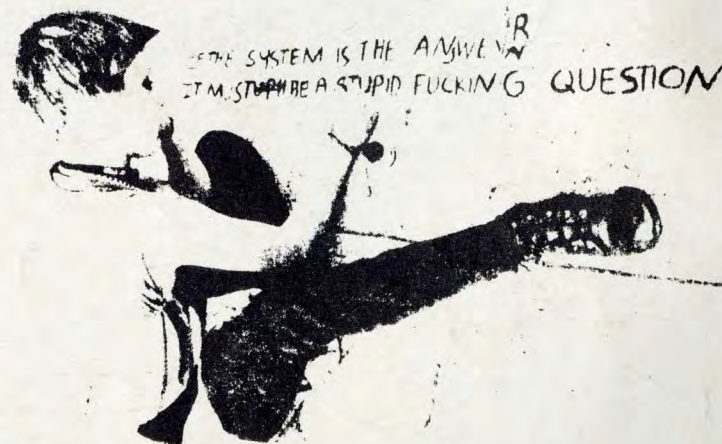
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FUSE & Artists Rights

TWO ISSUES AGO FUSE PUBLISHED one of my cartoons in the article "Building Culture With a Woman's Perspective" by Banuta Rubess. The following issue you printed a letter from Eleanor Wachtel naming me as the artist of the cartoon and *Room of One's Own* as the magazine in which my cartoon had originally been printed. Therefore imagine my shock at seeing my drawing "People Against the Budget" on the cover of FUSE incorrectly attributed to Gordon Gamble (the technician who had helped me silk screen the Solidarity Poster), and the picture physically altered to fit some graphic design concept. (One of my pet artistic peeves.)

In an effort to track down this mistake I called Sara Diamond, [editor] of the B.C. Solidarity Supplement. She informed me that she had gotten the information from Mary Bechler (another technician who had run off many of the Solidarity posters). At that point I recognized that an honest mistake had been made and that FUSE had asked about the artist. EXCEPT FOR ONE THING! My image had been changed. If you had made the effort to get hold of the artist before liberties had been taken with another person's art, you would have discovered your error. In fact your own policy statement in the front of FUSE states that nothing may be reproduced without permission.

I found it interesting that this spring issue also had an article on the problems that free lance artists have. ("Free Lancers in the Arts" by Joanne Kates and Jane Springer). They talk about our valuable skill and how we seldom get paid for the hours we work. They talk about the difficulty in organizing artists into unions. As a very active member of a local artists' union I have found that getting artists into the union is the easy part; getting artists to stick up for their rights, getting galleries to respect contracts, publications to realize that art is not in the public domain, and getting artists' fees is much harder. After all, in this philistine society artists are a dime a dozen. If one causes trouble get another.

This issue was chucked full of things

on this subject. It also included a letter on plagiarism and how ripped off Dionne Brand felt when her work was used without credit (not by FUSE). Let me quote, "Now I don't mind people using my work, sometimes I don't even mind getting the minimal fee for my work. What I do mind is people not acknowledging that they use my work. When that happens, then I feel ripped off."

I like FUSE magazine. I like your perspective and your philosophy. I feel that you are filling an important void. I was amazed that a good leftist magazine with your consciousness would print an artist's work without checking with the artist. And to change it, I'm left speechless! I regularly work for leftist causes for nothing, and had you asked me I'm sure we would have come to an agreement about my image. I would enjoy sending you political cartoons in the future. In fact I'm enclosing a photograph of a painting of the B.C. Cabinet which I made while on a Canada Council B Grant with its statement. (See, you can do political art on a grant, at least once.) I hope you consider it timely. I am also asking for a TWO year subscription (value \$24.) of FUSE instead of payment for my cover graphic.

—Jeannie Kamins
Vancouver, B.C.

Dumb Headline

WE WERE DISMAYED TO SEE AN otherwise fine layout of our article ("Freelancers in the Arts" Spring 1984) marred by a head we had not composed — or ever imagined!

Above a section detailing the histories of two organizations we helped found and organize is the head (in a point size much larger than any of the other heads), "Case Histories in False Consciousness". Although we are critical of these organizations, the condescension implied by this heading is in no way a part of our analysis.

Using a concept as ideologically laden and ill-defined as "false consciousness" is a mistake we didn't make — and we wish you hadn't, in our names.

Jane Springer and Joanne Kates

EDITORIAL RESPONSE: FUSE

acknowledges and appreciates the criticisms contained within the letters above. While we are far from perfect, we will make every effort not to repeat these, or invent new ones.

Critics Grants

WHILE INDIVIDUAL GRANTS TO artists are an interim substitute for a guaranteed living wage, it is to our collective advantage to ensure that such funding mechanisms are both fair and equitable. Similarly, it is the responsibility of the program funding officers to assemble peer juries that are seen to be representative of the defined constituency.

In 1981, a group of Toronto writers approached the Ontario Arts Council for the purpose of setting up an Assistance to Art Critics program. The OAC then held several 'soundings' — inviting existing art and artist magazine writers, artists, curators and other critics. The lobbying writers' group (which included Rick Rhodes and Philip Monk) put forward the argument that it was preferable for the process of adjudication to be independent of the existing magazines so that the writers could remain 'independent'. The assembled magazine editors informed the meeting that although many had yet to succeed in getting adequate funding to pay their contributors, they would not oppose the new program. It was agreed by consensus that the new program should support a broad cross-section of visual arts writing including cultural research and criticism.

Since the program began, I have made two unsuccessful applications — despite the fact that my writing has been widely published for more than ten years.

Following the first three competitions, as the then Managing Editor of FUSE, I made an appointment with Nancy Huishan, OAC officer responsible for the new program and its jury selection. As the competition results had evidenced a certain bias and narrow jury composition, I presented, on that occasion, a list of twenty potential jury members for future consideration. The list contained a broad representa-

Continued on page 8

Pornography as Metaphor

JOYCE MASON

I WILL BEGIN HERE WITH ONE word — a word with which our editorial discussions for this issue began — pornography. The use of the word often ran obstinately contrary to generally accepted or literal meanings: "Nancy Reagan astride a rocking horse on the cover of *LIFE*, that's pornographic!". But all examples remained in the realm of mass media representations of (political) power: the militarisation of male sexuality (the sexualisation of the military), the commodification of sexuality (the sexualisation of commodities), the militarisation and sexualization of politicians, the distribution of power and pleasure.

The question is, why do we so easily ascribe the word 'pornography' to the world of politics? — easily and insistently taking it from its literal meaning, its dictionary definition.

porn o-, comb. form of Gk *porne* harlot, as: *oc'racy*, dominant influence of harlots, esp. in government of Rome in 10th c.; *og'raphy*, description of manners etc. of harlots, treatment of obscene subjects in literature, inflammatory literature, so *og'rapher* n., *ograph'ic* a.

'Pornography' and 'pornographic' are words which have a literal meaning, any other use is metaphoric. The word 'pornographic' as used earlier, functions as a metaphor — as a statement of identity ("it is porn"), rather than a statement of comparison ("it's like porn"). A metaphor is just that — a statement of identity between subject and symbol. As with any good metaphor, the statement of identity illuminates both symbol and subject. They charge each other with new meaning.

Pornography, from its dictionary definition, is the realm of representation where the social organisation of sexuality and economy meet — sex (or its representation) is exchanged for money. But what then, is the meaning of the 'graphic depiction of harlots', in its economic and political manifestations, rather than in terms of sexuality or genitalia?

In this brief exploration of meaning I will raise only two issues:

representation: Pornography — as the representation of whores — is not condoned, *not* because of its nature (representation), but because of *what* it represents. Its disapprobation is rooted in the belief that to represent is to condone.

power: In all cases (both literal and figurative), that which is not condoned is, on some level, the power of an other. The power of the 'harlot' — the power of female sexuality? — is mythological (though I have not researched 10th c. Rome, I suspect its status as 'pornocracy' is to some extent mythic). Other 'powers' — such as those of the death squads in El Salvador, of men to abuse women with impunity, of American cultural and economic imperialism — are real.

It is easy to see, given these moral (ideological) connotations, why war, politics, power struggles and violence can easily be included in an ever-broadening use of the term and to see why feminists, right-wingers and others may all agree in naming a particular image pornographic, though their reasons for disapprobation will have different roots. The disapprobation inherent in the word's literal meaning is due to its representation of a mythic and absolute power as well as the need for the social control of sex-

uality; its metaphoric use is in relation to reality.

When it is said that pornography tells lies about women, the reference is to the mythic quality (this is pornography's literal meaning); but, though it obviously misrepresents women, it tells more than lies. Its horror, for most of us, is rather in the *truths* that it reveals about our lives. If hatred of women were a myth, its representation would not be a problem.

Such a term, loaded with this conflation of truth and myth, is volatile. It can be and is used by existing powers to control ideological choices and to inject systems of social control and repression with moral righteousness. Because of this, we must work towards a fuller understanding of the term, so that our use of it will not further feed the power of a system which defines and controls dominant meaning.

Joyce Mason

Corrections and Apologies

FUSE Spring 1984 (page 268) "B.C. Solidarity": The support strike started on November 8th — not on the 15th.

In addition to errors noted in the "Letters" column, we would like to apologise to:

Bev Davies, who was not credited for her photograph of board members at the new VAG opening ceremonies (page 277 of FUSE Spring 1984);

Clara Cirasella, who was not credited for her photograph of Alix Dobkin (p. 255, FUSE Spring 1984);

and our own Sandra Gregson, who was not credited for her illustrations in "Freelancers in the Arts" (FUSE Spring 1984).

Kootenays. The city council of Nelson is fighting the provincial government to enable it to take over administration of the centre.

The NDP leadership race is underway. Margaret Birrell, a strong feminist and fighter for trade union rights is running to revitalize the party's role in opposing the government. She has fought for the full promise of Solidarity (restoration of social services, trade union rights, etc.) as part of her campaign. The support of other candidates for Solidarity is more qualified. In November Barrett and the NDP refused to support the strikers. The leadership debate has placed the NDP back in the public eye as an opposition force.

While B.C. residents watch the EXPO slogan "Man in Motion" whirl at us through high tech t.v. ads, many of us feel unsure of our future: Will the upcoming months bring motion sickness or a revitalized Solidarity?

Sara Diamond

Bill C-24 & the CC: Who'll be in Control?

Living in the late nuclear age may be irrelevant when it comes to the speed of legislative action and reform, but when governments head into that condition of pre-election panic, it seems that anything can happen — and happen very quickly. Which is to say that by the time you read this there is a possibility that The Canada Council's existence as an independent, arm's length cultural agency may be no more. In its place could be The Canada Council, Crown Corporation, governed under Schedule C, Part One, of the newly amended *Financial Administration Act*. The Council would then be governed in the illustrious company of VIA Rail Canada Inc., Defence Construction (1951) Ltd., Canada Post and about thirty-five other non-cultural crown corporations.

Timed, as these matters are, for optimum political gain, Mr. Herb Gray President of the Treasury Board recently tabled "New Legislative Proposals for the Control and Accountability of Crown Corporations". Bill C-24 has already been read in Parliament and is being submitted to a

Parliamentary committee where it is expected to be obstructed long enough for it not to survive this session of Parliament. However, it will inevitably be re-introduced by the new governing Tories or the new governing "left of centre" Liberals, because government self-control and accountability are believed to be among the most popular part costumes to be worn before an angry electorate.

The Canada Council has formally protested its inclusion in Bill C-24 stating that "it would subject the Council to new forms of Government control". Council believes its accountability is well-served by the existing legislation — The Canada Council Act (1957). Furthermore, the Council's objection is strongly supported within the recent Federal Cultural Policy Committee's Report. And just to confuse those who would like to believe in the durability of the funding status quo, the Minister of Communications currently responsible for The Canada Council, Francis Fox, was seen on television supporting the Council's position despite the fact that officials within his Department have admitted that they agreed with the inclusion of The Canada Council within the new controlling legislation.

Super civil servant and the D.O.C.'s Assistant Deputy Minister, David Silcox (who would remain in his position of power even if the Rhinoceros Party were to get elected) claims that the Council's fears of the increased threat of direct political interference amounts to "paranoia". Not surprisingly, it is the likes of Mr. Silcox that keeps the officers, middle and upper management of the Canada Council, awake at night. The arts lobby that could eventually keep the government out of the Council's filing system does have a high media profile, but it is rather short on numbers. It also includes the likes of ourselves, whose political engagement is often ambiguous, half-hearted and even at times organizationally conservative. The ongoing struggle for control between the D.O.C. and The Canada Council is further complicated by the D.O.C.'s ability to finance larger and more attractive programs (definitely government controlled) including new plans for Film and Video currently going

through Cabinet which will be announced before the appearance of this report.

Tim Porteous, Director of The Canada Council, recently outlined what could be the expected changes arising from C-24 or subsequent legislation. There are three main areas of government control:

- Power of directives.
 - Submission of an annual corporate plan.
 - Government's right to change The Canada Council's By-laws.
- The directives would be tabled in Parliament and responsibility for them would clearly rest with the government. In the statement of objectives of C-24 there is a paragraph that states:

"The government considers it inappropriate to issue directives that could be construed as interference in cultural activities that Parliament has entrusted to certain Crown Corporations. The Bill therefore provides that no directive could be issued to The Canada Council, the CBC, the CFDC or the National Arts Center Corporation dealing with the form or content of a project, production or broadcast program. The same prohibition would apply to directives concerning the provision of financial assistance by these corporations to any person or group. Any other directive issued to these corporations would be tabled in Parliament, and the Bill provides that no action on the directive could be taken until 30 days after tabling."

Frankly, these reassurances, echoed by Mr. Silcox who said, "it would be an intrepid politician who would choose to interfere on a day-to-day basis", are not very comforting. Despite the Council's arm's-length protection, the Seventies were littered with reactionary members of Parliament jumping out of their seats to object to Council's support for various Explorations projects, Pulp Press, bill bissett, CEAC — the list is both long and well remembered. The government's current promise of long-term ethical intentions has to be weighed against their record of using job creation programs, urban development projects and so on as handy-to-use, quick-to-apply political glue for any amount of electoral fence mending. The fact that the Minister of Communications has just given The

Canada Council an extra \$3 million with "no strings attached" has undoubtedly been timed to buy the Arts votes just prior to a crucial election.

The Canada Council's own analysis of Bill C-24's new "power of directives" suggests that in future it would be possible for government to insist that certain Council monies are proportionately distributed geographically to target regions, or even specific constituencies. This by itself would interfere with the Council's own analysis of appropriate subsidy distribution.

The second area of increased control is the requirement to provide a corporate plan which, as a demand, contains both overt and subtle threats. Hitherto departments like the Treasury Board may have disagreed with certain decisions made by The Canada Council, but without the full responsibility they were under no compulsion to act. One of the principles of C-24 states: "By statute the government will be responsible for the strategic and budget decisions of all parent Crown corporations."

The Treasury Board could simply take control of investment decisions, which would threaten the Council's control over its own Endowment Fund. In fact, the Endowment Fund could simply be removed if decisions were made to suggest better investment potential elsewhere. The Department of Communications could also strengthen its objection to the Council's involvement in Film and Video to the extent that part of the 'corporate plan' would be formally refused. Past disagreements, such as the Council's funding to service organizations (like ANNPAC), could become disapprovals. The fact that at times of evaluation, the entire network of Canadian service organizations has supported the Council and not the government could theoretically be changed by the government directly controlling the source of funding. Government economists disapprove of grants to individuals, allegedly because it makes it difficult to define and trace where such subsidies re-enter the economy. It is therefore considered an "inefficient" use of subsidy in the schema of accountable management. The subtleties of the new powers, the Council readily admits, could finally have the

most effect. The existing Crown Corporations and the government have not historically shared the same operational priorities. Examples have included government interference with Air Canada's choice of who should be awarded advertising contracts. (There are those infamous Liberal and Conservative supporting major advertising agencies. Air Canada happened to choose the "wrong" one.) Bill C-24 itself came about partially as a reaction to the furor caused by the Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. activities that included bribing international agents who were purchasing Canadian nuclear reactors. The business of selling nuclear reactors just happens to include bribery.

Mr. Porteous admits that the ongoing struggle between Council's and the government's agenda could only become more intense under the proposed legislation. The end result would inevitably be more caution on the part of Council. We can, as artists and as workers within artist organizations, identify with this hesitancy — if only because criticism of the Council itself often stops short because of the possible threat of interference with the securing of our own personal grants. Under Bill C-24, all personnel within the Council who are not classified as civil servants will have virtually no job security. Government appointments of new personnel at the top would contribute to their functioning as disguised cabinet messengers. The Council, at least publicly, is not objecting to more stringent procedures of accountability; but there would be, for their underfunded client organizations, a definite limit to how much more increased administrative costs they could accept or bear.

Bill C-24 requires two separate plans of action. The first is for all affected individuals and organizations to lobby on behalf of The Canada Council's independence as guaranteed by The Canada Council Act. This effort should be directed to the Minister of Communications, the Minister of State for Social Development (currently Senator Jack Austin) and through all other regular channels. The second plan — as this matter of control of The Canada Council is the core issue — is for artists to re-evaluate such mechanisms that exist

(such as the Arts Advisory Panel) that could allow for our own agenda of priorities. If the Canada Council is worth keeping as an arm's length agency, it is also worth further democratizing its internal structure to improve the sharing of power and responsibility between its clientele and itself. The Canada Council prides itself comparatively with similar cultural funding agencies in other countries, but given the unused opportunities that a limited independence provides, the funding model could and must be greatly improved.

Clive Robertson is the Founding Editor of FUSE magazine. This report first appeared in *Parallelogramme*, April 1984.

Macauley: Whatever Friends You've Got

In November 1983 the members of *The Special Committee for the Arts in Ontario* (the Macaulay Committee) were told of a study which "revealed" that sixty-one percent of the public recommended that if reductions in government spending were necessary the arts should be the first to be cut. The committee's own survey showed that seventy-seven percent of respondents, when told the proportion of public money actually spent on the arts, would be willing to pay between \$5 and \$25 annually to maintain such support.

On November 25, 1982 the "big six" art institutions in Ontario — the National Ballet, Canadian Opera Company, Toronto Symphony, and the Stratford, Shaw and Toronto Arts Productions theatres — sent a letter to the Ontario Arts Council asking for \$3.1 million that year simply to restore their funding to 1974 levels.

These two happenings overwhelmingly set the agenda for the Macaulay committee, which reported April 6. The arts seem an easy area for the Treasury to make cuts in government spending. The major prestige cultural institutions, under increasing financial pressure, try to flex whatever political muscle they may possess.

In a commendable attempt to defend "the Arts" the committee speaks in the language of economic benefits and costs, and of contributions to developing a national culture and identity. It's a useful defence, but all

other discourses about cultures and artistic practices are thereby set aside. The domination by Toronto of cultural production seems almost to be a matter for celebration. Unless, of course, you happen to be writing in North Bay, or even Fredericton. The centralizing of publishing and the arts in London is regularly attacked by the English, Welsh and Scottish arts communities, but Macaulay's recommendations for touring theatres and art shows barely touches the matter of Toronto's attempt to dominate the arts and the culture industries in Canada.

Macaulay's approach in terms of economics and institutions also by and large sets aside issues of cultural politics. The committee recommends a better deal for individual artists who are understood as underpaid, unsecured employees. What doesn't get allowed is the potential importance of oppositional artistic formations. Groups of people around A-Space, *The Body Politic*, the Womens' Cultural Building Collective, Trinity Square Video, the Funnel, don't fit into the Macaulay discourse. The function of these alternative institutions in training artists, writers, performers, technicians, and the collective development of ideas, techniques and talents may seem too dangerous. And rightly so.

Put another way, the problems for Macaulay are poor economic management (including unsatisfactory long-term public funding) and massive American competition. But from the point of view of oppositional artistic formations, an American socialist art network, a Boston gay community newspaper, a U.S. feminist collective and journal, a New York political film group: these are certainly not part of what has to be resisted. The block isn't "international" competition *per se* or poor financial management. The block is the dead weight of conformity and cultural hegemony in both the U.S. and Canada. So if you're a member of an oppositional art network what do you say to Macaulay? You stress the artistic innovation that has always come from outside any "big six" institutions, and then, in a tough world, you take whatever friends you've got.

Alan O'Connor studies and teaches cultural politics at York University.

Letters, Continued from page 2

tion of arts writers in Ontario (most of whom would not automatically leap up and award me a grant). Recently the sixth 'Assistance to Art Critics' programme competition results were announced. Fifteen out of twenty-four (62.5%) of the awards were granted to those who serve on juries.

JURY	AWARDS
1) John Bentley Mays	1) Philip Monk*
Dr. David Burnett	Jennifer Oille*
Walter Klepac	Jeanne Randolph*
2) Judith Doyle	2) Tim Guest*
Peggy Gale	Goldie Rans
Jennifer Oille	Rick Rhodes*
	Robert Stacey
3) Tim Guest	3) Renee Baert
Dennis Reid	Bruce Elder*
Rick Rhodes	Walter Klepac*
	Elke Town*
4) Bruce Elder	4) J. Bentley Mays*
Ian Carr-Harris	Philip Monk*
Jeanne Randolph	Don Synder
	Alish Farrell
5) Philip Monk	5) Renee Baert
Diana Nemiroff	Rick Rhodes*
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6) Peggy Gale	6) Gary M. Dault
Rick Rhodes	Bruce Grenville
Maia Sutnik	Tim Guest*
	Walter Klepac*
	Philip Monk*
	Carla Murray

* denotes jury member.

Writings from the successful 'independent' critics have appeared most visibly in *Vanguard*, *C-Magazine*, *Parachute*, and the *Globe & Mail*. Magazine editors that have been omitted from the jury system include *Fireweed*, *Asianadian*, *The Clarion*, *The Body Politic*, *Broadside*, *TKO*, and *Fuse*.

This program needs both improvement and expansion. I hope that other writers will apply, as well as send to the OAC, their list of potential jurors.

— Clive Robertson, Toronto

Errata

IN HER VERY INTERESTING review of Rose English's Montreal performance (FUSE, February 1984), Martha Fleming has neglected to mention that it was *Powerhouse Gallery* that sponsored and organized the event. Thank you for your attention.

Barbara Steinman
Powerhouse, Montreal

Response

I WOULD LIKE TO RESPOND TO Dionne Brand's accusation, in your last issue, that (a) I ripped off her work and (b) I am dishonest.

As Dionne says in her letter, I asked for and received permission from her to use excerpts from her book, *Primitive Offensive* in last summer's Pelican Players show, *Ancestor Stick*. As she also points out, a royalty cheque was sent to her, although this is not usual practice when performances are free. Of course, full credit was given in the programme.

Frankly, I'm mystified. If this is a rip-off, perhaps more people would like to rip off my work!

I like Dionne's poems very much. Of a 35 minute theatre piece, something like 4 minutes consisted of a dramatized reading of one of her poems. Beyond feeling that the poem worked well in the context of the rest of the material, my purpose in using it was to gain a wider audience for Dionne's work. It's unfortunate she was unable to see the production. I can't help but think she would have been pleased with the treatment.

As for the 'genesis' of the piece, neither Dionne nor myself invented the idea of trying to understand the present through a search for a lost cultural past. Different artists will interpret the same thematic material differently. Along with the actors who collaborated on the piece, I take full responsibility for our version.

It is customary, I believe, for publications such as yours to allow people to respond to an attack — especially a personal one — in the issue in which it appears. This courtesy would have been appreciated.

Robin Belitsky Endres
Artistic Director
Pelican Players Neighbourhood
Theatre

Distortions and Liberal Intentions

Pandering to the Unwitting Subtleties of Racism

MARLENE PHILIP

White Dog

Directed by Samuel Fuller
Produced by N.B.C.
Televised in Canada on First Choice.

A WHITE GERMAN SHEPHERD IS accidentally run over by a car. The driver takes it home to care for it. During its convalescence the dog is absent for a while, and returns covered in blood. It is soon apparent that it is human blood, and that the dog has been trained to kill Blacks by its owner, who is portrayed as an elderly white gentleman of rather gentle disposition. With the help of two trainers, one of whom is a Black man, the driver of the car, a woman named Julie, attempts to retrain the dog rather than destroy it. Although the dog has been caught in the act of killing a Black person, the Black trainer, played by Paul Winfield, continues his efforts to retrain the dog.

The moral of the film may be said to be obvious — that racism is wrong, and that it is learnt behaviour which can be unlearned. Despite the obvious, this movie was withdrawn in the United States. The makers of the film, NBC, argued that the film was an anti-racist film; the NAACP*, that despite its purported anti-racist motives, it was in effect racist. The lines were drawn, and the NAACP won this round and succeeded in having the film withdrawn. Due to relaxed Pay T.V. criteria, the film was allowed to be shown here in Canada to the accompanying praise of at least one reviewer, Jim Bowden of the *Toronto Star*, who recommended it as reason enough to obtain Pay T.V. — so impressed was he with the film. There was some debate of the issue in the Black newspaper *Contrast*, with the general

* National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People.

feeling about the airing of the film being a negative one.

The film raises several important issues, not the least of which is: who decides, in a society that is inherently and often openly racist, whether an action, book or film is or is not racist. Once you move beyond those blatant and gross examples of racism into the grey areas of good intentions and well meaning motives, this issue becomes an extremely difficult and complex one. At the risk of being clichéd, I shall state the obvious: the society in which



Paul Winfield tries to 'retrain' this symbol of a racist society

we live is very much a White society, by which I mean that the values it espouses, the images it portrays, the behaviour it rewards and punishes, are all deeply rooted in a predominantly Anglo-Saxon world. This is in turn rooted in the Old World, the European world (primarily Western Europe). Other cultural and/or racial groups are tolerated to a lesser or greater degree, depending on the political milieu of the times.

Belonging therefore to a racial and cultural group that is not part of the predominant culture means that an ac-

quisition of one's individual culture is concurrent with the acquisition of an understanding of what that world — the White world for the sake of brevity — is all about. How Whites think, how and what they think about us and the world, what their responses are to any given circumstance; all constitute information that is gathered and stored for future or present use. This understanding or attempt at understanding, which fortunately I believe to be a lifetime task, arises, not out of a desire to become white — quite the contrary — but as a survival skill. Neither is the acquisition of this skill always a conscious one or only present where Blacks are a minority.

Even in predominantly Black Caribbean societies, with very little overt contact with Whites, this process is at work. Although predominantly Black in composition, the values of these societies were, and to a large degree continue to be, colonial or neo-colonial, i.e., Anglo-Saxon and often Victorian or American. I have suggested elsewhere (letter, *Contrast*, *Globe & Mail*) that the prevalence of these values is one of the reasons why in the fall of 1983 American troops were welcomed by some Grenadians.

It could be that this double vision, this way of viewing the world simultaneously through one's own eyes and through those of the colonizer, the oppressor, the patriarch, is common to all oppressed groups. This stage is definitely an improvement over the former stage of seeing the world only through the eyes of the oppressor.

The ideal, however, is not that of seeing the world only from one perspective (for that is in part what the problem is) but a lessening of the need for this double vision. This can only come from a radical change within society.



Paramount Pictures

Kristy McNicol shares her burger with the killer dog

It shouldn't, but it still surprises me when once again I realize how very little the Black psyche, as conditioned by life in the western world, is understood. It surprises me because understanding or trying to understand the White psyche is part of my education — a sort of street-proofing — that I can never afford to neglect entirely. It is a luxury that continued survival does not allow. The reverse is not true for Whites, and for very obvious reasons.

So, to return to *White Dog*: who decides? Whose eyes are more capable of comprehending when a racist act is being done? Surely not those of the oppressor, who often does not understand and does not care to understand the world of the oppressed. This is not to suggest that only members of oppressed groups are able to detect prejudice and racism, but to offer a corrective — to put in perspective the defense of the film on the grounds of the film maker's good intentions, and also to reveal the discrepancies and the divergence of consciousness between the oppressor and the oppressed.

Let us for the moment accept that Fuller's intentions were noble, that he intended to make an anti-racist film. Let us assume that the white dog was allegorical — albeit a simple use of allegory for a complex issue — to reveal the moral that racism is something learnt, and susceptible to being unlearned. He would have us believe that the solution lies in reprogramming or retraining the in-

dividual.

If this is what Fuller was doing, then he has failed and for these reasons: humans, unlike dogs, are social creatures, to be found in groups. They tend to organize their lives around organizations and institutions which reflect and reinforce their biases and prejudices. To therefore suggest, as Fuller does, that one can take an individual and retrain him/her without attempting to change the institutional and social causes of those biases, is to give very short shrift to a very complex issue — to simplify it to the point of distortion. Why was the dog being reprogrammed and not the owner who had trained it?

To take the allegory further: no one with an understanding of American history as it relates to Blacks could watch *White Dog* and not recall the history of Black slaves who, trying to escape, were tracked by dogs. Then, it was because slave owners viewed their slaves as their property; today, in *White Dog* at least, there is no such attempt at validation (albeit unacceptable). In view of the failure of the central allegory, this detail only becomes psychologically oppressive. One is tempted to ask: no longer being property, is our only fate to be killed by dogs?

Wanting, as much as possible, to give Fuller the benefit of the doubt, I thought that there was possibly a stronger argument to be made for his use of the white dog, not as an allegory

but as a symbol. But being equally susceptible to a literal as well as a symbolic interpretation, its symbolism is considerably weakened, if not destroyed. In other words, it is quite possible to envisage someone in American society doing what this man did with his dog. Being so close to realism, the symbolism fails.

The role of the one Black character raises several issues. In response to the obvious question — why would a Black actor play this role? The answer is another question — how many Black actors do we see in any one month of films in this city, reputed to be one of the film capitals of North America? That is not to excuse his action, if it needs excusing at all, but to put it into material perspective.

There are other issues. It is my opinion that Fuller used a Black character in an attempt to stave off the very criticisms the film generated. We have had our share of Uncle Toms, and will continue to do so, but is it realistic to contemplate a Black man putting his life, and the lives of other Black people, at risk to save a dog trained to kill Blacks? But that is possibly an unfair question if the casting of this character was the mechanism for revealing something else.

That something else is what Jim Bawden of the *Toronto Star* described as the "liberated Black man standing up to prejudice, whether in White men or White dogs". This he says "turns *White Dog* into a violent, yet unforgettable plea for tolerance". And tolerance, as I suggested earlier, is all that Blacks and other peoples of colour will receive until racism is eradicated. Exposing this type of subtle racism, both in the film and in a review like Jim Bawden's, is a part of this task.

His support of the film and the reasons he gives for this support reveal the unspoken assumptions that are the underpinning of this film. The Black character whom Bawden extols serves only to perpetuate the specious image of the greater nobility of the oppressed who will even sacrifice themselves to bring the message to a misguided society. As a White friend once said to me, "Blacks have so much to teach Whites". More than this however, what this character suggests in his actions is that the moral problem of White racism is the problem of the

Continued on page 72

POPULAR THEATRE IN KENYA

WORKING WITH PEASANTS AND WORKERS IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST POVERTY AND OPPRESSION

Popular theatre in the Third World often claims to be a tool of protest and struggle and a means of social transformation but rarely does it challenge the status quo in a significant way. Too often it becomes as marginalized as the peasants and workers it represents, with little real impact on society as a whole.

In Part One, in the last issue of FUSE, Ross Kidd described the formation and early struggles of the Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Center (KCECC), a peasant and worker controlled organization in rural Kenya, whose popular theatre work constitutes a significant exception to the above. Its voicing of protest against injustice and corruption and its championing of workers' rights and popular expression made it a major target for official repression.

ROSS KIDD

PART TWO

PERHAPS THE BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT of the community was the construction of a huge open-air theatre. During the initial public readings of the play the idea of a village theatre was raised and the community decided to go ahead with it. Although expensive to build, it was seen as important to the presentation of the play and a way of making money for the KCECC.

The question then was: how to pay for it? This started one of the most important discussions of the KCECC. People spoke vehemently against the idea of holding a "harambee" rally in

which "big people" pledged contributions to the project. They felt this was a vulgarization of the real Harambee — one in which the whole community joined in a collective physical effort. They said that the new Harambee was just a platform for self-praise, a chance for the *wabenzi*¹ to show off their wealth, which had, anyway, been stolen from the peasants and workers. Having been exploited by the "big people" the peasants and workers didn't want to go begging them for funds to support the project. They also rejected the idea of applying for funds from an



Linda Haridim

Ngugi wa Mirii on the KCECC stage

overseas donor, which they felt might compromise them and introduce another form of dependence.

They proposed instead a "Harambee of Sweat": every villager would contribute ideas and labour and materials to the building of the theatre. The main source of funding for the theatre came from publication of the playscript, by the East African Literature Bureau. (Other publishers turned the script down because it was not in English.) When the issue of selling the playscript was debated by the community, people said this was a legitimate form of Harambee. Everyone in the village had participated in making the script, turning up at the play readings and community rehearsals to give comments and suggest changes. The script was the community's property, the product of their labour — a "Harambee of Sweat".

The weekends were set aside for the theatre building project and a team of young men was selected to take the lead in designing and building the theatre. Working from a model made of matchsticks and using local materials the community constructed a 2,000-seat theatre on the plot beside the community centre.

When it was finished it was favourably compared with the National Theatre in Nairobi and praised as the true national theatre of Kenya — a theatre built by the people, accessible to the people, dealing with their issues and speaking to them in their language and idiom.² (Kahiga, 1977.)

State Repression and Village Resistance

ON 2ND OCTOBER THE PLAY opened. It attracted immediate attention. People came from neighbouring villages and at once the word spread from all over the country. Peasants and workers sat alongside Nairobi businessmen and civil servants — but, according to one correspondent, it was the peasants and workers who laughed and enjoyed themselves the most. It was their lives, their story being enacted on the stage, the first time in Kenya's history that "a play of the people [was] being acted for the people by the people." (Kahiga, 1977.) It played

to an audience of up to 2,000 each Saturday and Sunday. After seven weeks of extremely popular performances, the inevitable happened — it was banned.

The production was too threatening — the ruling class

were mortally scared of peasants and workers who showed no fear in their eyes; workers and peasants who showed no submissiveness in their bearing; workers and peasants who proclaimed their history with unashamed pride and who denounced its betrayal with courage.

(Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981)

When the government saw that the KCECC and its supporters were not backing down, they struck again.

The District Commissioner in the area announced that he was withdrawing the license for the play on grounds that it fomented strife between classes.

The KCECC fought back, through their supporters in the press and in the Kenyan middle class who turned it into a national issue. People flooded the newspapers with protest letters and widened the debate, bringing out the issue of foreign control of Kenyan cultural institutions.

When the government saw that the KCECC and its supporters were not backing down, they struck again. On 31st December 1977, Ngugi wa Thiong'o was detained.

The resulting tension and fear did have an effect. The repression clarified the nature of class forces — i.e., those who supported the villagers' struggle (for survival, political rights and

freedom of expression) and those who worked to undermine it. Although for a number of weeks villagers stopped coming to the centre and waited to see what would happen, finally it increased their determination to continue.

The authorities underestimated the villagers' strength; they didn't understand the broad-based nature of the villagers' organization. They thought that by detaining Ngugi they would break the KCECC. But instead of falling apart, the centre increased its activities, showing that the centre was not dependent on any single individual.

Fresh literacy classes were started with new participants and the enrolment increased to 150 people. The orchestra and choir, which had been created for Ngaahika Ndeenda continued to meet regularly and produced two records — *Ndinguri na Murimi* (The Rich Man and The Poor Peasant) and *Mwiku Mwiku?* (Where are you People?).

The women's group became very active, developing ways of working together for purposes of improving family incomes and supporting each other. They formed a production group and took on contract work, distributing the wages among the members. This collective approach made the women stronger; earlier when each woman on her own had struggled to find work they had been more easily exploited. Now as a group they demanded a fair wage.

The real effect of the repression was external to Kamiriithu. In Kamiriithu the people and KCECC were strong enough to continue despite the harassment. However the banning and detention did stop a ground-swell of peasant-initiated cultural activity in other villages which had been inspired by the Kamiriithu experience. As one committee member put it:

If our efforts had not been clubbed down so suddenly there is no telling how many other centres of its kind would now be in existence.

(Kahiga, 1979)

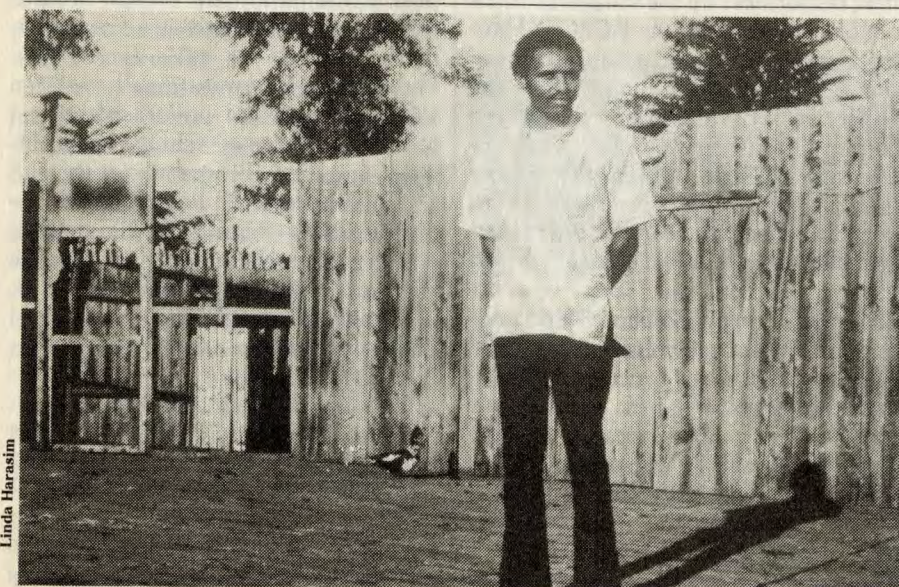
These villages had taken an interest in Kamiriithu's work and had just started to organize a cultural programme with advice from Kamiriithu. When the KCECC was repressed, they gave up out of fear.

The Second Drama and Further Repression

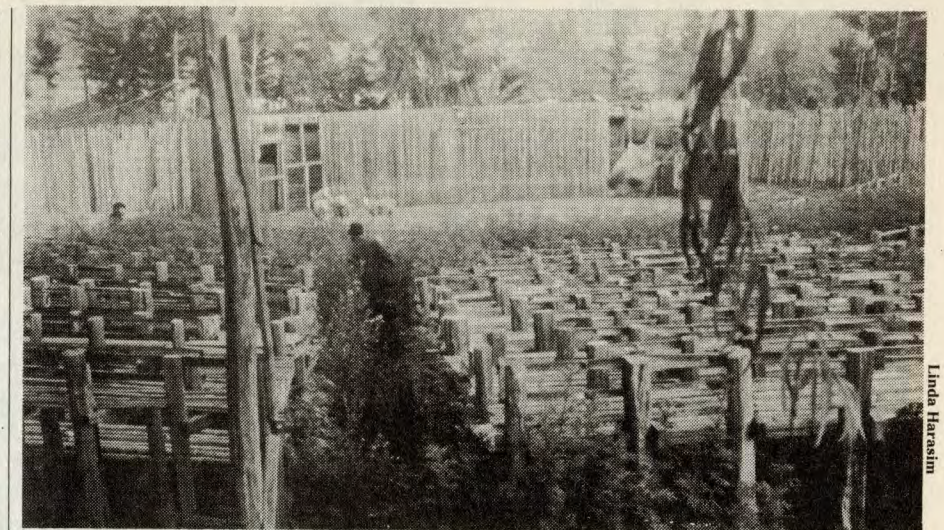
A YEAR AFTER NGUGI'S DETENTION Kenyatta died. The new regime released Ngugi along with other political prisoners. He returned home to Kamiriithu where he received a hero's welcome from the villagers. During his detention he had been fired by the University at the urging of the Kenya government. (Ngugi wa Mirii had been similarly victimized.)

After recovering from his rough treatment in detention, Ngugi started to work with the villagers on a new play *Maitu Njugira* (Mother, Sing to Me). The play this time was historical, rather than contemporary, and it was assumed it would avoid provoking the authorities. The play focuses on the colonial system of control, including brutal suppression and apartheid-type legislation — e.g., forced labour (1806-1919), Vagrancy (1896), Native Passes (1900), Hut Tax (1901), Masters and Servants (1901), etc. It also shows the determined resistance by Kenyans against colonial rule and exploitation by the settlers. The play centres around the resistance songs of various Kenyan nationalities which are sung by the mother to the daughter — a history lesson about Kenya's struggle against foreign domination.

When the rehearsals started 400 people auditioned for the 50 parts! Ngugi was thrilled by the turn-out:



Linda Harasim



Linda Harasim

Two views of the KCECC community theatre — before it was destroyed by the police

After the problems we had over the first play I thought people might be scared off, but this time they came knowing exactly what the problems might be — very conscious.

(Brittain, 1982)

This time the KCECC proposed to perform the play in the National Theatre in Nairobi — partly as a challenge to its neo-colonial practices.³ In the fall of 1981 they wrote to government asking for permission to perform the play. They never received a reply. Government used "ping pong tactics" to avoid responding, passing their letter from department to department. In February 1982, when they showed up at the National Theatre for

final rehearsals the doors were locked and they were prevented from entering. They switched their rehearsals to the University where they performed for ten nights to a packed theatre of over 1,000 people each night. Then the university closed them down, under pressure from the government.

A few days later KCECC's license was withdrawn and the Executive Committee sacked. The theatre group was told they could no longer use the centre and government announced they were taking it over as an adult education study centre. To reinforce the message a squad of police invaded the centre and smashed the theatre — which had been built at great expense and labour by the community — to the ground.

Assessing the Work to Date

THE STRUGGLE BY THE PEASANTS and workers of Kamiriithu will continue. They may have been silenced, their centre taken over, and their theatre destroyed, but their awareness, commitment, and organization will produce new struggles and new forms of protest.

Kenya remains the land of Dedan Kimathi and the Land and Freedom Army (the Mau Mau). No constitutional engineers can wipe this fact from the consciousness of Kenyan workers and peasants.

Their culture of resistance though "repressed, persecuted, and betrayed ..." will live on in "the villages, in the forests and in the spirit of generations of victims of colonialism". (Cabral, 1980.)

Popular Participation and Villagers' Control

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THE Kamiriithu experience? To begin with, the Kamiriithu theatre is "theatre by the people". It has emerged from the masses rather than being imposed by an external force. The peasants and workers make the theatre, not a group of outsiders. They are involved in analyzing their reality and acting out their understanding of their situation, rather than responding to the thinking and analysis of others.

The high level of participation in the Kamiriithu experience has helped to demystify theatre, to show that ordinary villagers can do it, can "rise to heights hitherto unknown and undreamt of in an area of modern performing arts" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981). It represents a reappropriation of culture by the people, of taking back what the ruling class has denigrated as "traditional", or converted into a tourist commodity, a means of glorifying political leadership, or a tool of partisan politics.

But it is more than mere participation. As Williams (1972) has shown, participation can be a sham, people can "participate in their own domestication", i.e., being drawn into a process in which they take part but have no control, in which they are manipulated through their involvement to accept the status quo. The Kamiriithu villagers are not just actors or participants or a cheap source of labour for a community project shaped by others.

They not only contribute their labour — they *control* the process and shape it through their participation and ideas. They started the KCECC, they make all the decisions, they control the finances, and they determine the direction in which it is going. Their meetings are full of frank discussion, criticism and self-criticism. Decisions are made collectively and no indi-

vidual or group is allowed to dominate or appropriate the decision-making process. Their theatre work reflects a similar process. When Ngugi gets locked up, the work continues. No one is indispensable. As one villager put it:

We cannot close the centre if the Ngugi's are not here. If they stopped writing, we would come together and write something.... These two individuals are not the centre; the centre is the members.

(Mutahi, 1982)

The two Ngugi's are simply ordinary members of the KCECC. They chair two of the committees but they have no special status or privileges. They

When Ngugi gets locked up, the work continues. No one is indispensable.

take part in the physical work and are held responsible by the villagers for the actions on behalf of the KCECC. Having observed them in action, I can say that the Ngugi's defer completely to the collective structure and consult the committee on every decision. They are members of the community rather than outside animateurs sent in to organize the community. In effect they are the "organic intellectuals" which Gramsci talked about. They live in the community, have close long-term contacts with peasants and workers.⁴ The relationship is not one-sided, an exercise in paternalism or charity. They learn a great deal from the peasants — about "music and dance and drama — and the meaning of sheer selfless dedication to a communal effort". (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981.) They are "insiders" and when things

get rough they face the same victimization along with the villagers.⁵

Villager control over the KCECC accounts for the high level of participation in KCECC activity. People feel they are working for a project which is theirs, a project which they have helped to shape. Through running the KCECC, people begin to feel more in control of their lives. As Ngugi wa Mirii commented in analyzing the literacy work:

The poor will never change as long as the pivot upon which their cultural life is governed is not under their control.

People's Organization: An Ongoing Movement

KAMIRIITHU'S SECOND distinguishing feature is its organization. It is the organization which has been the vehicle for popular control over the organizing process. It is the organization which gives the work continuity. Without it the work would have stopped at the first sign of repression.

The creation of the KCECC has also made it possible to link drama with a community transformation process. Drama becomes one part of a larger and on-going experience rather than simply a one-off event.

In other popular theatre experiences in Africa the problem has always been: what happens next? An individual performance may spark a lot of discussion, participation and critical insight, but once it's over there is no organizational vehicle to take it further. People's consciousness may have been raised but without an organizational base for follow-up action all the interest and momentum stops at the end of the performance. In Kamiriithu the creation of an organization has made it possible to make drama an organic part of an on-going movement — illustrating that people come to a critical class consciousness, not in an abstract intellectual exercise but in the process of building an organization and struggling for their rights. The drama is part of a broader community effort, a struggle by the peasants and workers to transform Kamiriithu. In this context, drama is not the primary mobilizing agent for community action nor the



Linda Harasim

The KCECC building, where the literacy classes and committee meetings are held

main source of learning; it is "drama-within-a-process" — one of a number of interconnected activities which serve a broader aim of building a people's organization and struggling against oppression.

Of course this kind of work doesn't go on without a reaction from the dominant class. They can ignore the one-time, outside-in theatre experiments or the theatre of political rhetoric for the middle class. But a theatre which is rooted in and organized by the peasantry is more threatening. It isn't just the play and the exposure of corruption which concerns them, but the organization and the organizational capacity which lies behind the play, the fact that peasants and workers have shown that they can organize for themselves, that they can develop things without bourgeois patronage or bureaucratic influence. The peasants' awareness that they can

develop their own organization is in itself threatening, because this kind of independent organizing can spread to other areas.

Popular Content: Advancing Consciousness

ANOTHER STRENGTH OF THE Kamiriithu theatre is that it advances popular interests. It is not a propagandist theatre promoting the dogmatic slogans of modernization and teaching a subservience to the dominant structure. It is a truly popular theatre, a theatre which:

represents the most progressive section of

the people in such a way that they can take over the leadership.

(Brecht, 1964)

As the outcome of a process which is both collective and critical, a process which is controlled by the people, it is a genuine expression of popular interests, advancing the consciousness and organization of the peasants and workers. This popular content accounts for the extraordinarily high level of participation:

landless peasants can easily participate in a programme which discusses issues related to land....just as in the struggle for Independence peasants joined in with a will because it was also a struggle for land.

(Ngugi wa Mirii, 1978)

But it is more than populist content dealing with the concerns and issues of the people. It is critical content. It not

only starts with people's experience of poverty, but it shows how they have been made poor and challenges the proverbial, victim-blaming rationalizations. It shows that poverty is created by the political-economic system rather than people's habits, attitudes, etc. Rather than "banking" people with modernizing information and techniques and reinforcing dependence on the outside expert, it encourages the growth of people's own analysis, self-confidence and fighting spirit. It makes people question the political-economic structures which shape their oppression and develop the will to transform these structures.

It is also critical in relation to tradition. While rooting itself in tradition and recognizing the vital role tradition has played in the struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism, it does not accept tradition uncritically. It develops tradition in a progressive way, attempting to overcome the contradictions within traditional culture. It identifies and develops those aspects of traditional culture which strengthen their identity and resistance (e.g., the songs of struggle) while rooting out those elements which reinforce submission to domination. The best example is the traditional practice of *Harambee* — whose distortions by the ruling class have been exposed by the peasants and workers of Kamiriithu.

Popular Theatre As Resistance

ANOTHER FEATURE OF THE Kamiriithu experience is the use of drama as resistance. Having been humiliated, manipulated, and victimized, the villagers have discovered drama to be a powerful tool for fighting back — rebuilding a sense of community, voicing people's concerns and aspirations, clarifying the nature of poverty, raising political consciousness, poking fun at their oppressors and protesting against the abuses of the dominant class. The resignation and alienation of the past has given way to a fighting spirit — of questioning, of combativeness, of challenge. One sign of this growing confidence and involvement has been the reduced dependence on drinking.

People's Drama As National Culture

KAMIRIITHU HAS PROVIDED AN alternative vision for developing national culture in Kenya — the notion of popular centres of culture in every village rather than elitist and neo-colonial institutions of culture in the capital. The Kamiriithu community theatre has a significance far beyond its own village: it is a concrete example of what a people's national theatre should be — accessible to and controlled by the masses, performed in their languages, adopting their forms of cultural expression, and addressing

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culture

their issues. In this sense it is a direct attack on and a clear alternative to Kenya's existing institutions of national culture — which are inaccessible to the masses, controlled by foreigners, and reflect foreign interests, themes, languages, etc. It is an assertion of the peasants' and workers' right to "creative efforts in their own backyards... to a theatre which correctly reflects their lives, fears, hopes, dreams, and history of struggle." (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981.)

At the same time it is a clear demonstration of the validity of building a national theatre and a dynamic national culture out of:

the lives of peasants and workers, the languages they speak, the rhythms of their speech and gait and daily work and homely chores...[and] the conflicts in their lives... (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981)

The peasants and workers proved that, out of their own internal resources and the passions born of their unique experience of history, they can outshine the best that can be produced by parroting foreigners, and by following submissively the trodden paths of foreign education, foreign theatres, foreign cultures, foreign initiatives, foreign languages.

(Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981)

For Ngugi wa Thiong'o the Kamiriithu experience has been a breakthrough. Before working with the KCECC his creative expression was an individual effort and was consumed by a very limited audience of people who could read English. Now his creative efforts are collective, couched in the people's language and accessible to and influenced by the peasants and workers.

As the bridge between the literary theatre of committed intellectuals and the theatre of the people, Ngugi should be given the last word on the Kamiriithu experience:

Nairobi's privileged classes live in a world where their cultural alternatives range from French and German theatre to a National Theatre which puts on *Oklahoma*, *Carmen*, *The King and I*. Our rural people can choose between the bar and the church. Kamiriithu showed that by writing in one of our national languages and using ordinary people there is a cultural life in Kenya just waiting to be allowed out. Their own Kenyan cultural life is what Kenyans want, instead of being second-class Americans watching *Oklahoma*.

¹ A pejorative term meaning the Kenyan bourgeoisie, alluding to the way in which they flaunt their wealth, purchasing expensive cars such as the Mercedes Benz.

² The use of Gikuyu rather than English represented a radical shift in Ngugi's writing and commitment from addressing a small, English-speaking audience to working with and being influenced by the peasants and workers.

³ This theatre is only national in name. African theatre groups are discouraged from using it because of its policies (including a high rental fee). It serves a small elite group, largely foreigners, with a repertoire of plays such as *Oklahoma*, *The King and I*, *Gulliver*, *Carmen*, *Boeing Boeing*, etc., performed by foreign groups.

⁴ When Ngugi's daughter was born while he was in prison, the villagers named her "Wamuingi" meaning "belonging to the people".

⁵ In fact they've been singled out for rougher treatment because, as Ngugi ironically puts it: "detaining a whole village would severely drain a necessary reservoir of cheap labour. Who would now pick the tea leaves and coffee beans — for a pittance? (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981)

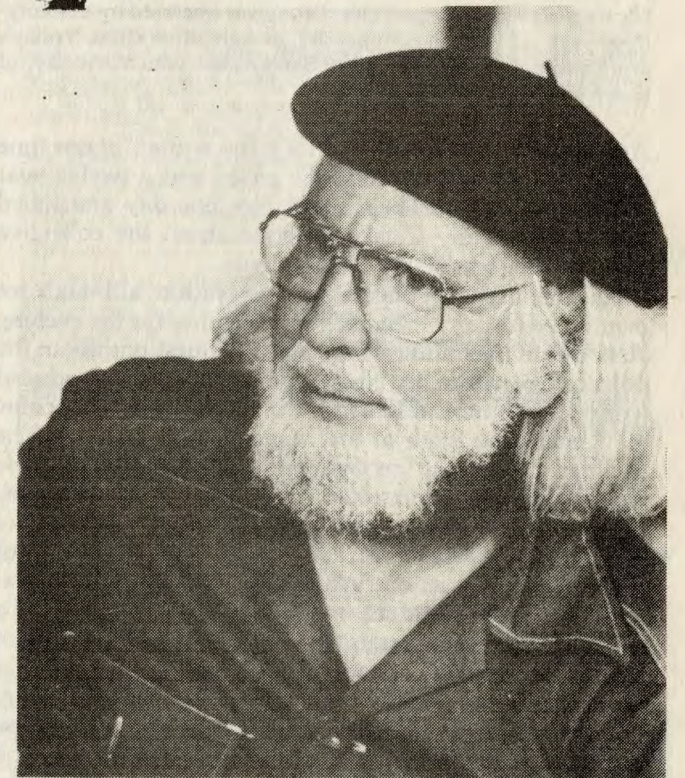
Ross Kidd is a teacher and writer living in Toronto.

NOSTALGIA

FOR THE FUTURE

THE POETRY OF NICARAGUA'S ERNESTO CARDENAL

BY HIMANI BANNERJI



IN OCTOBER 1983, IN A PACKED AUDITORIUM AT the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (Toronto), Ernesto Cardenal, poet, priest and Nicaragua's minister of culture in the Sandinista government, spoke about his country's desperate and courageous attempts to hold on to the revolution of 19th July, 1979, and nurture it to its fullest development. Speaking of Nicaragua as a country besieged by economic and military aggression of the United States, Cardenal also emphasized the country's role as an emblem of hope in the Latin American and Caribbean struggle against imperialism. "Are we exporting revolution?" he asked with a smile. "I don't know about that, but we are certainly exporting hope." Cardenal took pains to explain the Nicaraguan path to revolution: "In four years of revolution Nicaragua has experienced profound changes, material as well as spiritual.

The Nicaraguan revolution is a new one, without models. It is an original Nicaraguan revolution."

What, we might ask, is the originality of Nicaragua's revolution? Cardenal outlined its main feature for us. It is characterized by a mixed economy, it is popular and humanistic. Speaking about humanism, he remarked that this was the "...most generous revolution in history...the first without the death penalty." As the Sandinista leader Tomaso Borge put it, "In Nicaragua what has been executed is in the past." This humanism is complemented by an all-pervasive presence of Christian ethics.

...it is the first to be achieved with the mass participation of Christians. The reason is that the revolution was of the majority and that majority are Christians. It's not only that there are many priests in the government, but that there are many active lay people who hold government and cabinet posts.

This view of language and art, that is, of culture, suggests the need for a new aesthetic

The popular aspect of the revolution becomes evident when the massive participation of women as well as that of young people of both sexes is considered.

Nicaragua's second largest city, Leon, was liberated by a twenty-three year old woman commander, as were other cities. Today's army and police are made up of Sandinistas, which is to say, of many young women members.

And as for young people, suffice it to say that "at one time the most wanted person by the guard was a twelve year old revolutionary. They found him one day and killed him." And finally Cardenal spoke about the collective nature of the leadership in Nicaragua.

Another aspect of Nicaragua's revolution, although not mentioned initially, began to be highlighted as the evening wore on. In the middle of the talk and questions about the political situation in Nicaragua some one introduced words like culture and poetry. But Cardenal had not come to Canada this time in his capacity as a poet, and he declined to read or recite from any of his poems. He remarked good-humouredly that a poet must forget his old poems in order to write new ones. Instead he spoke about the importance of cultural work as a process of socialist reconstruction. When speaking of culture he extended the conventional use of this term to speak of a culture of political economy, a cultural dimension of health care and the people's militia, pointing out that every project of reconstruction includes a cultural wing, through which people problematize their needs and raise consciousness. New and old cultural forms, verbal and non-verbal, are used. While this was reminiscent of the theories and practices of the Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire, what was important and original about Cardenal's position was not that he expanded the use of a certain device, but actually created the possibility of rethinking a body of work, activities and values which we call culture.

Meaning a Cultural Revolution

With this definition of cultural work, Cardenal, like many other politically committed artists, shifts from a conventional way of thinking about creative work towards a new aesthetic. It is not only that art, or 'culture', may be used to serve the people in understanding and expressing something, but it must also reformulate itself in terms of social relations. Our conventional use of this term has been largely a topographical one; we use it to mark out a certain realm of activities, a certain aspect of our social geography. Culture in that sense is like a fence, a boundary, outside of which lie our non-cultural activities, whatever they may be. But how do we know how to classify some activities as cultural and others as not?

The conventional practice has gone to various formal traditions, types of media and mediations, in establishing what qualifies a culture and what does not. That is, we have a cultural product-index. We don't see it so much as an activity in the context of ongoing social relations but as an end product of a certain type, constructed within certain 'genres' or traditions.

In Cardenal's terms, however, it is possible to see culture not only as a previously coded body of products but also as a set of expressive formalizing activities in the context of an ongoing set of social relations. Any change in the social relations can and indeed must bring about major changes in our formalizing expressive activities — in their location, use and form. Perhaps then it is possible to say about culture what once Marx said about capital: that it is not a thing but a set of social relations concretized within history and formal traditions. So when new social relations evolve, in the process of creating revolution or in the post-revolutionary era, they lead to a redefinition of culture both as a category and as activities. This way of seeing of course provides an activist role for a population of producers of their own culture rather than as passive consumers of 'art' turned out by the socially disengaged artist. Cardenal himself has written about this in many of his poems, particularly in the context of language and culture, in the collection *Zero Hour and Other Documentary Poems*:

"Revolutionary art without artistic value..."

And artistic art without revolutionary value? It seems to me that great bards of the 20th century are in Publicity those Keatses and Shelleys singing the Colgate smile Cosmic Coca-Cola, the pause that refreshes,

.....
language, also polluted.

"It appears that he (Johnson) never understood that words also have a real meaning besides serving for propaganda

Time said that he does understand it and he lies just the same.

And the defoliation of Vietnam is a Resource Control Program it's also a defoliation of language.

And language avenges itself refusing to communicate. Plunder: investments

There are also crimes of the CIA in the realm of semantics. Here in Nicaragua, as you have said: the language of the government and private enterprise against the language of the Nicaraguan people.

... —Epistle to Jose Coronel Urtecho

This view of language and art, that is of culture, suggests the need for a new aesthetic. A revolutionary struggle is also a cultural one; that is, it is a struggle for the reclamation of our everyday lives, for our right to express and communicate in our own way. And this struggle which is

His vision is totally integrated with the revolutionary efforts of the Sandinistas...

cultural-political is also personal because it involves making a choice, deciding what kind of social relations one wishes to live with, and this means knowing which side one is on. It is at this level that Ernesto Cardenal's poetry addresses its readers, as a personal message outlining the task of a personal political choice — particularly about Nicaragua.

In fact, Cardenal's poems are a lot like letters to the individual reader. They are an invitation for participation, for making a choice, and they demand a clear 'yes' or 'no' about their content. There is no standing by in an objectivist pose and watching in an act of abstract contemplation. Of course the reader may delay for awhile, wander about with the book in a hand-bag, may defer coming to any conclusions because that involves so many confusions, doubts and indecisions — but position oneself, one must, or the process of reading this poetry will not be concluded. Cardenal is not a liberal relativist saying 'This is only my version of Nicaragua; you may have one too. Both are equally tenable, or the truth lies in between.' His vision is totally integrated with the revolutionary efforts of the Sandinistas, and he speaks with the absolute moral imperative of the revolutionary, and this absolutism is compounded by the morality of 'liberation theology'. If this version of history and social change is not to any reader's liking, if that reader also rejects this absolute moral imperative, then Cardenal is not his/her poet. And today in North America and elsewhere the world is divided between people who say 'yes' to this political stand of Ernesto Cardenal and those who do not.

Cardenal's version of the world in which we live — in which Nicaragua lived — is simply the world of industrial capitalism in its imperialist phase; it is not meant for the advancement of people but of profit. A world of "Texaco, Standard Oil...the monopolies", a world evolved from a long history of class societies, of "private property and the accumulation of capital".

... Later on better than raising sheep was stealing sheep.

War could be an industry.

To guard the wheat as important as sowing it.

War could be productive.

And after domesticating animals man invented a way to domesticate man.

Not killing the enemy: making him work.

Slavery was the basis of industry and the accumulation of capital

... The division of classes a product of progress? Yes but it did not accelerate, it retards future progress. Progress in Neolithic times was in the production processes and it was made by the producers

but now these — the inventors — become the lower class.

Oracle over Managua, *Zero Hour*

A world of beauty, of "Moon pottery/(white laquer and fine-lined motifs). Charming/red jaguars with a white background, incense pots" had fallen prey to imperialist enterprises. On top of the world of freshness and beauty lay:

bits of Coca-Cola bottles and Goodyear tires and chamber pots. Acahualinca begins there, the houses of cardboard and cans where the sewers empty...

Streets that smell of jails, that characteristic jail smell, of shit and rancid urine houses of cement bags gasoline cans rubble old rags. The sewers end there.

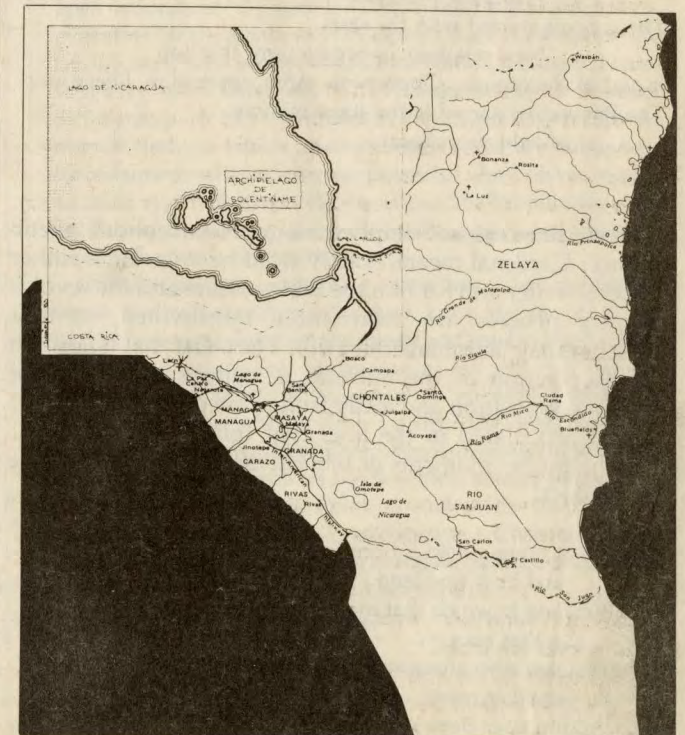
... There the children with wary little eyes the children weak sickly enormous beetles their bellies swollen and their legs thin as toothpicks...

... Old women crouched over the guts that the slaughterhouse throws out scaring off the buzzards.

The pig and the pot-bellied kid in the same puddle.

... I saw a papaya tree in a street like a miracle in that horror. Oracle over Managua

Cardenal established a church and religious community in Lake Nicaragua's Solentiname islands in 1966



Revolution is inscribed as the last stage in the book of nature, in the evolutionary process...

This is clearly a degraded and inverted world. The humans have been denied all conditions of being human. "Man's greatest crime is to prevent men from being men". And to be set back on its feet, to be the right way up it must be turned upside down, a complete reversal. Hence revolution. Cardenal's poetry is full of insurrectionary, resurrectionary (which for him is also revolutionary) signs. Revolution is to be seen as a communion at the end of a long chapter of exploitation.

kupia-kumi = "one-single-heart."
"One-single-heart": the military and money look like that today (but those two have no heart). No: the sole true kumi is Love, namely the union of the people to achieve the Revolution. Only Love is truly "single-heart."
Nicaraguan Canto, Zero Hour

And so for Cardenal. Revolution is inscribed as the last stage in the book of nature, in the evolutionary process; a denial of the revolution is the denial of God's will as expressed through nature.

I said the iguanas lay their eggs...It is the process. They (or else the frogs) in the silence of the carboniferous age made the first sound
sang the first love song here on earth
sang the first love song here beneath the moon
it is the process.

The process started with the stars.

New relations of production: that too is part of the process. Oppression. After oppression, liberation. The Revolution started in the stars, millions of light years away.

These lines are not simply a matter of metaphors, poetic licence; Cardenal means exactly what he says. He is rather a literal writer and for him the Bible, nature and the revolutionary process are inextricably intertwined, in that together they illuminate the truth. The belief that holds him in the position of the minister of culture in the face of Vatican opposition and away from a life of contemplation, is also articulated in the lines that follow. They are not merely 'poetic' moments or biblical metaphors, but a guide to conduct.

Because at times a man is born in a land
and he is that land.
And the land in which that man is buried
is that man.
And the men who afterward are born in that land
are that man.
And Adolfo Báez Bone was that man.

The Land, The Man

Ernesto Cardenal was born into a well-to-do family in Granada, Nicaragua, in 1925. He studied at the University of Mexico (1943-47) and Columbia University, New York (1947-49). From 1957-59 he was a novice at the Trappist monastery in Gethsemany, Kentucky (USA), where poet and priest Thomas Merton was his spiritual director. Cardenal's ill-health, among other reasons, prevented him from taking the vow and he studied instead for the priesthood from 1959-65. In the same year he returned to Nicaragua and established a church and a commune which he named Nuestra Señora de Solentiname. This place is an archipelago of 38 islands on lake Nicaragua, with a population of one thousand *campesinos* (peasants) and fishermen. In 1970 he went to Cuba to be a judge for a poetry competition organized by Casa de las Americas. In 1977 the Somoza dictatorship ordered the destruction of the commune and Cardenal fled to Costa Rica. Thereafter he became the roving ambassador for the liberation movement (FSLN) which in 1979 toppled the Somoza dictatorship. Cardenal was chosen to be the minister of culture in the new government.

A poet and writer for a long time, Cardenal is relatively unknown to English readers. His books of poems which have received some attention in the English-speaking world are *Apocalypse and Other Poems* (English translation 1977) and *Zero Hour and Other Documentary Poems* (English translation 1981). Another work, *In Cuba* (English translation 1974), is an account of socialist reconstruction in Cuba and an assessment of christianity's methods, goals and morality in relation to those of communism. The trip to Cuba convinced Cardenal of the compatibility of the two. *Homage to the American Indian* (English translation 1973) is virtually unknown among English readers and difficult to come by. There are also two other volumes which consider the relationship of christianity to revolutionary activities, and specifically ponder the question of armed struggle, namely, *The Sanctity of Revolution* (1976) and *The Gospel in Solentiname*. There is also a small illustrated book published after the revolution about Solentiname and Cardenal's own involvement there called *Nostalgia del Futuro*.

These are the bare facts of Ernesto Cardenal's life, and these have to be supplemented by other facts, contextualized in relation to the Nicaraguan reality. We must move out of the individual biography to the history of the country, of the region and the relations of the U.S. to Central America. Questions as to Cardenal's involvements before he became a priest, why he set up the commune of Solentiname, why it was destroyed, why he went to Cuba, how he can be part of a political group that espouses armed struggle, or a member of the state, far away from his priestly duties — those questions can only be answered by introducing the historical

...a denial of the revolution is the denial of God's will as expressed through nature...

element into his personal life. Cardenal himself is acutely aware of being rooted in the Nicaraguan reality. In the "Nicaraguan Canto" he compares his poetry to the local birds' song, he expresses a complete identification with his country.

I'd like to watch the lumberjacks at work.
To talk to turtle-catchers on the cays.
This is the land I sing. My poetry belongs here,
like the trumpeting *zanate*, or the wine-producing palm.
I feel a longing for those eastern swamps.

His poetry is an epic verse rendition of Nicaragua's history and struggles, and it is to this history that we must now turn.

The history of Nicaragua has been one of a continuous battle against the local tyrants set up and propped up by U.S. military power and the ubiquitous presence of the U.S. multi-nationals or its adventurist gangsters, such as William Walker earlier in this century. The attitudes and activities of the gangsters were actually not very different from those of the businessmen and the government interventions that were to follow, such as Cornelius Vanderbilt, the American railroad magnate who built an extensive empire in Central America, or the later companies such as the United Fruit Company, or even the White House itself. Always with the so-called business came the army. All talk by modern political theorists of the 'relative autonomy' of the state breaks down in the face of the imperialist ventures of their countries. The business and the state always go hand in hand. As Cardenal puts it,

To invest capital in Nicaragua and then to protect U.S. investments was the State department's job.

And

the Marines landed to "reestablish order"
and they stayed in Nicaragua for 13 years. Control over railroads customs banks was not enough.

Nicaragua sold her territory as well...

Nicaraguan Canto

The Monroe Doctrine of 1823, which, as George Black points out in his book *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua*, "claimed the Americas as an exclusive target for U.S. expansionism in exchange for non-intervention in the colonial affairs of the European powers", is still in operation today. Whenever there is any attempt to move out of the U.S. economic and military stranglehold, local and U.S. repression descends. One such attempt led to the emergence of the liberation fighter Augusto Cesar Sandino in 1927, when "the US marines duly disembarked at Corinto in January. This time the

force was a large one: 215 officers commanding 865 Marines and 3,900 soldiers, accompanied by arms supplies..." Sandino, whose memory lives on in the revolution of Nicaragua today, was a 31 year old worker who had returned to the country after years of working for the U.S. companies. In his account of the development of the Nicaraguan revolution George Black outlines the nature of the resistance put up by Sandino and his guerillas from the mountains of Segovia:

His experience as a worker was vital to the formation of his anti-imperialist and to an extent class consciousness. As a

1977 Letter to Nicaraguans from a Priest who joined the people's struggle

...I have decided to address you as my brothers in Christ to tell you of my decision to join the clandestine struggle as a soldier of the Lord and as a soldier of the Sandinista National Liberation Front.

I came to Nicaragua from my birth land, Spain, about nine years ago, as a missionary of the Sacred Heart. I gave myself passionately to the labors of preaching, and soon I began to discover that the oppressed and humiliated people I was serving as a priest were hungry and thirsty for justice, and that this demanded the comfort of actions more than the comfort of words.

As an adoptive Nicaraguan and as a priest, I have seen the open wounds of my people. I have seen the shameful exploitation of the peasantry, crushed under the boot of the landowners, who are protected by a National Guard. I have seen a few grow obscenely rich in the shadow of the Somoza dictatorship. I have witnessed the degrading traffic in human flesh to which poor young women are subjected, forced into prostitution by the powerful. And I have touched with my own hands the baseness, the humiliation, the deceit and the robbery brought by the power and domination of the Somoza family.

Corruption and repression are merciless. They are deaf to words and will continue to be deaf, while my people groan in the dark night from the bayonets and my brothers suffer torture and prison for demanding a just and free nation, from which robbery and assassination are gone forever.

And because our honest youth, the best sons of Nicaragua, are at war against the oppressive tyranny, I have decided to join this war as the humblest soldier in the Sandinista Front. This is a just war, one which the holy gospels see as good and which my conscience as a Christian says is good, because it represents the struggle against a state of affairs that is hateful to the Lord our God...

Your Brother in Christ Patria Libre O Morir
Gaspar Garcia Laviana
Missionary Priest of the Sacred Heart
from *Christians in the Nicaraguan Revolution*

The Nicaragua into which Cardenal was born echoed with the struggle and the betrayal of Sandino

warehouseman in Montecristo sugar mill in Honduras owned by the Honduras Sugar and Distilling company; as a banana plantation worker for the United Fruit Company in Guatemala; as an oilfield worker for the South Pennsylvania Oil Company and Huasteca Petroleum Company, he had learned his lessons in politics. It had given him a first hand knowledge of the reality of American imperialism in Central America. Under Sandino's leadership, the war against US intervention was Nicaragua's first organized questioning of bourgeois and imperialist power structures, and gave shape for the first time to a long — if sporadic — tradition of spontaneous popular revolt.

For this resistance Sandino was murdered by Anastasio Somoza, the head of the National Guard, created by the U.S. in 1934, and of course with the active support of the White House. Before he had him killed in an ambush, Somoza invited Sandino to Managua for peace talks and embraced him publicly.

How much of these events influenced Ernesto Cardenal? People make their own history, but they don't do it just as they please. The world into which we are born, its politics, history and culture, provides us with the stage on which we act, parts that we have to reconstruct for ourselves. Not even the strongest individual consciousness is solely self-determined and immune to history. The Nicaragua into which Cardenal was born echoed with the struggle and the betrayal of Sandino. For almost half a century thereafter Cardenal and Nicaragua lived through the dual realities of repression and resistance. His life coincides with the founding of the Somoza dynasty and goes beyond. Changing neither their master nor their economic and political practices, the Somozas continued to grow from 1934 until by the '70s the state of Nicaragua had become the private estate of the family. To this the people offered their persistent resistance, so during his student days Cardenal, like other young people of the country, found himself joining in the resistance attempts, culminating again in an armed struggle. People from all walks of life found themselves next to each other in this process. Cardenal's poetry is a tribute to such people, every line filled with a direct knowledge of their sacrifice, their torture and death.

...
That same night a boy stripped to his shorts.
Like one of those frightened puppies.
'Drink it up,' said Colonel Somoza Debayl to me. 'Isn't it your own blood? It won't hurt you.'
I began to confess lies my voice faltering, the stenographers getting it down on paper with their swift pencils...
Between one torture and the next he'd see a movie.
Oracle over Managua

Countdown to the Revolution

In the poem *Zero Hour*, written before Cardenal went to the Trappist monastery, we find the history of

Nicaragua paralleled by Cardenal's own development; it is the countdown to the revolutionary moment. The poem is in four sections. The first section is an overview of Central America as a whole, narrowing down to Nicaragua.

Tropical nights in Central America,
with moonlit lagoons and volcanoes
and lights from the presidential palaces,
barracks and sad curfew warnings.
...
And Managua the target of machine guns
from the chocolate cookie palace
and steel helmets patrolling the streets.

Watchman! What hour is it of the night?

In the next section the particularity of Nicaragua is further specified, a country rendered to a carrion by the Somozas and their U.S. allies, with the multinationals crawling in it like so many maggots, and terrible man-made famines stalking the land.

The banana is left to rot on the plantations,
or to rot in the cars along the railroad tracks
or it's cut overripe so it can be rejected
"when it reaches the wharf to be thrown into the sea;
the bunches of banana declared bruised or too skinny,
or withered, or green, or overripe, or diseased:
so there'll be no cheap bananas,
or so as to buy bananas cheap.

Having outlined the different stages and causes of oppression the poem introduces the theme of resistance. Augusto Cesar Sandino becomes the embodiment of Nicaragua's struggle against foreign and local dictatorships. Cardenal takes historical details of this struggle and its betrayal, and projects them until there is a fusion between the past resistance and that of the FSLN leading to a victory in 1979. It was also in these northern mountains, Sandino's Segovias, that the Sandinistas regrouped themselves for the final onslaught against the Somoza regime. There, beckoned by the light of revolution, which is also the light of Sandino,

What is that light way off there? Is it a star?
It is Sandino's light shining in the black mountains.
The old and the new Sandinistas fuse into one.
There they are, he and his men, beside the red bonfire
with rifles slung and wrapped in their blankets,
smoking or singing sad songs from the North,
the men motionless and their shadows in motion.

The following section about the failed uprising of 1954 moves closer to Cardenal's personal experience. It is about his friend Adolfo Baez Bone's death, but also about himself and all the others who fought. Sandino's death is repeated

So Cardenal returned to his country and slowly developed the community of Our Lady of Solentine

but this time not with a simple act of treachery, but through tanks and planes that raze the house that hid Bone and his companions.

But April in Nicaragua is the month of death.
They killed them in April.

I was with them in the April rebellion
and I learned to handle a Rising machine gun.

And Adolfo Baez Bone was my friend:
They hunted him with airplanes, with trucks,
with floodlights, with tear-gas bombs,
'with radios, with dogs, with police;
and I remembered the red clouds over the Presidential Mansion
like blood red swabs of cotton.

In "Nicaraguan Canto" and "Oracle over Managua" Cardenal writes of these deaths again and again — the deaths of the poets Lionel Rugama, Ruben Dario and all others who were part of the struggle — "Selim Shible, Silvio, Casimiro, Julio, they had fallen." And "Glory isn't what the history books teach:/it's a flock of buzzards in a field and a great stink." But the theme of the undying freedom fighter who rises up or returns because he died for his people, a common myth of many agrarian struggles, is also present in Cardenal's poetry. It keeps alive the hope, the continuity of the people's struggle. "The underground radio kept saying he was alive./The people didn't believe he had died./ (And he hasn't died.)"

It was at this time (around 1954) that Cardenal seems to have turned to the church. When he went to the Trappist monastery at Gethsemane he couldn't have been very optimistic about anything, let alone about a successful armed uprising against the organized, U.S.-backed brutality of the Somoza regime. In this state, suffering from excruciating headaches, Cardenal was particularly fortunate in his spiritual director. It is Thomas Merton who gave him his new direction. In an interview with Margaret Randall, Cardenal gives us a brief history of the foundation of his contemplative, and eventually activist community, Solentine.

It was Thomas Merton who gave me the idea. He had been a monk for twenty years and had written a great deal about that life but had been unhappy with monastic life.... And after twenty years Merton was wanting out.... He knew it was a medieval, anachronistic lifestyle. Ridiculous. So he wanted to found a different kind of contemplative community outside the U.S. Merton was an enemy of the U.S., of Yankee civilization and everything it represented. He hated the bourgeois mentality most monks had.... He told me I was in my monastic honeymoon and that within a few years I too would find the life arid.

Christians in the Nicaraguan Revolution

So Cardenal returned to his country and slowly developed the community of Our Lady of Solentine. It was a long process of involvement in the life of the local people,

becoming a part of their every day life, not only as the priest in residence, but as a teacher, a friend. Much went on in this little community. The gospels were read, interpreted, poetry written, paintings done, and all the while the situation in Nicaragua examined, understood, actions considered in the light of new interpretations of the Bible in a communitarian context. Cardenal had once more turned to the struggle for the liberation of Nicaragua. Abstract contemplation, far from the world of pain and misery, was not to be his path. He engaged in what could be called 'praxis' and combined the understanding of history with struggle for change. The people of this community had come to the same conclusions as he had. One of the older members of the community, Olivia, had this to say to Margaret Randall when questioned on how she felt about revolutionary militancy:

Each day we would learn new things, and I tell you that this is the sort of thing where you couldn't take it in and just live in peace. You begin to feel more committed, more concerned about others. If, living the life we led, we were concerned about

Land titles were given to peasants on the fourth anniversary of Father Garcia Laviana's death in battle (see letter on previous page)



Margaret Randall

It is perhaps more than a piece of trivia that the first slave ship was called the 'Jesus'

all our neighbours, now we had concern for everything in the country. And afterwards, for everything not only in the country, but in Central America. And for what was happening in the world.

There was an active contact with the FSLN, but also many of the young people of the community became guerillas and joined the liberation movement. This brought down tremendous repression, and finally in 1977 Solentiname was destroyed by the National Guards. The physical destruction of the community could not break the spirit of the people however. Though Cardenal fled to Costa Rica, the members of the community who survived continued to fight along the FSLN lines. Cardenal himself became a spokesman for the liberation movement and represented it at UN meetings and in various countries. On July 18, 1979 he clandestinely flew back into the country. The next day Nicaragua was reborn from the ashes and debris of the past. In the poem "Light" in *Zero Hour*, this moment of possibility finds its expression.

It's the most dangerous moment, enemy aircraft
may be waiting for us over this airport.
And the airport lights at last.
We've landed. From out of the dark come olive-green-comrades
to greet us with hugs.
We feel their warm bodies, that also come from the sun,
that are also light.
This revolution is fighting the darkness.
It was daybreak on July 18th. And the beginning
of all that was about to come.

Christian Communism

The Nicaraguan revolution, said Cardenal, was a unique revolution. This would appear to be the case if in particular one were to consider the nature of its political mobilization. It is not so much a classically marxist as a populist revolution. It realizes the dreams of both christians and communists, one could even say of christians as communists. How, the world has been asking, is that possible? After all, christianity has been very ready to be of service to colonialism, imperialism and local exploitation. The cultural and ideological subjugation of the peoples of the third world in the name of God, Christ and the church has been well recorded and much discussed. The Andean Indians who were declared to have no soul, and therefore to be of no consequence as human beings, were eliminated with the church's approval and help. The Africans who exchanged their land for the Bible, as the saying goes, lost more than their worldly possessions in the process. It is perhaps more than a piece of trivia that the first slave ship was called the 'Jesus'. (The examples of dissident jesuits and priests do more than anything else to prove the exceptional nature of their commitment, rather than christianity's positive con-

tribution to the people's cause. The unpopularity of such clerics with the Vatican is also well recorded.)

The struggles of the poor during the last few centuries has not been able to sway the Catholic church or christianity in general to act for them in any significant way. If there was once a contradiction between the church and growing capitalism (which appears upon close inspection to be a conflict of interest — feudalism fighting capitalism) there is certainly no vestige of that now. Once the church, though itself the biggest European landlord in the middle ages, forbade usury; now the Vatican has its own bank. Cardenal mentions this bank in "Zero Hour": "The Bank of the Holy Spirit has been closed./A kind of automatic fruition, as if/money laboured."

By and large, as far as poor people are concerned, the church has operated on the dictum of 'to him that hath it shall be given, but from him who hath not it shall be taken away'. But it seems that time and time again the misery of the people and their social discontent catch up with their religious beliefs, and with or without sanction from the church institutions and ecclesiastical bodies, they proceed to put up their version of what God meant against the version of those in power. They speak in the language of religion because that is the clearest ideology that they have. And here we might mention from Marx the expressive aspect of religious ideology — not just the pacificatory one since so far we have only heard of a truncated quotation from Marx on religion as the opiate of the masses. The fuller version of what Marx actually said widens the social implications of religious expressions:

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of the spiritless condition. It is the opium of the people.

By the 1960s a popular and militant version of christianity seemed to be emerging in Latin America. There was of course the impact of the memory of the Columbian priest Camillo Torres, excommunicated and killed, whose christianity prompted him to pick up a gun to fight the exploitation of the rural poor in Columbia. And also there was a general disgust at the traditional church for its hand-in-glove complicity with the dictators. As Cardenal puts it,

the church goes to bed with anyone at all,
...
Monsignor Borgia all in red tassels and phylacteries
presiding over the Bishop's conference
"And that prick from Nazareth, what's he saying"
...the apostasy of the Nicaraguan church...
...
Fernando said: don't fuck around.
Tinita Salazar doesn't earn ten pesos a week.

There was an identification of the Christian in the catacombs, and the guerilla going underground...

Pijulito died because the hospital wouldn't let him in.
And then they talk to me about God. Don't be ridiculous!

Clearly if religion were going to mean anything for the people it had to be different from what the monsignors of this world had preached as the word of God. It would have to be a church that would not excommunicate the Camillo Torreses of Latin America. And a possibility arose from within the church itself for some re-interpretation to occur.

The second Vatican Council called by Pope John XXIII in 1962 prescribed a gospel-oriented content for christianity and a more socially conscious doctrine than that of previous papal encyclicals. A general ecumenical opening-up allowed for dialogue with other denominations and non-christians. Lay people were given responsibility in the pastoral work of the church. Liturgical reforms included the introduction of language, songs and instruments native to different cultures and an end to masses in which priests kept their back to the people.

Christians in the Nicaraguan Revolution

The Latin American Bishop's Conference in Medellin, Columbia, in 1968, concretized the radical implications of this new papal encyclical. 'Liberation theology' began to be theorized and acted upon. The Catholic Church in Latin America had entered a new era. The long existing demand for equality of all people and social justice was now firmly anchored in the idea of a just God who punished the wicked and legitimized popular militancy against all forms of oppression. The life of Christ was read more directly, from the vantage point of the oppressed rather than mediated through the 'institution'. In fact the story of Christ became the story of the poor people themselves. Christ was seen as a poor revolutionary who sought justice for the poor and died on the cross of the ruling class. There was sought a return to the early pre-Constantine non-imperial days of the religion, to the days of the catacombs. Christianity was again to be a religion created by and for the poor, not that which was later adopted and radically adapted by the ruling class. There was an identification of the christian in the catacombs and the guerilla going underground to avoid Somoza's National Guard. "With no alternative to death/You went underground/or as you said entered the catacombs." The mystical tradition re-read thus could have profoundly political and incendiary possibilities. What actions should follow from lines such as these,

The solution is simple: to give to others in brotherhood.
Capitalism impedes communion.

...
Saint Ambrose thundered in his Milan cathedral, on the threshold
SUMMER 1984

of feudalism...

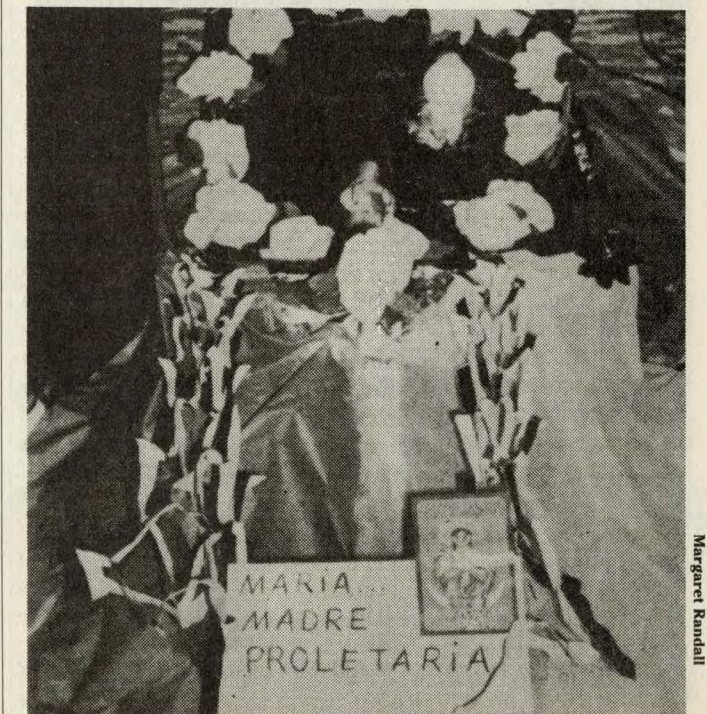
THE EARTH BELONGS TO EVERYBODY, NOT THE RICH
and Saint John Chrysostom in Byzantium with his Biblical
Marxism

"the community of goods is more faithful to nature."

Both the priests and the lay Catholic community were aware of the radical and novel nature of this interpretation, but neither group considered it as heretical. In fact the traditional church's record of repression and class service had earned it the name of 'the church of hierarchy'. Not only was christianity reconcilable with militant class struggle, but it actually offered the imperative of militancy out of its own nature.

This particular way of reading christianity provided the majority of the people with a world view, a language, a systematic organization of symbols and signs, a basis for the construction of the struggle. There was no need to learn a completely new way of conceptualizing and expressing; they could begin from where they were, transforming the world they inhabited. Part of the real social transformation was that very transformation of christianity itself. It was both a tool for change as well as the tool forged in the struggle. God was called to be on the side of the poor, and it was felt that he was.

A Purisma, or altar to the Virgin Mary; also a neighborhood gift-giving celebration through December in honour of the Virgin



Margaret Randall

The technical or formal aspects of his poetry combine with the Bible and Marx's *Capital*...

Visionaries and Revolutionaries

Such a large-scale reinterpretation of the Bible and formulation of social movements in terms of religious ideology is relatively new in the Catholic tradition. But christianity had already served this purpose in the protestant tradition. The peasants' war in Germany was fought in the name of Martin Luther, though he wanted no part in it, and the civil war in England, also called the 'puritan revolution', activated large-scale religio-political movements. In the English case in particular, during the war and even through the period of Restoration and the 18th century, religious ideas of different types served as common people's ideology of social struggle.

Radical activist christian sects such as Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Shakers, Quakers and Muggletonians have mostly disappeared, leaving behind a luminous history of visions of social change. The influences of John Muggleton and other poor people's mystics — such as the shoemaker Jacob Boehm — on William Blake's revolutionary poetry has been discussed at length by writers such as E.P. Thompson. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is another vision that has found its way into English literature.

The work of Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millenium*, or that of Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, documents many of these revolutionary religious movements. Religion was such an integral force in the demand for social change that Christopher Hill made the remark that "Indeed it is perhaps misleading to differentiate too sharply between politics, religion and general skepticism." What he says of the 17th and 18th centuries is equally applicable to the popular revolutionary ideology of Central America.

Of course this reinterpretation was not a scholarly exercise, a textual debate on the Bible, but rather a way of exploring and realising the ethical imperatives of a certain type of christianity. People acted on the belief that it was 'easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for the rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven'. They also acted on the promise that 'the meek shall inherit the earth', and made distinct attempts to attain the reward here and now. The kingdom of heaven would at least find its earthly expression in a new social order brought about by the militancy of the poor. Freedom is the precondition for this kingdom of heaven. It is illuminating to read in this context what the 17th century christian activist Gerald Winstanley said to the people of London:

Freedom is the man that will turn the world upside down, therefore no wonder he hath enemies.... True freedom lies in the community, in spirit and community in the earthly treasury, and this is Christ the true man-child spread abroad in the creation, restoring all things unto himself.

G. Winstanley, *A Watch-Word to the City of London*, 1649

The social project of the common people of Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries was not very dissimilar to that of the common people of Nicaragua in the 1970s. An echo of Winstanley's sentiment can be heard in the words of Olivia, a poor woman living in the community of Solentiname, whom I quoted earlier:

Revolution and religion go together; they are two equal things, never unequal. That is why I say that revolutionaries can be christian. There is no contradiction. I have heard some people say that a revolutionary can't be a christian. In truth, is a revolutionary not a real christian? If a revolutionary does not mention God perhaps it is because he or she doesn't want to. In fact he or she is more christian than many who say they are.... And any person who says they're very religious but they don't like the revolution must not understand Jesus.

Christians in the Nicaraguan Revolution

But then again, this is not the 17th century and there are distinct aspects to the Nicaraguan religio-political ideology which are features of a post-marxian era, filled with global anti-imperialist struggles. Liberation theology, therefore, not only speaks of the rich and the poor, the just and the unjust, but about relations of classes, of socio-economic systems of exploitation and foreign domination called capitalism and imperialism. It is in this that they can supercede the older millenarian movements, build a movement oriented to class struggle, make alliances with non-christians and marxists and can participate in the revolutionary armed struggles and the Sandinista government. Neither in the lay Catholic population nor in its priests — such as Ernesto Cardenal, Fernando Cardenal, Miguel de Scoto, Uriel Molina and others — do we see any doubt about the values embodied in the Nicaraguan revolution.

Cardenal's visit to Cuba, recorded in his book *In Cuba*, was one of a series of assessments made by Catholics, particularly priests, of the goals of a socialist revolution in the light of christianity. Cardenal, for instance, found that communists or socialists and christians could make close alliances and aimed for the same type of social justice. He feels strongly that the ethical imperatives of communism and christianity, based on basic human needs and against different types of alienation, overlap. Going by the doctrines and practices of liberation theology, one could say that a new brand of militancy has evolved in Central America, a militancy of 'communist christianity', and I emphasize the word 'communist' since 'community', 'communion' are at the root of this word.

The Poetics of Documentation

This 'communist christianity' not only constitutes the politics of Ernesto Cardenal, but his poetics as well. The

...a new brand of militancy has evolved in Central America, a militancy of 'communist christianity'...

documentary quality of his poetry combines with a contemplative tone like that of Thomas Merton in an epic form. These formal devices are as essential to Cardenal as documentary film or news formats are to other 'reporters'/documentarians. In Cardenal's case, as a partisan to the revolution, he must explain the revolution to us, show the justice of his cause and demand that we take sides too. For this he needs a type of realism in his poetry, a realism which is not just disjointed bits of the social surface, but more in the nature of a set of transparencies showing what is going on underneath and around them — in fact, the social relations, the contexts that produce and texture the surface. Here the 'natural' is relieved of its work of being a substitute for life. Events, bits of history, details of landscape and businesses, are all slides inserted into an 'epic' version of history which provides a systematic view of exploitation and resistance.

Cardenal's poetry, then, records what exists, bears witness to what happened and is happening, but at the same time captures the transformative forces. He must be 'documentary' and 'revelatory' at the same time. The technical or formal aspects of his poetry combine with the Bible and Marx's *Capital* or *The Communist Manifesto*, not in a bid for eclecticism, but in an attempt at creating a new epistemology, a new way of knowing reality. The vast sweep of Cardenal's historical vision from the Pre-Columbian days to now is also set within the Biblical myth of the fall, of 'Paradise Lost' through the conquest and regained through the revolution.

Because Cardenal is a christian communist he can see the world as a set of signs from which a believer can read the will of God. This way of looking at the natural and social world presupposes of course a knowledge of, a commitment to the christian code, which confers significance to the world of appearances and events.

The elements of Cardenal's poetry include: descriptions, reports, allusions, and certain types of juxtapositions where man-made horror, inflicted by imperialism, is juxtaposed to the beauty of nature. In fact, throughout his poetry the beauty of nature serves as a source of healing, a reminder of the possibility of regeneration. In poem after poem filled with stories of moral and economic bankruptcy, hunger and exploitation, death and torture of those who protest, there are also moments reflecting the serenity and innocence of Nicaragua's nature and her humble people. The early morning following Sandino's murder is an instance of this:

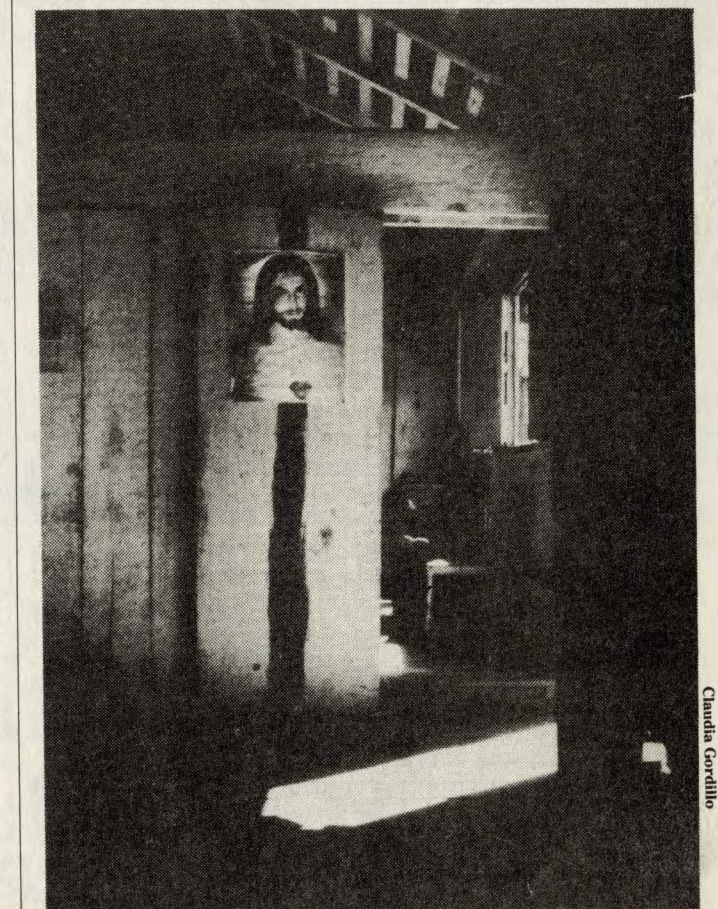
It's the hour when the corn-mush star of Chontales gets the little Indian girls up to make corn mush, and out come the chicle-seller, the wood-seller, and the root-seller, with the banana groves still silvered by the moon

...The ranch hands begin to herd their cows
...the boatmen hoist the sails of their boats;
...And the Tuca squaws keep coming down the Hidden River with the ducks going quack-quack-quack, and the echoes, the echoes, while the tugboat goes with the Tuca squaws slithering over the green-glass river toward the Atlantic...

Zero Hour

This beauty of the natural world, set in contrast to Sandino's death, does not indicate nature's indifference to the going's-on in society, but rather resonates with the beauty of the 'newly-created' earth! The beauty remains and the revolution's project is not only to reclaim the earth, but

Many Nicaraguan homes feature posters of Christ side by side with ones of Che Guevara, Marx and Sandino



Claudia Gordillo

It is this great social movement that has spoken through the available ideology of Christianity

also to recreate a redemptive social order eliminating the contrast between the innocent beauty of nature and the socio-political world. "With all things held in common/as they were before the Fall of our First Parents".

Marxism or Christianity?

In the preface to *Zero Hour and Other Documentary Poems*, D.D. Walsh calls Cardenal a marxist-christian poet. In his talk in Toronto (O.I.S.E.), Cardenal himself endorsed this opinion. This raises questions that the epithet "christian communist" does not. Whereas the communitarian roots of christianity with an emphasis on social justice can have exactly the same immediate political projects as those of marxist revolutionaries, their epistemological implications are very different. They spell out antithetical relationships between consciousness and the material world. This becomes a problem if marxism is seen as a philosophy, a world view, a method of investigation of reality rather than solely as a political project. That is, if while discussing marxism we talk not only of *The Communist Manifesto* but also, for example, of *The German Ideology*, if we see *Capital* not only as an exposure of a particular type of exploitation, but as a method of exploring social formations. If such considerations are kept in mind one must come to a conclusion of an irreducible contradiction existing between materialist and idealist interpretations of the relations between the socio-historical world and forms of consciousness. One approaches reality radically differently depending on whether one believes that God created man or man created God.

Cardenal himself does not seem to think there is a contradiction, neither in his O.I.S.E. talk nor in his writing. While answering questions regarding his marxism he equated the biblical notion of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth with the marxist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He also made statements like, "He saw that matter was good (a materialistic God)" or "Idols are idealism/While the prophets were professing dialectical materialism."

What could he have possibly meant by using such words as 'materialism' or 'dialectical materialism' in such ways and such contexts? This is not a usage that either materialists or idealists would accept because it robs words of their meaning in a consistent philosophical tradition.

It is politically and morally acceptable to say that marxist politics and christian ethics move toward the same goal. It is also true that the Nicaraguan 'church of revolution' and the marxists conceptualize history in terms of struggles of classes, struggles between the oppressors and the oppressed. Both reject exploitation and alienation and seek to establish a society of just distribution and development of creativity. Both consider basic needs rather than

merit and at least in theory reject the division between mental and manual labour. So far so good. But things begin to stick at the epistemological divide.

Secularism of marxism and spiritualism of christianity make it impossible for idealism and materialism to stand in for each other or be aggregated in a total world view. If any one sees God himself as a figment of imagination, a product of idealist thought, that God can not be seen as 'a materialist God'. It does make all the difference in the world if we were to say that consciousness is determined by existence, rather than the reverse.

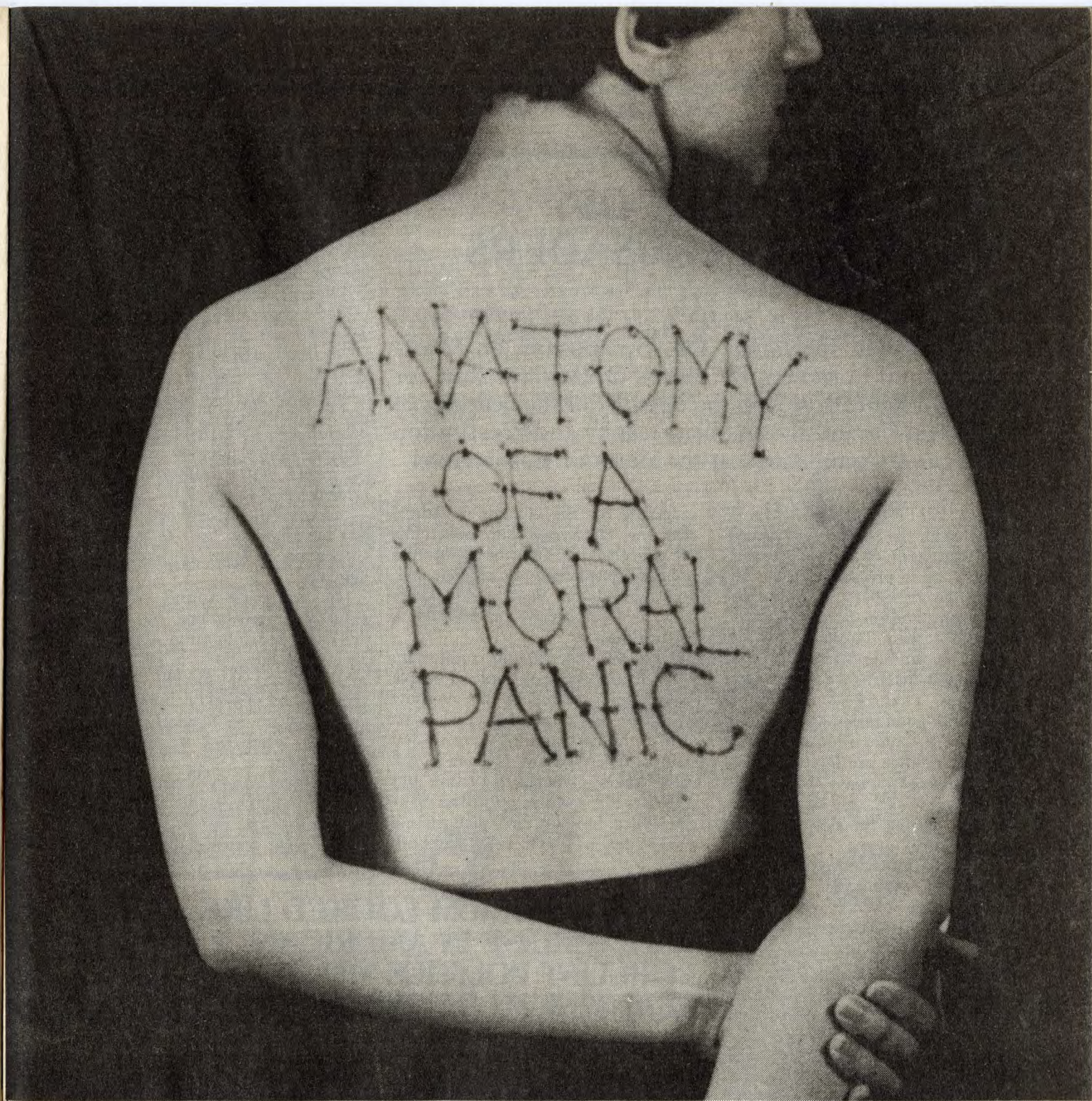
It could be that if these two traditions of thought were spelled out and developed to their fullest ramifications they would actually have different practical/political implications, not just epistemological ones. It is my feeling that a 'materialist' reading of the Bible would disempower the Bible itself of the type of moral force and revelatory character that Cardenal finds in it.

The other problem that emerges out of this attempt of what seems to me to be an unworkable synthesis is that the source of one's political/moral actions remains unclear and undifferentiated. This could pose a real problem if, for instance, one lost one's religious (idealist) motivations and had no secular ethics on which to proceed. This dilemma was posed a long time ago by Dostoevski in *The Brothers Karamazov*, in the question of Ivan, who said, "if God is dead, must not all things lose value and all actions including murder become permissible?" One need not cite such extreme examples perhaps except to point out the degree of confusion that such aggregation leaves one open to. Also there are other possibilities that one must guard against. If, for instance, the people of Nicaragua see their revolution as a 'christian revolution' then a strongly divided pulpit, as reflected in the attitudes or dictates of the right-wing Cardenal Obando y Bravo of Managua, or of the Pope himself, could confuse the people and re-assert reactionary trends. This could of course also weaken the participation of the clergy in general, and pose the problem of seceding from the Roman church.

But even with these questions and reservations, one must revert to the position that the only revolutionary project that succeeds in any fundamental way must begin where people are. It must be a process that reclaims, regenerates and reconstructs the overall terrain of popular consciousness. The goal of social justice and the defence of the revolution from reaction and U.S. imperialism have drawn the Nicaraguan people together, believers and non-believers alike; the coincidence of the will of the people has led to a convergence of political understanding and symbols. It is this great social movement that has spoken through the available ideology of christianity. It is this that has radicalized christianity, rather than christianity radicalizing the people.

Himani Bannerji

SUMMER 1984



ANATOMY OF A MORAL PANIC

VARDA BURSTYN CRITIQUES TWO FORUMS
ON PORNOGRAPHY, PROSTITUTION
AND MEDIA VIOLENCE

DANGERS OF THE PORN CRUSADERS

ON FEBRUARY 5TH AND 6TH TORONTO WAS treated to twin spectacles: the "Symposium on Media Violence and Pornography" at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and the opening of the hearings of the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution (the "Fraser Committee") at the Harbour Castle Hotel.

TIMED WITH CONSUMMATE political skill, the Symposium preceded the hearings much as the reconstruction of a crime precedes a trial. The Committee members attended the Symposium, and made reference to it throughout their Toronto deliberations. Symposium organizers, for their part, tipped their hats to the Fraser Committee. This special relationship existed with good reason: the political projects of the Symposium and of the Fraser Committee are interdependent and intertwined in ways that became increasingly clear, and increasingly worrying, during the days in which they unfolded.

In order to understand the nature of this political symbiosis, I would ask you to go back to a cold, snowy Sunday morning in February as great crowds of people thronged to the authoritative Bloor Street auditorium of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. They were coming to attend the Symposium, sponsored by a group who call themselves the Canadian Coalition Against Violent Entertainment. Judging from their literature, this group is a mixed bag of individuals who have come together around the issue of pornography and violence in the media. If the conference proceedings are any indication of the power dynamics within the group, it seems that their chairperson, David Scott, is totally in command. It was he who lined up the speakers and attempted to weave a web of apparent consensus between irreconcilable positions. Scott is an American-born graduate student in psychology, a former primal therapist and a two-time

candidate for the Liberals in federal elections. The Symposium looked like an exercise in American populist politics transplanted to Canadian soil, and showed that Scott is still every inch the man intent on building a political base.

By 11:30 the 600-seat auditorium was packed, and two hundred people were already seated in the overflow rooms on the mezzanine level, watching the proceedings on video screens. The media were there in full force having scented that rare but unbeatable media combination: evangelical fervour, dirty pictures and a great deal of blood, belonging both

decency" in "our" society. To listen to him use these terms in the context of Reagan's America was to experience a qualitatively new level of willful dishonesty and self-delusion. His casual assumptions of complete cultural and political identity between Canada and the U.S., his blithe assurance that we share his commitment to an economic and political system in which social expenditure is slashed and the military budget is upped to the trillions of dollars, his glib belief that we think that the problem of violence against women can possibly be solved in the framework of the priorities and values of the New Right — in a word, his assumed impunity was breathtaking. So was the virtual silence on it from conference participants.

His approach found echoes in numerous presentations, but its most dramatic recapitulation took place during the slide show on "kiddie porn" by the agent from the FBI. This man showed a set of slickly choreographed images which he regularly takes all over the continent in his crusade against smut.

The presentation begins with pictures of toddlers playing on the beach 'au naturel' and moves to pubescent kids playing sexual games with each

THE SYMPOSIUM LOOKED LIKE AN EXERCISE IN AMERICAN POPULIST POLITICS TRANSPLANTED TO CANADIAN SOIL...

to the innocent victims whose bodies were sure to be on display, and to the feminists who were bound to be massacred by the patriarchal line-up promised by the Symposium's advance publicity — a line-up so politically mixed that it gave many feminist groups in town the political willies just to read it.

The reality turned out to be fully as awful as the agenda predicted. The keynote speech was given by the American surgeon general Everett Koop. For forty-five minutes he spoke in Reaganite double talk about the failure of "compassion" and "human

other. The apparent innocence of these events, we are told, is just a dangerous illusion, for to pedophiles, these pictures are 'pornography' from which they derive sick pleasure. From these images he progresses to snap-shots of adults of indeterminate age (in their twenties perhaps, perhaps older, many different pictures) playing with adolescents and then escalates to pictures of a young girl tied up in horrendous imitation of a sequence in a bondage magazine ("This man wasn't a pedophile", says the FBI agent, "just a man looking for someone to do his bidding". What are the pictures doing in

the collection, then? Good question.); and concluded with the bodies of young men murdered and mutilated.

These pictures and the sexuality they presumably represent cannot be found on the open market. Anti-porn laws will not touch these images. So why are they a part of the Symposium against pornography? Because, according to the logic of the FBI, pornography is responsible for luring unsuspecting victims into the filthy clutches of perverts and hence for all the terrible things the slide show has demonstrated. In the horror and panic produced by this extraordinary assemblage of images and ideas, the whole distinction between consensual sex play between peers and among teens and adults on the one hand, and the coercive behaviour of some men vis à vis children and youth on the other, goes up in smoke. This is no accident. It is remarkable to what degree FBI reasoning has remained true to its J. Edgar Hoover formation. Like the old argument that marijuana leads inexorably to heroin addiction, this presentation insinuates that parents must hide, suppress and control both their children's and their own sexuality at all times, otherwise their children will end up dead and mangled, like the real victims of violent crime the FBI has found and photographed; and the adults, so the vicious undertones suggest, may well end up as the molesters shown in the grisly photographs.

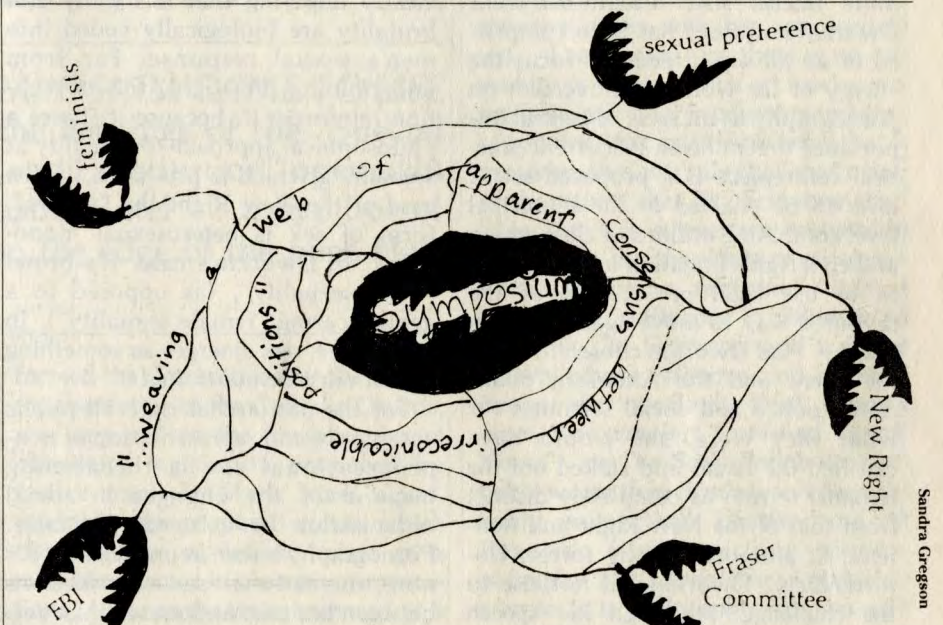
The manipulation of our emotions in the service of this ideology is horrifying, but as we are shown images of brutalised young bodies many times larger than life, I realize that there is another nightmare going on. I become aware of it because for every violated body on the screen, my own mind is flashing on the pictures I have seen of torture victims — Latin Americans brutalized by the CIA-trained specialists who are the essential pillars of support to regimes from Pinochet to Duarte. I realize that the sadistic FBI pictures do not look like most of the hard-core porn that I saw on Forty Second Street when I spent time researching there last year. They do look like what you see in mercenary and police magazines, in war films, in military training manuals — in all those publications which speak for the social

institutions that cultivate, glorify and perpetuate aggression and violence.

I realized that the agent from the FBI has no objection to violence being used (he wants prison sentences for any men who possess pictures even of dressed children if they are "known child-lovers"); he has no problem with the institutionalization of sadism as long as it is used against people he thinks of as his enemies; 'communists' abroad and 'perverts' at home. When American men do to non-American people what the brutes he showed do to American children and youths, they

voices of sanity tried valiantly to present a balanced view against a dizzying display of slides, charts and research models full of reactionary bias and obscurantist methodology; as moment by moment feminist politics were systematically excluded (the "divisive" issues of abortion and sexual preference had been ruled out of the discussion by the conference organizers from the beginning) through inundation, silence or direct attack.

In fact, so suppressed were the ideas of feminism that shortly after the lunch break, a group of women, some of



are defending civilisation. But if they turn their brutality inwards against, potentially, his children, then things are out of control and must be taken in hand. This kind of reasoning handily prevents him from calling into question the system which produces norms of masculinity which are themselves sick; instead it makes him — and he makes us — afraid of sexuality itself.

The larger structure of the Symposium should not go unobserved, for it said a great deal about the politics behind the event. Most important was the fact that the symposium had no room, structured or otherwise, for members of the conference to voice opinions or even to pose questions to the speakers. For nine hours eight hundred people sat as panels of women fought for time with individually presented male stars; as occasional

whom were panel participants, others not, stormed the stage, held a banner that proclaimed: "women's bodies, women's choices, women will decide" and read a statement to the conference criticising its patriarchal character. It was a good action, because it tried to retrieve the feminist stamp of approval which had implicitly been conferred on the conference by the initial agreement of a number of feminists to participate in it on the terms of the conference organizers. (This in effect vindicated the decision of a number of feminist services, socialist-feminist and gay groups to boycott the conference, a decision explained in a brief pamphlet that was handed out at the conference.) But the action came too late to recuperate the effect of the whole event, and did nothing to stem the tide of the larger dynamic of feminist coop-

tation which is now in full swing in the political culture as a whole.

By the time we had heard from the FBI agent and the American Surgeon General in the mid-afternoon, there was only one person who had sufficient authority, both because of her power as a speaker and her strategic location in the right/feminist alliance, to undermine that dynamic. That person was Andrea Dworkin, founding mother of Women Against Pornography, chief theoretician for the radical wing of the anti-pornography movement, and resource person for its more liberal sister-stream as well. Dworkin's strategy has been comprised of an all out attempt to focus the energy of the women's movement on pornography as an issue of central importance to feminism. Its current practical centrepiece is a proposed set of laws to be enacted at the municipal level combining notions of class action and civil rights litigation in such a way as to use legal prosecution as the favoured way to move against pornography. Had Dworkin chosen to name the event and the American politicians, police and social scientists for what they were, she would have clarified the issues and staked out the feminist terrain as completely distinct from that of the New Right and non-feminist antipornography forces. Unfortunately, Dworkin did not rise to the challenge. Although her speech

thing in life most important to men, and the essential goal and achievement of Patriarchy. "Male sexuality" is the living expression of this orientation, and, by implication, pornography is its natural, inevitable, ubiquitous product. Patriarchy is misogyny is pornography, runs the Dworkinist logic, and "male sexuality" is the lynch pin of the whole shooting match.

Both in her speech and in her current writings, Dworkin does not speak of "masculine", that is of *learned*, sexual behaviour, but of "male", that is of ascribed sexual behaviour, clearly implying that misogyny and brutality are biologically coded into men's sexual response. Far from undermining the Right, this conception reinforces it, because it shares a philosophical approach to sexuality as something which is pre-given. In the case of the New Right the "natural" form of sex is heterosexual monogamy; in Dworkin's case, it's brutal "male sexuality", (as opposed to a gentle, caring "female sexuality"). In either case, sex emerges as something which must be *controlled*.

For the patriarchal right all public acceptance and representation of non-procreational sex is threatening because of the changes in social organisation its existence validates. Pornography is seen as propaganda for non-procreational sex. Distinctions between feminist and masculinist ver-

social relations, Dworkin as well as the New Right seek to exorcise pornography as if it were the devil incarnate.

The exorcism metaphor is extreme, but it conveys something of the fundamental problems of the "evil" approach when it comes to developing strategy and social policy. Whether informed by a patriarchal or a feminist worldview, this approach demands control, repression and punishment as the keys to eradicating the problems as it defines them. And these methods bring, by extension, greater construction of and reliance on the organized structures of power and social domination in our society — those state systems social scientists describe as the apparatuses of social control. We do not need such an expansion of social control, we need a growth of self determination and popular power. Dworkin's inability to understand the crucial differences between the two is seriously weakening the women's movement's capacity to fight for these goals.

Many radical feminists who are correctly suspicious of the state think that Dworkin's furious anti-male rhetoric rescues her from alignment with the New Right. Alas, this is far from the case. Her insistence for example, in other speeches and articles, that Right and Left men are equally patriarchal, equally hating; that the differences between them is simply that Right men want their pornography in private, and Left men want it in public is profoundly dangerous and works in *de facto* fashion to encourage alliances with the Right. If Left men have no more to offer women than men of the Right, this reasoning goes, if Left men are identical to Right men on the only issue that really counts, and since Right men agree off the bat to go after porn, whereas Left men hesitate to call for any form of censorship (conclusive proof that they want to hold on to their pornography at all costs...), alliances with the Right are virtually guaranteed. By equating socialist men with New Right men, Dworkin throws out with one fell swoop the entire record of acquisitions embodied in, for example, the welfare state — acquisitions fought for by men as well as women, especially by socialists and trade unionists.

By appearing on the same platform

with Koop and not denouncing him and his administration for their record on women's issues (remember the withdrawal of Medicaid funding for abortion?), Dworkin implicitly encourages us to forget the social record of the Reagan administration. By encouraging us to focus only on men's hatred and violence on the one hand, and women's fear and rage on the

other, Dworkin encourages women to see themselves as victims and men to see themselves as monsters; women's overriding feelings become panic and fear; men's guilt, shame and defensiveness. These feelings, while perhaps inevitable in the process of coming to consciousness, are not alone positive bases from which to build strategy and alliances.

THE TRIAL: WHO JUDGES WHOM?

THE POLITICS OF THE SYMPOSIUM CAME TO LIFE again the following day as the hearings of the "Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution" opened in Toronto at the Harbour Castle Hotel — a symbol of affluence and status sitting on the edge of the posh Harbourfront development.

THE HOTEL WORKERS WERE ON the job that morning, setting up the accoutrements for the still-breakfasting committee, fitting the red-draped tables on the raised dias at the front of a large ballroom with water and microphones, opening the cloak-rooms, cleaning the toilets, serving coffee in the restaurants. Later in the day, we saw cocktail waitresses in the lobby bar, dressed in long, clingy dresses slit up to the thigh to reveal bare legs and high heels. But inside the hearings hall, the people present were distinctly middle-class and professional, the only exceptions being the prostitutes who had come to speak on their own behalf.

The hearings began shortly after ten o'clock, and the opening presentation was made, fittingly enough, by Toronto Mayor Art Eggleton. His Honour pleaded for more police and tougher soliciting and pornography laws and supported the film and video censorship. He was followed by Dr. Suzanne Scorsone, speaking on behalf of the archdiocese of Toronto, who echoed his sentiments in tones that made the original plea seem feeble by comparison. In addition to endorsing all of Eggleton's demands, Dr. Scorsone in-

formed the Committee that she, as the representative of the Catholic Church, was opposed to the liberalisation of obscenity legislation proposed by justice minister Mark MacGuigan, especially the proposed clause which cites literary or artistic merit as a mitigating factor in obscenity prosecutions. As far as she was concerned, it is

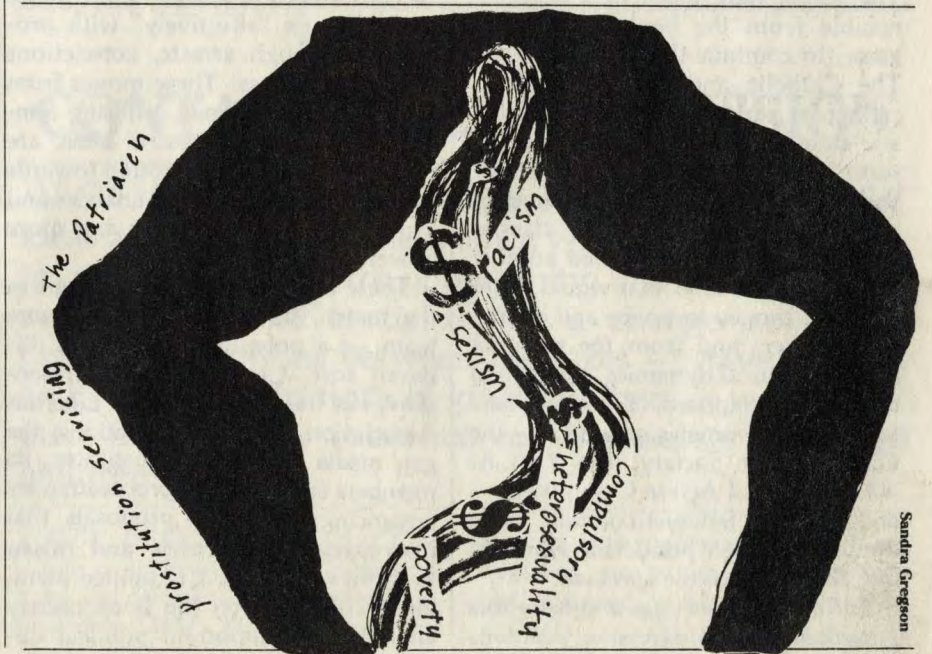
not the form but the content that counts. If the values are wrong in commercial material they can be equally subversive in art. The idea implied in the proposed amendment — that art is somehow better than commercial material — is nothing but a smokescreen for corrupt values, she asserted.

Dr. Scorsone set a rather harsh tone, but her words were in a peculiar sense a relief because she was so openly up front about the relations between laws, social relations and social values. One knows where one stands with Dr. Scorsone, and from the opposite point of view one can even, in small measure, agree with her approach to 'art'. I too think that there is no immunity or purity which art has by virtue of its artisanal production process. I too think that artistic material that is censored does as a rule challenge many of the values that Dr. Scorsone cherishes; that it is 'subversive' material to that extent. But the extent of my agreement is of course, profoundly limited because the difference in values is so great. To Dr. Scorsone, and to Mary Brown whose religious and political circles she overlaps, Paul Wong's tapes, for example, ("Confused: Sexual Views"), or *The Body Politic* are probably worse than *Penthouse*, even probably worse than *Hustler*; and Al Razutis's filmic critique of pornography and advertising is probably seen to be in philosophic cahoots with

IN THE CASE OF THE NEW RIGHT, THE 'NATURAL' FORM OF SEX IS HETEROSEXUAL MONOGAMY...

was full of anger and outrage, it was not clearly directed against the *living* political and economic representatives of what she calls Patriarchy — the Reagans, the generals, the bosses, the bureaucrats, the gangsters, the pimps. Instead she chose to declaim against the whole male sex in terms that were frighteningly close to biological determinism. Pornography, she stated, is what "men like to do to women". Men "like to do it" because it reduces women to a non-human status, the

sions of change — whether women have a say or are just objects in these new forms of sexual practice — is irrelevant. For Dworkin and those who share her point of view, non-procreational sex is not itself the source of evil, but "male sexuality", by definition aggressive and harmful to women, is. Pornography is evil because it is propaganda for "male sexuality". As a result of this practical convergence on the character of pornography as powerful propaganda for bad sex and bad



gangsters and pimps. This is because in Dr. Scorsone's framework same-sex and sanctioned non-procreational sexuality is far more threatening to the values of the Catholic Church than a large sector of prostitution. Prostitution, whether live or pornographic, has after all proven its ability to stabilize patriarchal social relations. As long as it remains hidden, as long as the minority of women who sell sex directly can be scapegoated for the problems of the whole society, prostitution works very well with, indeed is necessary to, a system of compulsory heterosexual monogamy. Work that in effect challenges that

on prostitution, calling for decriminalization, for better social services for prostitutes and for community, non-criminal means of regulation. With respect to the issue of pornography, unfortunately, they were less thoughtful and careful. By arguing that the current obscenity legislation be replaced by new "pornography" legislation, they provided the cover for continued harassment and *de facto* censorship of sexual material. ("Pornography" should be defined, they argued, as, variously, violent, coercive and degrading sexual material.) There was no unanimity on formulation and insufficient concern with the possible

MAYOR EGGLETON...ARGUED FOR LAWS THAT WOULD CHANNEL MORE MONEY TO POLICE AND COURTS

system is consequently far more dangerous than commercial material symptomatic of the system. To Dr. Scorsone the fact that the Ontario Censor Board regularly cuts or bans artists' films is a good thing, to be defended and extended to the maximum.

Thus the hearings of the Fraser Committee were, as the reporters in the media put it, kicked off in Toronto. The teams were more or less recognizable from the beginning of the game, to continue the metaphor here. The Catholic and Baptist churches, calling for various forms of censorship and state crackdown, formed one big team; Mayor Eggleton, representing the whole bureaucracy he must keep in jobs and the whole local ruling class he must keep in profits, formed another and argued for laws that would channel more money to police and courts. Yet another, and from the point of view of political dynamics, the pivotal team was comprised of the women's services and women's networks — the Elizabeth Fry Society, the YWCA, NAC (National Action Committee) — and, on their feminist coattails, were the local women politicians who slid into the centre of the spectacle.

The women's services and networks presented very progressive positions

use of such legislation against dissenting or minoritarian voices. Police Commissioner Jane Pepino and Alderman (sic) June Rowlands, following in these footsteps, not only argued forcefully for anti-pornography crackdowns, they also exploited this agreement on pornography to extend their repressive orientation to the question of prostitution as well, calling for greater funds and powers to the police to deal more "effectively" with prostitutes through arrests, convictions and jail sentences. These moves from Pepino and Rowlands, utilising feminist rhetoric for repressive aims, are examples of the larger motion towards the cooptation of feminist analysis and legitimacy by much larger and more powerful repressive forces.

These then were the main players in the match, but there was one more team — a polyglot faction of a different sort. Composed of representatives of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, artists organisations, the gay media and some prostitutes, its members enlivened the proceedings by advancing ideas and proposals that provoked many scowls and raised eyebrows from the Committee members. This coalition too is an uneasy alliance with important political dif-

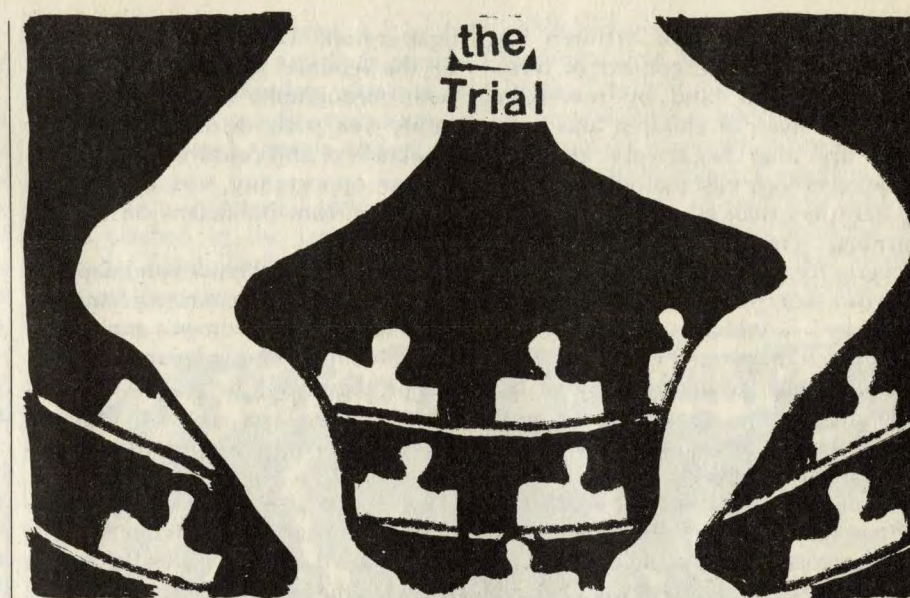
ferences which have not yet been fully explored. It also has a poor record of joint action which the hearings did nothing to change. Chris Bearhell of the *Body Politic*, for example, launched a full-scale attack on the women's movement in her presentation, instead of pointing to the fairly extensive support for anti-censorship positions in important sectors of the feminist movement and explaining the dangers of the proposed amendments to the Criminal Code. The stupidity of this tactic was rendered less clear, unfortunately, by the total absence of feminist organisations arguing against the pornography proposals of MacGuigan, NAC and some women's services. Unlike what has happened in the U.S. in recent years, clear feminist organising which actively opposes the kind of analysis and action exemplified by Dworkin and Women Against Pornography (the so-called "Pro-Sex Current") has not yet taken place. Until now only individual feminists have spoken out. The anti-censorship alliance as a whole was weakened by this situation and the silence allows the Pepinos and Rowlands of this world to appropriate the feminist label and get away with it.

As with the Symposium, the form of the event was integral to its content. The Committee has been launched to perform a dual task, and its members seemed well suited to their work. On the one hand, it represents the state to the public through organizing and intervening into the public debate. In this way the Committee can shape the debate along the lines of its own preoccupations and parameters. On the other hand, it is to interpret the responses thus evoked back to the state so that these responses can be broken down, digested and turned into policy. The hearings represent the public execution of the first aspect of this task, and the Committee members did their very best to convey the necessary atmosphere of authority and democracy. The latter characteristic, however, was continually belied by the entire performance. Sitting up there on their floodlit platform, for example, the Committee members were visible to the television cameras which were there to catch the ritual exchanges between them and their petitioners. But all

possibility of dialogue, even with the elite section of the population represented in the audience — the "public" as we were dubbed — was destroyed by the height of the platform and the blinding lights. Those of us who had come to participate in this event sat, appropriately enough, in deep shadow and developed headaches as the days wore on, trying to cope with the lights and the stiff, scripted nature of the entire event.

The six Committee members in attendance were selected and arranged with an eye perfectly attuned to the issue of gender representation. The members were upper-middle class to a person and still mobilizing their way upward to judge by the short bios available at their publicity table. The men were Queen's Counsels and deans of law schools; the women, intercutting the men like icing on a cake, also highly successful and highly placed within the legal profession — for women. Needless to say, the Committee was faultlessly groomed, Madame Ruffo positively radiant with good health, good looks and superb tailoring, Mr. Fraser glowing from his buffed nails to his carefully coifed and burnished head. It is really a wonder that even one prostitute was able to get up and speak out in that context of power, certainty and creature comfort; that any woman who has had to work in bare legs on a bitter winter night in order to keep life and limb together should be able and willing to speak in that warm hotel full of food and soft beds for the wealthy without choking on her rage was quite extraordinary. "Who should be sitting in judgement over whom?", I wondered as Paul Fraser greeted Peggy Miller (spokesperson for a prostitutes group) when she made her presentation that first day.

The question is more than rhetorical. There is something very wrong with the fact that it is the privileged who sit and judge the fate of the exploited in terms of 'morality' and 'public good'; that hearings financed by the whole 'public' are closed to the majority of people as surely as if admission were explicitly restricted to those with the verbal and social skills of a university education, preferably a graduate degree. These are always



Sandra Gregson

structural problems with Royal Commissions and Special Committees, but they are particularly acute in this case where the people whose very bodies and spirits are exploited are structurally excluded from the deliberations. Their enforced silence is echoed by the chosen and cowardly silence of the pornographers and commercial entrepreneurs who simply abstain from any public appearance, preferring to pull their powerful strings from behind the scenes. And what's worse — indeed fundamentally bankrupt would not be too harsh a judgement — the Commit-

tee itself carefully explains that it has read out of its mandate any consideration of the economic and social conditions that have created the problems of porn and prostitution they are so profitably investigating: their sole function is to judge the merits of various kinds of LEGAL reform. Since the law has nothing to do with the root causes of prostitution but is rather a reflection of the social hierarchy based in those conditions, the Committee, by definition, will be unable, as well as unwilling to recommend policy leading to real progressive change.

DIVERSION, CONTAINMENT, REPRESSION

IN CANADA TODAY, AS IN THE U.S., THE BASIC ideas and demands of the women's movement — equality in social standing, in opportunity and remuneration, reproductive and erotic rights, a change in the antagonistic relations between the sexes — have come to embody the aspirations of great numbers of women and men for a better existence for themselves and their children.

THESE DEVELOPMENTS CON-stitute an enormous change in expectations and desires — in a word, in consciousness. With the exception of a recent influx of young middle-class

women into professional training, however, no commensurate change has occurred in the structural and material conditions of men and women. If anything, the life conditions

for the majority of women are deteriorating in the context of recession/depression, and by reverberation, the lives of children and some men are also negatively affected. Women in their vast majority continue to earn less than 60 percent of men's earnings, creating a kind of super-poverty for women. This perpetuates a gender-script for men — "the provider" — which is also oppressive and which many men would prefer to leave behind. *Structural* change has not occurred — as compared with changes in law for example — because it requires a series of qualitative and fundamental changes in the economics of our society, in both the private and state sectors. These would entail a vast shift in the distribution of wealth: from the private to the public sphere, for example from capital equipment and weaponry to social provisions and community organizing; and form men-as-a-group who, in pyramid fashion, control most of this wealth to women-as-a-group and to children of both sexes, who have the least access to and control of it. When feminists have talked about the 'revolutionary potential' of the women's movement, these are the kinds of changes they have in mind. For these are the preconditions to our transcendence of present gender arrangements.

It is precisely this potential of feminism which frightens politicians

against itself. The current convergence of the feminist and rightest concern with pornography is a golden opportunity for such defusing, given the weakness of anti-censorship feminism. It is an opportunity, virtually handed to mainstream politicians on a silver platter.

Because of the breadth and depth of the changes in consciousness feminism has created, the women's movement cannot simply be bludgeoned. Defusing it requires a series of different 'moments' or stages, of which the main three are: diversion, containment and repression.

Diversion itself is a many splendored thing and it begins almost of its own accord with a series of subtle shifts at the level of ideas within the women's movement itself. From an appreciation of the multi-dimensional reality of masculine dominance, feminist concern and public awareness increasingly narrow to one dimension — the sexist and sexually explicit representation of women in the commercial media — i.e., pornography. From here, feminist concern moves to look at sex work and joins the concern of other social forces over different kinds of sexual commerce, especially prostitution. More media verbiage and feminist meetings and union educationals and institutional seminars are spent these days on these issues than on most other feminist issues combined.

REPRESSION IS A WORD THAT ALWAYS DRAWS BLANK STARES WHEN ONE USES IT IN A CANADIAN CONTEXT

who are committed to corporate capitalism and masculine privilege. These systems of privilege cannot accommodate the kinds of changes feminism's basic demands imply, and they are, as a result, very threatened by the way that feminist ideas have come to embody so many social aspirations. The political personnel who keep these systems working smoothly need, as a result, to find ways to defuse this consciousness, to divert it, to harness it and, if possible, to turn it

As the many facets of women's oppression are eradicated conceptually (Dworkin's "pornography IS patriarchy"), people's attention can more easily be diverted from the political fact that fewer social and economic resources are being devoted to action on the very conditions which create and contribute to prostitution and pornography in the first place.

The trade-off is real, in terms of both feminist and state resources. The energy of most feminist organizations

has gone into debating pornography at great length — in itself not a bad thing — in a wave of panic about porn which has swept many women up in the analysis and strategy of Dworkinesque politics — a serious problem. At the level of the state, the diversion from many to single issues takes the form of government studies and Special Committees and the millions of dollars it takes to finance them. State coffers have limits, as we are endlessly told these days, and these are dollars which would have been much better off poured into alternative job training programs for sex workers, or into self-help groups for victims of sexual abuse, programmes organized with the help of the feminist services by and for their users. The beauty of this diversion is that it convinces people that pornography causes sexism. In fact, unless change takes place on a mass scale in the economic and social conditions in which people live, the economics of our society will continue to reproduce the buyers, the producers and the workers in the sex business.

When diversion works at this level, it becomes more than simply a shift of feminist attention. It actually succeeds in containing, in freezing, the energies of the women's movement and its supporters, because it does more than refocus those energies away from the institutions of economic and gender misery, (in which change would depend on full employment, guaranteed livelihood, economic independence for youth, reproductive freedom for women and an end to compulsory heterosexuality). The process of containment actually involves feminists in reorganizing the large, expensive state systems of control and punishment: the courts, the jails, the law. And it is at this level that the mandate devised for the Fraser Committee is most inspired. Anyone concerned with the real problems of the market in human sexuality must stand on their individual or collective heads to fit that concern into the guidelines of the Committee, since it wants to hear only about legal regulation. The catch-22 is that since it is not the legal system in the first instance that is responsible for pornography and prostitution, changing the legal system while leaving the economics of sex untouched will do

nothing to improve either the conditions of its workers or the products the business makes and distributes.

Considering how insidious diversion and containment are, why are so many women in government and women's services feeding into, indeed fully participating in the whole undertaking? Perhaps economics are basically at work here as well. Many of the women who support these approaches, feminist and non-feminist alike, are professional women employed, potentially employed or indirectly funded by the various branches of the state apparatus. Their benign attitudes toward the legal reform/social control strategy stem from their relative confidence in government, state structures and the law, in turn a product of their own privileged position within and vis à vis these institutions. For too many professional women, whose pay is much closer to that of men's, and at the upper end of the income ladder at that, issues like equal pay, affirmative action, and social services are qualitatively less important than for working class women because they are earning professional salaries, even if only at 80 or 90 percent of what their male colleagues make. Consequently they have enough money to pay privately for nannies, cleaners, music teachers and psychiatrists. For a more conscious minority of professional women, as for the majority of working women and mothers, support for legal reform reflects something different: a sense of fear and desperation, and no political grasp of an alternative strategy, a different way to organize to improve the quality of life.

In so far as the legal reform strategy leads inexorably to expanding the branches of the state in charge of social control, containment begins to shade into the even nastier 'third stage' or 'moment': repression. The hard varieties of social regulation — police, prisons — are expanding, ostensibly in response to the kinds of pleas made by Eggleton and Pepino. The soft varieties — health, education and welfare — which combine forms of social control with much needed social services, shrink by comparison, and those that remain or are expanded tend to be hardened up. Mediating between these branches, and partaking both of their

hard and soft characteristics, are the ever growing courts and their personnel — lawyers and judges who make a killing on the extraordinary increase in prosecutions and appeals and all the rest of it.

It is true that social services have been slashed in the last decade in Canada. But following the same pattern as the other western states, this

publicized and understood. Now many feminists have actually reinforced the trend, directly if inadvertently.

Repression is a word that always draws blank stares when one uses it in the Canadian context. Canadians have a peculiar form of collective delusion about their political life, thinking of it as somehow free from that terrible word and all it signifies. The desire to



has not meant a real drop in state expenditure. The systems of social control — the judiciary, the courts, the prisons and the military — have benefited from the diverted funds. It is with this already present dynamic towards an increase in social control that the pornography crusades intersect. And this intersection dramatically increases the possibility of repression on a really large scale. Prior to the feminist and rightist alliance on crackdowns, this long-term structural change was potentially a dangerously discrediting development, largely hidden by the rhetoric of state fiscal crisis, but threatening to blow a lot of political legitimacy if sufficiently

believe that we are all living in a 'good world' blinds Canadians to the fact that not only in Canadian history but now, today, next door people are experiencing sexual repression by the state. They are gay people of both sexes: gay men who are liable to mass arrest on a scale which is only ever duplicated when the Canadian government evokes the War Measures Act, and lesbian mothers who are denied custody or even access to their children; they are prostitutes of both sexes who are harassed by police, brutalised and in practice without civil rights; they are working class girls taken away from family and community for the crime of 'sexual

ANATOMY OF A MORAL PANIC

precociousness'; they are pregnant women who cannot obtain abortions despite their inability to bear or rear their children; they are artists whose work is banned and censored because it somehow transgresses the rules of an oppressive society.

However, the point about repression is even broader than this, for sooner or later it will affect all feminists who really are committed to the majority of women, and not to a privileged layer. For a radical movement — a move-

Mrs. Brown is a very intelligent, very ambitious politician with a major mass base. Indeed, she exemplifies the values of the mainstream conservative wing of Canadian politics. She thus provides a good indication of the kind of values that do and will have major, and majoritarian, influence in provincial and federal levels of the Canadian state. Given half a chance, Mrs. Brown would go after all kinds of feminist and feminist informed cultural material, even material that a feminist point of

IDEOLOGICAL REPRESSION IS THE COMPANION OF COERCIVE REPRESSION AND THEY TEND TO ESCALATE IN TANDEM

ment which purports to challenge the roots of oppressive institutions — this wave of feminism has so far escaped the most dramatic costs of resistance: physical repression. During the first wave of feminism, working class women and, in the U.S. and Britain though not Canada, middle-class suffragists went to jail for their cause. In the last two decades European and Third World women have gone to prison for reproductive and economic rights. As with other radical social movements, when social tensions deepen, as they are bound to do as the recessionary decade gets worse and worse, feminist militants who stick to their principles will begin to encounter these forms of punishment and intimidation. The history of the last two hundred years makes it plain that tough times mean threats to women's gains. The cost of defending them, let alone extending them, will not be light.

Ideological repression, already present, will intensify in the context of deepening recession as well. At present the Ontario Censor Board cannot tell the difference between a scene of women's collective self-defense against rape, from "terrorism", as it indicated in its assessment of the feminist film *Born in Flames*. It has also called for the banning of a feminist film on incest "because it exploits children". Mary Brown, its leading light, rails against the Jane Fonda/John Voigt film *Coming Home* because it is "anti-family".

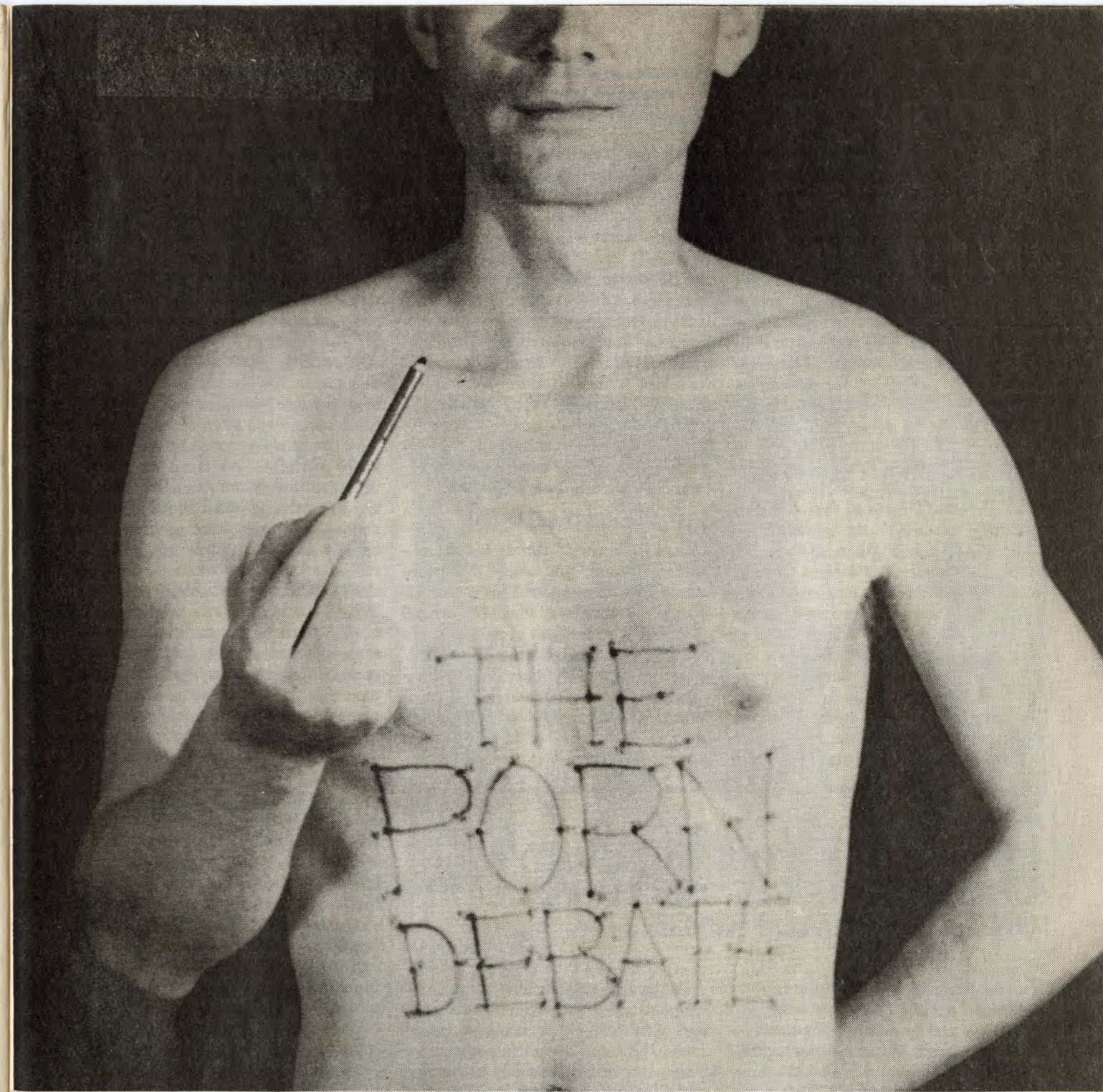
view would consider to be milquetoast. Mrs. Brown's desired goal is to narrow the content of public communication to material even more shallow and distorted than is now presented and once she is given greater room to manoeuvre, she will turn against feminists openly and directly. Ideological repression is the companion of coercive repression and they tend to escalate in tandem. We need to resist on both fronts.

Finally, to round out the ways in which the women's movement will become — is becoming — the victim of its own mistakes, we can look to certain changes in state apparatus well along at the provincial and federal levels. The last repressive trap is not in the hard apparatus of social control, but in the soft, the service sector. And the tactic in question is actually camouflaged by the appearance of 'responsiveness' to feminist demands when Liberal and Conservative governments create their own services for women — for example, the new, well-funded Ontario Women's Bureau. A triumph for the women's movement? Appearances are deceiving. First, the women appointed by the government (remember its first head, Sally Barnes, former secretary to Bill Davis?) hire non- and anti-feminist women to staff the new agencies, automatically institutionalizing the values and methods of a classist and

sexist bureaucracy in the 'response' to women's needs and political demands. Secondly, they cut off funding to the feminist-built services, automatically wiping out the input of feminist values and methods, and further impoverishing a whole layer of feminist activists and experts. In British Columbia, because of the defeat of the labour movement, such a sophisticated operation is now unnecessary. The Bennett government has simply cancelled virtually all funding to feminist services in the fields of shelters, health, advocacy. But in other provinces, and at the federal level, Socred style repression might bring rejection at the polls, so the longer-term strategy of substitute, divide and conquer is the favoured way to go.

All in all, the situation as it now stands — an agenda for increased social control on the part of capitalist and masculinist politics with a helping hand from many feminists — is pretty grim. Feminists and all who want to see social changes which benefit those who suffer most from present gender and economic arrangements must speak up now against the entire legal reform social control strategy and start to demand public resources for social provisions which pose *self-determination* and *social empowerment* as an alternative to *social control*. Social services for sex workers, for victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse which would be under user and worker control; economic independence for women and youth; reproductive rights and validation of plurality of sexual choice; an end to the commercial monopoly of sexual representation; and direct action by women in home, community and workplace to free the visual environment from material they deem to be harassing — these are what we should be organizing for in the fight against pornography; not laws which give police and judges and social workers well paid jobs to coerce and control the ever poorer working class, and thereby ultimately increase the victimization of women and children. Nothing short of these basic changes can make any real change. Nothing short of these basic changes can really free love.

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THE PORN DEBATE

GARY KINSMAN EXAMINES THE SIMILAR LIMITATIONS OF SEXUAL LIBERTARIANISM AND ANTI-PORN FEMINISM

THE PORN DEBATE

DISCUSSIONS IN PROGRESS circles in North America over the issues of porn, censorship, sex representation and sexual practice have reached an impasse. As a gay man attempting to work within an anti-sexist perspective, I have often felt pulled in different directions by these debates. This article has its beginnings as a critique of the dominant sexual libertarian trend in the gay liberation journal, *The Body Politic* (TBP). This is not to suggest that TBP has a monolithic editorial policy on these issues. There has, however, been a certain continuity in the positions taken in several articles and editorials in the past year.

As I wrote, I realized that many of the mistakes made by sexual libertarianism were reproduced in a parallel fashion by much of anti-porn feminist ideology and practice. By pointing out problems that exist in both major camps in this debate, I hope to help us move beyond this bottleneck. The importance of the issues raised goes far beyond the immediate concerns of feminists and gay men involved in the porn debate, including the questions of cultural autonomy and state control.

FOR MANY SEXUAL LIBERTARIANS, THE VANGUARD OF THIS STRUGGLE ARE THOSE ON THE SEXUAL FRINGE...

Sexual libertarianism and anti-porn feminism originated within the gay liberation and feminist movements in the U.S. (recent contributions include articles in *Christopher Street*, the *New York Native*, the *Village Voice*, the Barnard Conference on Sexuality, and the emergence of *Women Against Pornography*). In the past few years, these perspectives have been imported to Canada to explain our social, sexual and political realities. TBP, along with the other publications mentioned above, has become a leading vehicle for the expression of the gay sexual libertarian position in North America. Obviously, most advocates of sexual libertarianism are straight, but for the purposes of investigation here I will focus on gay male sexual liber-

itarianism. (Libertarianism is used here in the American sense of individual rights against all state authority and not in the British sense of emancipatory movements of workers and women.)

TBP has used a framework which may have more validity in parts of the U.S. to explain our situations here in Canada. For instance, the strategies and goals of women organizing against Red Hot Video in B.C. were interpreted in the pages of TBP through a framework developed to criticize Women Against Pornography in New York City, without examining the differences between these situations.

SEXUAL LIBERTARIANISM

Sexual libertarianism views sex as a universal good, and sexual liberation as the goal of struggle. This liberation is seen as the release of existing sexual desire from repression, freeing it of all social, legal and moral constraint. What is required is simply the abolition of repressive anti-sex laws and puritanical morality. The world is categorized into what is liberating and what is repressive and puritanical.

For many sexual libertarians, the vanguard of this struggle are those on the sexual fringe, the 'sexual outlaws'. Thus, the basis of unity between lesbians, gay men, prostitutes, hustlers and heterosexuals is constructed variously as 'deviant' and 'kinky' sex, including S/M. Together, these groups are seen as the advance guard of sexual liberation. While it is necessary to build alliances, sexual libertarianism would build this alliance on the shaky grounds of a common 'sexual outlaw' status rather than on an understanding of the special oppression that each group faces. All different, controversial or "avant garde" sexual practices are blurred together and their differences in social meaning are not understood.

On the positive side, sexual libertarianism leads to a firm anti-state censorship position, and allows for a certain space to explore lesbian and gay erotic life. For example, TBP published two articles by Tom Waugh on the history of gay male porn which represented valuable explorations of same-sex sexual representation.¹ Similarly, Chris Bearchell's article (#93, TBP, May, 1983) opened a discussion on lesbian porn. On the negative side, this perspective generally obscures the way in which the social relations of class, gender, and race and state policies participate in the organization of our sexual lives. Most significantly, it hides the differential gender organization of sexuality in a sexist society.

ANTI-PORN FEMINISM

Anti-porn feminism is the position within feminism which sees porn as a root cause of violence against women, ("porn is the theory, rape is the practice") and the oppression of women in general. It is an ideological position perhaps most clearly expressed by the Women Against Pornography group in New York City, and in the work of Andrea Dworkin. This perspective, which grew out of the feminist movement against violence against women, has clearly been able to organize and tap the anger that many women, straight and lesbian, feel against the imagery of hetero porn. Anti-porn feminism, like other currents of feminist organizing against sexist violence, demonstrates an ability to broaden the feminist struggle and organize women against oppression. At the same time, it often ignores the need to address the sexual needs and desires of women.

Anti-porn feminism (which includes advocates of both liberal and radical feminism) also tends to have an ambiguous attitude towards the state. Given the present context of attempts by right-wing groups, governments and the police to whip up 'moral panics' over sexual explicitness in porn, there is a real danger that feminist anger may be coopted and used to further plans for state action against oppositional portrayals of sexuality. Many anti-porn feminists do not

seem to understand the heterosexual assumptions they are perpetuating when they treat all porn as heterosexual without realizing the possible consequences of their activity in increasing state clampdowns on gay male porn and artistic activities. Obscenity legislation does not operate uniformly against sexual portrayals, but acts most rigorously against gay and oppositional images. Anti-porn feminism, practiced carelessly, can feed into moral panic and dubious political alliances which will, in the long run, help to undermine feminism.

CREATING DIVISION THE PORN DEBATE

Both sides of the porn debate can be criticized for creating and organizing this division among and between feminists and gay liberationists. TBP, for instance, has attempted to divide feminists into two categories, the 'good' ones who never organize against or criticize porn, and the 'bad' ones, those 'radical feminists' who oppose porn and supposedly advocate state censorship.

The focus on radical feminism, in Canada, is at least somewhat misplaced since liberal feminists (e.g. Maude Barlow, the Prime Minister's advisor on women's issues) and their alliance with the existing state structure represent more of a danger in this respect. This is a point TBP seems to ignore. For instance, their deputation to the "Fraser Committee on Prostitution and Pornography" did not spend time informing the committee members of TBP's actual experiences with obscenity legislation and state censorship. Instead, they devoted their half-hour to a polemic against radical feminism. TBP has also contributed to a distorted image of feminism in Canada, since it often relies on mainstream media accounts of feminism (for example, the stereotype of the anti-sex feminist), and often does not cover the debates and discussions of grass roots feminists (e.g. the Toronto International Womens' Day forum on pornography). In this process, it participates in silencing those feminists who are both strongly anti-censorship and anti-porn.

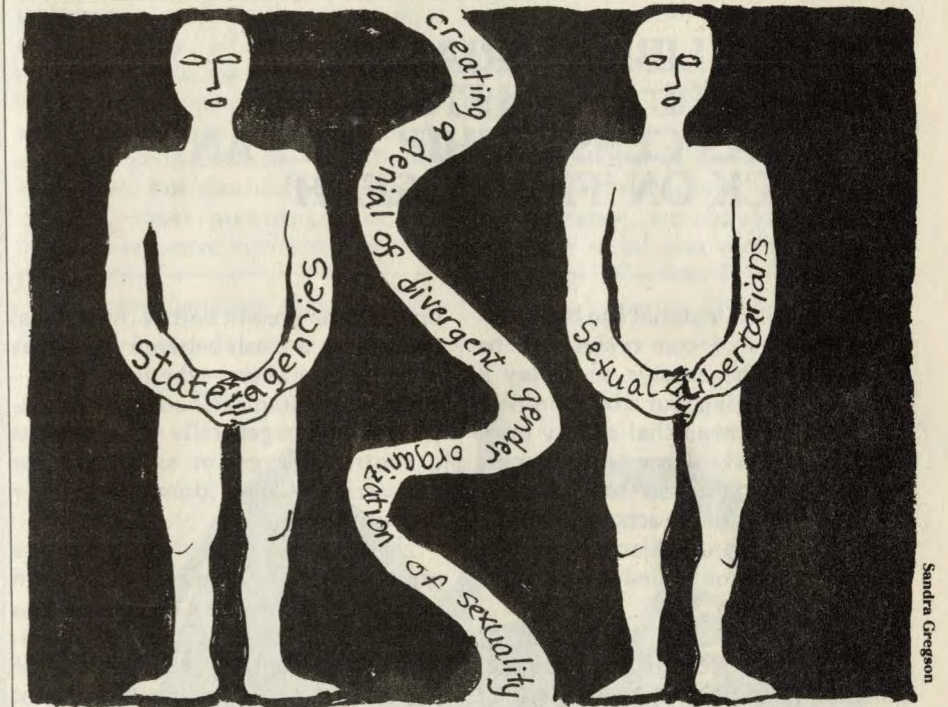
TBP's publication of an ad from Red

Hot Video in June 1983, at the same time as a mass feminist campaign was going on against this company, did not serve to clarify the complex debates over porn, but only created further polarization and division.

Both the libertarian and anti-porn positions ("porn is sexual liberation" vs. "porn is violence against women") are ideological accounts which treat porn as a thing-in-itself, rather than as

"we must not forget that women's sexuality is still by and large excluded from patriarchal public space and that somehow our claim to societal space is complicit in that exclusion...We must not forget this complexity if we are to be able to talk with women about our erotic culture."³

Sexual libertarians will have to recognize that hetero porn is a problem not only for many feminists, but is a



a form of social organization of sexually explicit representations. As a result, neither perspective investigates or accounts for internal contradictions within porn, or its different forms of social organization (i.e. straight male vs. gay male).

Sexual libertarianism assumes a universal sexuality undifferentiated by the social organization of gender, while anti-porn feminism tends to view everything through the prism of the social division of gender. If we started instead by accounting for the different experiences of women and gay men we would begin in a different place and would be led to a perspective that could resolve these seemingly conflicting views. We would be able to see that sexuality for women in a sexist society is both a realm of pleasure and a realm of denial, violence and danger.² As Tom Waugh reminds us,

problem for any sex-positive social change. Hetero porn carries with it, and helps to reproduce, the relations of male domination over women, and helps to create a social environment where violence against women is considered normal and natural. The social dominance of hetero porn also contributes to the hegemony of heterosexuality in this society, the corresponding marginalization and exclusion of lesbianism and homosexuality, and the denial of any autonomous women's sexuality apart from institutionalized heterosexuality. The images of sexuality carried in hetero porn are hardly the images of sexual liberation we should be fighting for. Seen in this light, feminist struggle against hetero porn is part of a broader struggle against the oppression of women in a sexist society.

From this perspective we could

THE PORN DEBATE

recognize the different character of gay male and hetero porn. While hetero porn largely perpetuates sexist relations, gay male porn (and the lesbian porn and erotica for lesbians that does exist), stands outside this social organization of gender inequality. Same-sex erotic images can serve as important validations for lesbians' and gay men's sexuality — our porn and

NEED FOR HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Both sexual libertarianism and anti-porn feminism lack a sense of history and social organization — they are unable to explain why porn and sexual representation have become such a contested battlefield now. With such timeless categories as 'liberation' and 'repression' sexual libertarianism can

SEXUAL LIBERTARIANISM VIEWS ALL CHALLENGES TO PORN AS CENSORSHIP — AS AN ATTACK ON 'FREE SPEECH'

sexually explicit material can be an important part of our resistance to heterosexual hegemony, and play a role in organizing our communities. This does not mean that all gay male porn is beyond criticism. As commercially produced porn in this society, it contains much that is racist, ageist, and downright boring. Also, most gay male porn is controlled by straight business interests.

However, instead of accounting for these differences in social meaning, sexual libertarianism in the gay movement tends to universalize the white middle class gay male experience of porn. This experience is the opposite of the ideological accounts of sexuality provided for us by state agencies. As George Smith of the Right to Privacy Committee explained in his brief to the Fraser Committee, the Committee's "Issues Paper" structured the "discussion so as to assimilate homosexual life to heterosexual life, treating them as though they were identical; that is treating all sexual life as though it were heterosexually organized." The varying experiences of gay male hustlers and female prostitutes, which the government in this report lumps together, are obviously not equivalent. Sexual libertarianism reverses the heterosexually-based view by generalizing from the special experience of gay men, but the effect is the same — a denial of the divergent gender organization of sexuality in this society.

only see the present battles over sexual imagery as a clash between the forces of sexual liberation — the good guys — and the puritanical bad guys. Anti-porn feminism generally views porn as a central expression of a timeless patriarchy of male domination over women.

Neither view has investigated the growth and development of the porn industry in terms of its emergence as a mass-production industry in the post-war years as part of the expansion of capitalism, and as an integral element of the broader system of representation of sexuality and gender in advertising, the media, and the entertainment industry.⁴ The state in the fifties and sixties attempted to regulate sexually explicit imagery through the categories of public and private. In the courses of action constructed by the state, porn was OK for private consumption, but not for public display. This regulation of sexual representation broke down under the pressure of increased public visibility of sexualized images. These social processes set the stage for the current battles over sex representation. The increasingly public character of these images created grounds for struggle, as the social relations embedded in these representations were criticized and struggled over. Feminism challenged patriarchal hegemony over images of women in advertising, the media and porn. Simultaneously much of the media, the right wing and the

police organized a backlash to 'sexual permissiveness' which includes calls for the re-privatization of these images and tougher state censorship.

OUR FREEDOM OF SPEECH IS NOT THE FREEDOM OF THE MARKETPLACE

While anti-porn feminism tends to downplay the very real dangers of state censorship, sexual libertarianism views all challenges to porn as censorship — as an attack on "free speech". Thus, different social groups operating on the stage of struggle over sex representation are conflated together (namely feminist anti-porn groups and the right-wing), denying the differing social motivations that lie behind their critiques of porn. This reduction of anti-porn feminism to the anti-feminist right-wing serves only to prevent any serious discussions of, and engagement with, anti-porn feminist ideology and politics.

TBP and other sexual libertarians are led to an important but abstract defence of "freedom of speech". In the context of the present debate this aligns sexual libertarians not only with civil libertarians but also with the defenders of the hetero porn industry itself.

In the final analysis sex libertarianism is a fundamentally liberal position. "Freedom of speech" in a society ruled by a capitalist marketplace is freedom for the present corporations and monopolies who dominate this market. We certainly want to defend and extend freedom of speech for lesbians and gay men, women and other oppressed people, but what interest can we have in defending and expanding the freedom of speech of the businesses and monopolies who presently control the mass media, and hetero porn industries? We have to establish the conditions of access that would allow oppressed groups control over the means of production, distribution and viewing of images. This would begin to establish the conditions for real freedom of speech.

Both sexual libertarianism and anti-porn feminism neglect the need to transform the realm of sexual representation and cultural production. Production of our own porn/erotica is ab-

solutely necessary, but it will remain a fringe phenomena, unless we deal not only with obscenity legislation and state censorship but also with the existing monopolies that control and define representations of our lives. The freedom of speech we should be fighting for and expanding is not the same thing as freedom of the marketplace. Otherwise, with our present lack of access to resources, all we are fighting for is the right to produce a consumer side-show event to the mainstream of society, with our images being distributed to only a small minority of people. We can rely neither on the marketplace nor the state for the images we need of our lives and desires.

ECONOMISM & IDEALISM

In conjunction with the absence of historical analysis, sexual libertarianism as put forward in TBP also develops a new form of what can be called *economism* — the idea that images, representations, words or fantasies are not 'real', but simply ideas (ideology). Therefore, they are not material or determining, as opposed to the determining 'material base' of society. In some ways this distinction is only a replay of the vulgar marxist distinction of 'ideology/material base' which has been used by a socialist tradition dominated by white heterosexual men to dismiss struggles over gender, race and sexuality.

This position has been most clearly expressed in Ken Popert's article, "Race, moustaches and sexual prejudice" (TBP June 1983). In this article we were informed that whites, blacks, Asians and Native Peoples were all "victims of racism when it impinges on sexuality", that "we are not responsible for the content of our desires", and that "Racism will go out of our sexuality when racism goes out of society and not before". Popert, writing from the standpoint of a white gay man, argues that racial fantasies, ideas and sexual practices cannot be changed now, instead we have to wait for changes in society. Social struggle is postponed until after social change when, we are told, images will automatically change. This picture paints our lives as totally determined by social forces,

THE PORN DEBATE

undermining possibilities for resistance and neglecting the potential for personal and social transformation in the present. The short-sightedness of a sexual libertarian perspective is displayed here. This very same logic, for example, could be used to put any critique of heterosexism and homophobia on hold, until after the revolution.

Sexual libertarianism ignores the fact that transforming and gaining control over the media — the communications industry, advertising and the means of producing erotic imagery — is part of changing society. This involves not only gaining control of the means of production and distribution of images, but also transforming the images, their meanings and the relations we enter into when we view them.

Anti-porn feminism makes the op-

posite mistake of tending towards an idealist critique of porn. The images in porn themselves become the focus, to the detriment of the social context in which these images are produced and distributed. This has a tendency to uproot porn from the social relations in which it is produced, treating it as a set of bad ideas or images. The result: porn is addressed as a single-issue, separated from the broader context of sexist relations of which it is an integral part.

BIG 'P' & LITTLE 'P' POWER

Both tendencies also tend to confuse different types of power in this society. For instance, we should distinguish between social and erotic power, or between "Capital P" Power, and "small p" power. The first refers to



Sandra Gregson

THE PORN DEBATE

forms of social power organized by the social relations of gender, class or race, while the second is the erotic power we can experience in sex play, which some people refer to as empowerment. For example, Rick Bebout, in an otherwise interesting article entitled, "From 'pornography' and 'erotica' back to sex", in *TBP*, October 1983, fails to distinguish between two men engaged in sexual play (where one is on top and eroticized for his position and control, for his erotic energy and power) with the systematic sexual domination that many women experience in this society. In contrast, images of hetero rape in porn exist within a social reality where rape and violence against women are everyday features of sexist social organization. Erotic power in sexual play should not be confused with the power of coercion in rape.

Many anti-porn feminists have also made the same error, viewing the previously mentioned gay male sex scene as an instance of domination rather than erotic play. Making distinctions between these different

In relation to the state, which historically has been a central organizer of women's and gay oppression, anti-porn feminism leads to an ambiguous position at best. While sexual libertarianism adopts a firm anti-state position, it is one-sided in ignoring our need for positive reforms like sexual orientation protection, funding for women's services, affirmative action programs, and other legal and democratic reforms. We have to struggle for control over, and radical transformation of, the state in this society. We should not simply be after a larger gay ghetto in which we can do what we want, free of state interference, as sexual libertarianism suggests. We also need a new society where the systematic organization of the oppression of women, and the exclusion and oppression of lesbians and gay men is no longer a part of state and social policy.

Clarification of these issues is all the more urgent given the movement of the state into this arena. With its laws, Censor Boards, police forces, Fraser

and also act to weaken patriarchal and heterosexist hegemony over sex representation. This will involve combining calls for the repeal of obscenity legislation, defence of the rights of sex workers, and the decriminalization of all consensual sexuality, with support for struggles against violence against women and sexist images. This would include support for the social and economic changes necessary to free sexuality from sexist social organization, as well as the making of our own alternate erotica/porn.

On the basis of support for the struggles against sexist violence and for the transformation of sexist forms of representation, gay men could engage in a productive dialogue with those anti-porn feminists who are currently being used by state agencies in proposals for the tighter regulation of explicitly sexual material. In moving beyond sexual libertarianism, gay men could weather the storms of the present porn debate, and come out with a strengthened alliance with the many feminists who are critical of state censorship. However, if we continue to deny many women's experiences of the sexism in hetero porn, we will continue to dismiss feminist concerns and continue to create division. This will not only hurt those feminists who need our insight, support and solidarity, but will also hurt gay liberation by alienating us from one of our most important allies. We need to work together in developing our own profoundly anti-sexist and sex-positive approach to sexual representation and sexuality more generally — a perspective and a vision which allows us to gain control over our bodies, defining our sexualities, pleasures, lusts and desires for ourselves.

¹See Tom Waugh, "A Heritage of Pornography" (*TBP*, #90, January 1983), and "Photography, Passion and Power" (*TBP*, #101, March 1984).

²See Linda Gordon and Ellen Dubois, "Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth Century Feminist Thought", (*Feminist Review*, #13, Spring 1984).

³Tom Waugh, "Photography, Passion and Power", (see note 1).

⁴See "The Battle Over Sex Representation" by Gary Kinsman, (*Parallelogramme*, Vol. 9, No. 3 — "Sex, Politics and Censorship" Supplement).

Gary Kinsman is a Toronto writer and editor of *Rites* (a lesbian, gay liberation publication).

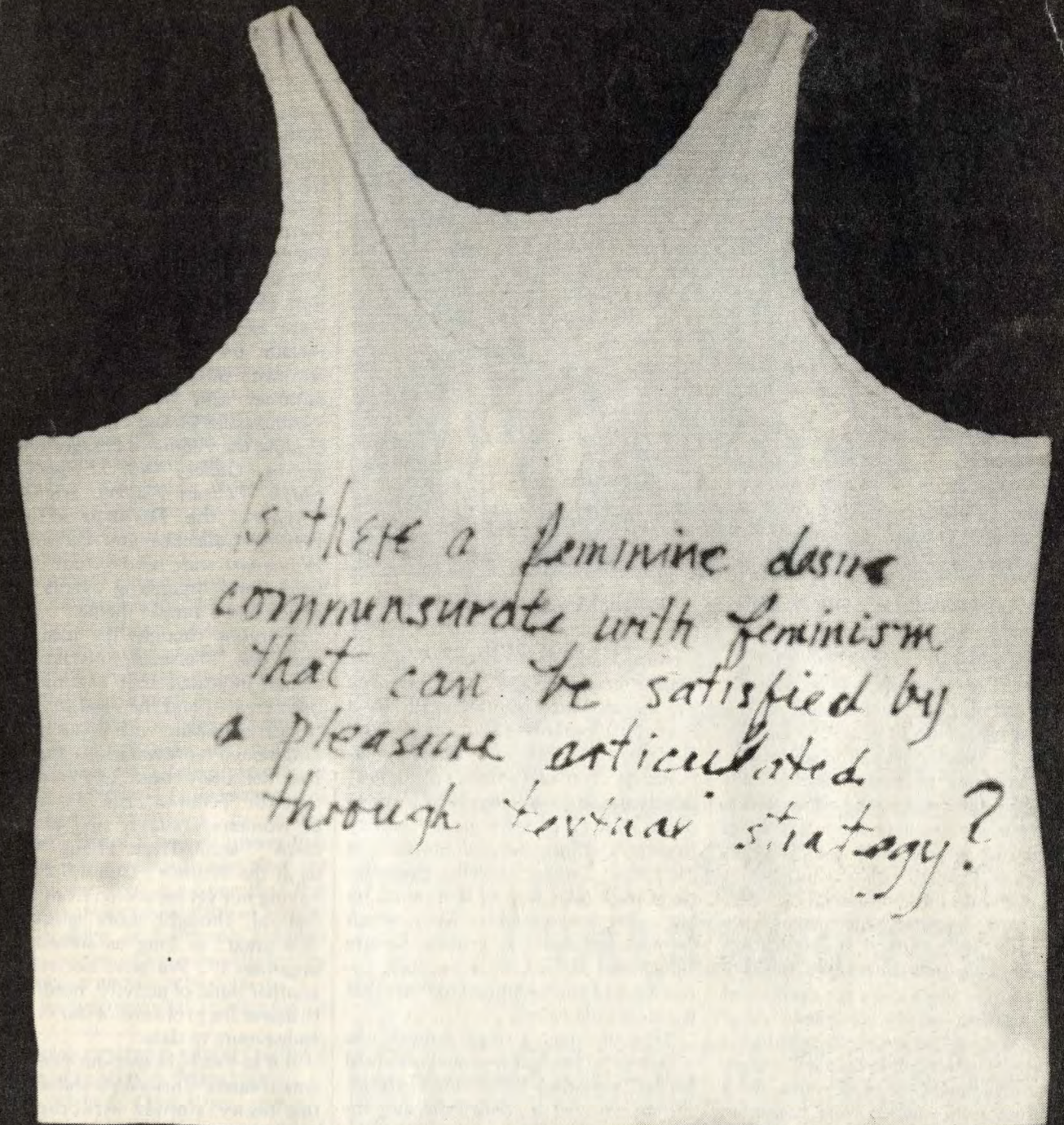
WE HAVE TO STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OVER, AND RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF, THE STATE IN THIS SOCIETY

forms of power would aid in clarifying the present debates over sex, and aid in exploring the many dimensions of erotic desire.

MOVING FORWARD: ALLIANCES FOR SEX POSITIVE AND ANTI-SEXIST CHANGE

Sexual libertarianism and anti-porn feminism are ultimately both one-sided strategies unable to deal with the complexities of social change and sexual practice and meaning. What gets lost in both views is the social dimensions of feminism and gay liberation, the fundamental social transformations these forms of liberation will entail, and the alliances with other oppressed people that will be necessary for their success.

Committee on Porn and Prostitution, and MacGuigan's new amendments to the criminal code, the state is the real danger. State agencies are responding to right-wing campaigns against public depictions of sex and street prostitution, which they have themselves helped organize. They are trying to co-opt women's anger over representations of violence against women to clamp down on oppositional forms of sexual imagery. At the same time, the hetero porn industry and those who have a monopoly over mass imagery are defending themselves from feminist criticism through "free speech" arguments. We must act to avoid being used by other social forces operating on the contested terrain of sex representation. We have to prevent a state-censored censorship solution,



ALTER EROS: WAS IT GOOD FOR YOU?

KERRI KWINTER & JOYCE MASON
DISCUSS RECENT FEMINIST CULTURAL
PRODUCTION IN TORONTO

ALTER EROS WAS IT GOOD FOR YOU?



TANYA MARS AS ELIZABETH I IN HER PERFORMANCE 'PURE VIRTUE'

THIS SPRING IN TORONTO, audiences were offered a wide range of feminist cultural activity. Much of the work presented addressed the current issues of gender/sexuality, intimacy, the problems of representation and manifestations of power. This work was found in a variety of contexts from artist-run spaces and feminist-run festivals through performance series and even into the commercial galleries, and ranged greatly in terms of its aesthetic and political sophistication or accomplishment. In this article we will address specifically the events and organisation of the feminist "Alter Eros" festival. In order to position it within its wider context we will simply mention some of the more noteworthy feminist works which were presented during the same time frame, including: *The Dancework's Modern Art Variety Show* at the Rivoli, especially performances by Tanya Mars ("Pure Virtue") and Johanna Householder ("The Difference between What One Thinks and What One Does"); "This is for you, Anna", by the *Anna Project Collective*

presented at *Theatre Passe Muraille*; "24 Postcards of Rage", a performance by Tanya Mars (written with Rina Fraticelli) performed at the *Music Gallery*; the exhibition "The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter" which was in town from New York to open A.R.C.'s new space; Nancy Johnson's *Allies: Several Stories*, at the *Ydessa Gallery*; as well as presentations and discussions of their work by Lizzie Borden and Mary Kelly which were organized by *Trinity Square Video* and *A Space*, respectively — this list is of course limited to those that we were able to see.

Though under a single banner, the "Alter Eros" festival was not conceived of and executed by a single group: rather, it was a 'conglomerate' including over eighteen projects, spanning two months, involving at least eight organisations and countless individuals.

Although there is no single identifiable moment that marks the beginning of a community project, one of the initial points for this one was when six

women painters, included in *Women's Perspective '83** decided that they wanted to show together again. The theme of 'desire' was proposed and agreed upon, at least in part, with a view towards "coming to grips with explicitly erotic images from a female perspective". The six were not alone; individuals and groups around the city were expressing a similar desire to reclaim the erotic in the context of feminist culture. By the end of last summer and through the winter various galleries and organisations, including the *Women's Perspective Collective*, *Gallery 940*, *A Space*, *Artifacts*, *Pelican Players*, *Nightwood Theatre*, the *Toronto Women's Writing Collective* and *Womanfilm/Womenart* were sending out calls for work, and organising events, all of which had a similar theme.

Everyone thought the idea was a great one. The success of last spring's events indicated that a context had been created and the need for women to deal culturally with issues surrounding sexual representations and power had definitely been expressed. The time for "Feminist Eros: a celebration of women's sexuality and empowerment"*** seemed ripe. Though those of us at the *Women's Cultural Building*, having not yet recovered from our last festival, thought more specifically, "It's great, as long as someone else organises it". We were not ready for another burst of activity, needing time to assess the problems of our collective endeavours to date.

It is in this light that our perspective was created. This year's festival, having many similar structural and organizational elements as those used by the *Women's Cultural Building* last year offered us an opportunity to analyse the events from the outside, and to propose criticisms that are applicable to both.

ALTER EROS

This year's festival, of course, suffered the inevitable problems of all

* for review of the "Women's Perspective '83" and "Women Building Culture" festivals, see FUSE, Fall 1983, page 91.

** this was the title of a festival planned by Womenfilm Womenart, a group which later bowed out of the coalition festivities.

ALTER EROS

large collectively organised events, some of which we may point to later; but there were a few which were perhaps particular. The level of activity, the sheer numbers of people necessary and the hype surrounding such an event, account for its extremely high profile in the city. In addition, this was the first time that women had exhibited under the title of Eros or Desire in an assumed feminist context. Consequently, and perhaps unwittingly, the feminist community invested the event with the responsibility for making coherent declarations on its behalf. No single work, or show, on the same subject, in another context could ever have aroused the same kind of expectations.

Given these circumstances, it is entirely understandable that there has been a great deal of criticism of the festival and of the works within it, while work which was presented outside of the festival context has virtually passed in silence. In this article, we would like to articulate and organise some of those criticisms and some of our own, as well as to raise some ideas for possible solutions, or future strategies. Because we are attempting to reflect ideas and attitudes that are not only our own, we hope that this may serve as documentation of a point in the history of Toronto's feminist cultural community — its activity, its self-criticism and its achievements.

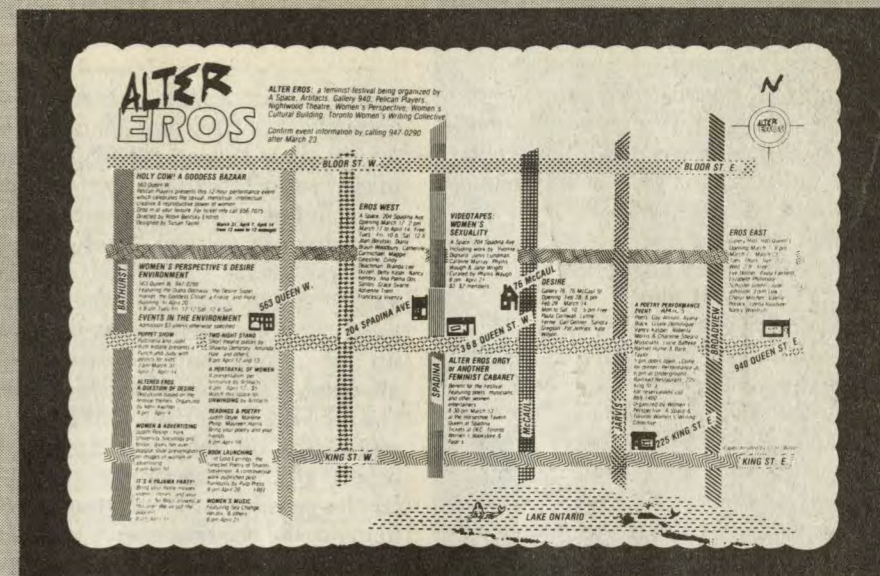
The festival included an evening of

SUZANNE ODETTE KHURI IN THE COLLABORATIVE THEATRE PIECE 'THIS IS FOR YOU, ANNA'



Brenda Ledsham

SUMMER 1984



WOMEN CULTURE & INAUDIBILITY

MARUSIA BOCIURKIW

"People can't afford to be sexist anymore...more doors are open; and yet we still haven't achieved the status of being contributors to the cultural workplace, no matter how many boards we sit on. I think it's really a rip-off."

A FRIEND OF MINE ONCE admitted that the thing she liked best about International Women's Day was that it was her only chance all year to be in a parade. Every year, women come out and have a noisy colourful march. We celebrate ourselves, while highlighting specific issues (e.g. jobs, choice, peace). Sometimes, the issues

do seem to get lost in a huge celebratory wave of balloons. (And who wants to spoil a party by being critical?) Within the feminist community — and particularly within feminist art practice — that dichotomy between criticism and celebration is becoming a matter worthy of debate.

When Avis Lang Rosenberg first published the results of her survey, "Women Artists and the Canadian Art World" (*Atlantis*, 1979), the figures she had uncovered justified anger: "18% of the works owned by galleries in 1976 were by women; 17% of the artists handled by commercial galleries in 1977 were women; over

INAUDIBILITY

50% of the students in art schools are women. Thus we begin to get some idea of the gap between aspiration and legitimation." The figures she produced for the alternative galleries in the 70's were no less depressing: only 20% of solo shows in the Parallel galleries in the 70's were by women.

But that was five years ago, and things have changed. It would seem that exclusion is not such an issue any more; the figures, at least for the parallel art galleries, show parity. Over 50% of group shows include women. 42% of solo shows are by women, and almost half of the members of boards of directors for galleries are women.* The alternative galleries have wised-up, and have begun to show as much, or almost as much work by women as by men. Some galleries are genuinely progressive; most are responding to pressure, fashion, or a combination of both. No matter that a small fraction of the work shown is feminist. Within the art world, where styles, formal issues and fashions seem to change with each issue of *Art Forum*, the illusion of change can be an effective means of reproducing a dominant culture which makes feminism largely invisible.

While the statistical studies (including those of Jane Martin, and Sasha MacInnes-Hayman) provided an important starting-point for the realizing of women's placement within art world structures, their premise is a liberal one: that more women in galleries, more women making and showing work, will transform the structure; that equal representation is all we really need. But more women anywhere does not preclude exclusion; that exclusion may simply become structured through ideology: through women being absent, from critical writing, from the structures of theory, or the creating of images that reflect feminist concerns.

Criticism has, in certain feminist circles, unfortunately become a dirty word — it comes from the mainstream, and as such, has come to connote a certain mean-ness, a tool for either back-biting or unabashed artworld ladder-

* figures from "Position Paper in Support of a Sexual Equality Clause in ANNPAC RACA's Membership Criteria", (*Parallelogramme*, Summer 1983).

ALTER EROS

video, a film, a slide lecture, a book launching, parties and many performance-related events (poetry readings, music, puppets, cabaret, performances — including three mammoth 12 hour performances entitled, "Holy Cow! A Goddess Bazaar"). However, it was the gallery shows that were the focus of most criticism. Each gallery show was up for a minimum of two weeks, allowing for the possibility of seeing the work, whether casually or repeatedly, on one's own time. Other aspects of the programming didn't offer this possibility. In addition, a great many of the one time events took place within a 'Desire Environment' which may also have affected or altered their reception.

The first of the gallery shows to open was "Desire" at Gallery 76. This was the six-woman show that had been in the works for almost a year. "Eros East" (Gallery 940), "Eros West" (A Space) and the "Desire Environment" — featuring the 'Desire Supermarket' (located in a storefront on Queen West) followed.

LOOKING AT THE WORK

If desire or eros are constitutive of some primary life force, energy or emotion, their expression/communication (erotica) is nevertheless socially/culturally determined. To

us is not as easy as just talking. To communicate anything requires a shared vocabulary and our shared vocabulary is man-made.

The question then is how to change the tools of discourse, how to insinuate the absent female voice/subject into an already determined system of meaning. To do this while at the same time addressing the subject of sexuality, which is also socially and culturally constructed, will not be as simple as depicting the object of desire or even, depicting a desiring subject.

"I wanted to tell you a story about two women in the city, about how our bodies remember each other. I had forgotten, for a moment, that our bodies are the icons of language; that my story would have been somewhere where I was absent."

(text accompanying Lynne Fernie's, "Desire/Control: A Story about Absence")

For us, the most successful pieces in these shows were those which interrogated one's reading of the speaking subject, one's position as voyeur, or actively mediated the reading of the piece, such as Jude Johnson's pieces of altered texts, Leena Raudvee and Pam Patterson's pieces (in the Gallery 940 show), Gail Geltner's collage pieces, Lynne Fernie's wall painting, Paula Cornwall's narrative panels (at Gallery 76).

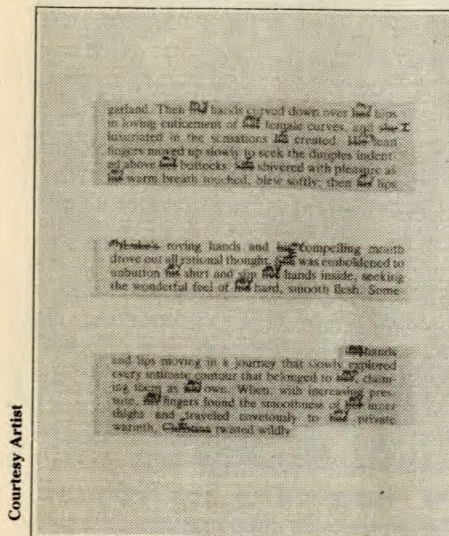
AN OBVIOUS ABSENCE WAS TRADITIONAL REPRESENTATION OF THE FEMALE BODY AS LOCATION OF DESIRE

alter eros or to communicate desire from a feminist perspective would therefore mean to alter the ascribed meanings and the location of speech or the subject, of the 'erotic'. In approaching the work, and our task of criticizing it, we organized our ideas around the basic and popular notion of women's attempt to find our own voice — a voice in which we could describe our own sexuality, desire or erotic life. But to find a voice that might do this, that exists outside of the influence of our culture's very fixed definitions of

The first three of these were examples of pieces which seemed rooted in a shared cultural experience. They took familiar material and poked at it, manipulated it or framed it, in attempts both to find and change its meaning.

"When I saw the call for feminist eros/desire, I thought of it also as a call for an exploration of ideas and as 'strategy forming' because for me, feminism is a political position...I wanted to do a 'gender make-over'...so I thought I would take [Harlequin Romances] as a base, to locate my sexuality

WAS IT GOOD FOR YOU?



Courtesy Artist

DETAILS FROM UNTITLED PIECE BY JUDE JOHNSTON

historically...work with it and change it... [Harlequins] are a public manifestation of women's sexuality, a real extreme example of what we are taught. To work with that and manipulate it myself, this was related to the term "empowerment" — that I would change it...non-genderizing it, repositioning myself with these things that part of me liked." (Jude Johnston)

Not being visual art critics, we can't deal adequately with the full body of work presented in these four shows. Nevertheless, by way of providing some kind of overview, we would like to mention that (in addition to those referred to above), there were some readily identifiable themes and stylistic tendencies in evidence. Among the themes were those pertaining to the biology of reproduction (menses, gestation) and nurturing, abstracted sensation, externalized landscapes, marriage, and (to a lesser extent) popular culture. Some artists seemed to use their canvas or material as a kind of field on which they represented, or etched, image-sensations that were in some way related to their sexuality. And there were those which, unfortunately, seemed merely to reproduce male-authored stereotyped definitions of female sexuality.

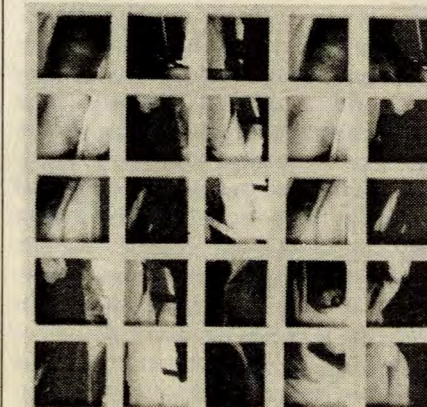
An obvious absence was traditional representation of the female body as location of desire. Sandra Gregson's work, for example, (Gallery 76) seemed to reshape the form and rearticulate the surface of woman's body and her facial gestures — specifically thwarting

bent head to flick tongue across nipples and felt stroke hair, then twine fingers through the tousled locks to keep mouth from moving any lower. I thought... began. "Shh..." pulled up until was sprawled half on top of breasts pressed against chest. "Some things are better shown than said, better felt than heard," softly told. lips met in a tender kiss that quickly deepened, yet there was no wildness or loss of control in the embrace. slowly explored mouth with tongue, savoring the Amaretto-flavored sweetness inside. own tongue languidly probing in return, gradually slipped into another world, a world where emotional and mental fatigue had combined with desire to produce a sensation of drifting, of floating in an endless void. Every sense was heightened, every movement slowed. hands seemed to creep down body, branding skin as moved lower. was gently pushed onto back. breasts teased and caressed until moaned deep in throat and blindly sought lips. felt too weak to do anything more than run fingers through hair and respond to the demands of mouth. The tenderness slowly gave way to passion; lips parted wide for a kiss that burned with desire. was still floating, but the void was surrounded by fire now. The flames moved closer, licking at every part of body, but especially where hands so insistently stroked. When fingers skittered away to graze legs, twisted around in frustration. hands sought hips in an effort to bring closer.

the traditional readings of a woman's body as either 'beautiful' or 'not beautiful'.

Many of the pieces at the *Desire Environment* (including performance) and some of the work in the *A Space* show (Eros West) seemed to try to extract from culture or conjure up from mythology, powerful images of women. These pieces seemed to approach the task of finding a woman's voice by calling up or alluding to a past or fictive female subject/author that we can assume is speaking. This is an appealing, interesting and powerful approach — but not without its dangers. The works in question can be described as, not necessarily falling into, but stemming from two standard types. First, those that allude to women as Goddess and second, those

LEENA RAUDVEE'S 'UNWINDING NO. 2' IN GALLERY 940 SHOW



Courtesy Artist

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climbing. There is little critical apparatus that leaves room for solidarity as it criticizes. Certainly, artists themselves are not, generally, expected to write or be articulate about their own work; they are encouraged to perpetuate the broad gulf between critic and producer, identifying themselves as one or the other. And so, it may be easier, and superficially more rewarding, to celebrate our new presence rather than pursue the analysis of what remains absent. But what we then perpetuate is silence, a silence of conspiracy, and also of resignation — a habit of not being heard.

Smaller journals writing from a specifically feminist standpoint (i.e., *Heresies*, *Camera Obscura*, *m/f*, *Fireweed*) make an important contribution to feminist cultural theory, and form a small but strong theoretical basis for continuing feminist production. But it is still those curious hybrids, the major art magazines with their rebellious headlines, slick presentation, and impenetrable language, that form the buttresses of ideology and treat feminist production either as invisible or as a unique fashion or style.

Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, in their book, *Old Mistresses* (1981) stress the unprecedented importance of the critic to contemporary art:

"The critic...is a central element in twentieth-century art practice, one who conditions the reception of works of art. It is through the discourse of critics, however, that ideology operates to protect the dominant system and stamp the work that women produce, even within radical art practices, with its stereotypes and values."

One woman I talked to summed up this dilemma in another way. "There are seven or eight people writing criticism in this country and they're all saying the same things...I've never been reviewed by a feminist, or given a feminist analysis. But then we're all so busy organizing, who has the time to write criticism?"

And so how do I, a feminist, write about feminist work — its place in local art culture, what it says and doesn't say, and why — in a way that is supportive, but critical as well? How will I find the language? (Perhaps there

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isn't one. Perhaps we are creating it as we go along).

Further complicating the problem of language is the cultural context in which we, as artists, live. We are often half-unwilling citizens of an 'alternative' art world that constantly vacillates between style and content — that celebrates the misogynist, post-nuclear excess of retro-chic painting with the same enthusiasm that it welcomes feminist/psychoanalytic work. But the truth is, that we need the galleries, the support and the information; it's the only cultural network we have. This uneasy alliance characterizes many women's experience in the art world and I believe, effects our production to a great degree.

For some, the compromise or solution has been women-only festivals. In the last two years, each spring, like Persephone returning to her mother from the clutches of Hades, the women artists emerge: in a burst of bright colour and infectious enthusiasm. With incredible energy and organizing skills, running on a starvation diet of meager government grants and/or dollars from benefits, the women's festivals provide one of the few really innovative *structures* for showing work, that this city has to offer (collective organizing strategies, and in some cases more control given to the artist regarding how her work is shown). They also, however inadvertently, create an illusion that women have arrived: that they are making and showing work as never before. The more difficult truth is that women have always been making work. However, the work, because of the private context in which it is created, often relates to issues that the larger women's movement dealt with ten years ago. Perhaps, the fact that they finally have an opportunity to show this work is less a cause for celebration than for reflection and re-evaluation.

There are mixed feelings within the feminist community about the festivals. One woman describes her involvement in the Women's Cultural Building 1983 festival as having finally given her art production some purpose and meaning; as having been an important politicizing factor in her work. Another labels it 'Women's Auxiliary', touching upon the problem of burn-

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that are contained within the 'Mother Nature' catch-all. Each type has its distinct problems, but they have in common an inherent connotation of female power and sovereignty — the very characteristics for which they were no doubt chosen.

Part of the success of these images lies in their poetic, mythological or allegorical power, which are qualities that we don't particularly want to challenge here. However, we remain sceptical about the female-authored status or origin of the mysteriously powerful, either close-to-nature/procreation or deified, images of women. In fact, based on the work of authors like Dinnerstein, de Beauvoir, or Jacqueline Rose, etc., we must acknowledge that they may in fact be 'natural' extensions of male-authored definitions of female sexuality. On the one hand, the goddess is broadly interpreted as the all-giving, all-punishing and all-taking-away omnipotent 'Other'; while in the second type, in as much as they equate women with nature, we read 'Mother Nature'. At first glance this later image is a benevolent and reverential one. It can though, finally, equate women with wild, dangerous, unpredictable, unknowable forces, and thus with that which is to be controlled, subdued and 'civilized.' The goddess-woman is, in its more insidious implications, that which is not (hu)man.

...IT SEEMED THAT A LOT OF THE WORK ACTUALLY DIDN'T BELONG IN A SHOW UNDER THE TITLE OF 'EROS' OR 'DESIRE'...

There do not seem to be many convincing arguments in support of retaining goddess/deified imagery. The social/religious structure which these reinforce — vertical and hierarchical, with power and purity at the top and us way at the bottom — hasn't been a very useful one to feminists so far. However, images of *women* as powerful or as integrated/nonalienated, or even as marginalized-yet-powerful forces, (all of which are at some time contained in nature related imagery) may yet offer us something. We would

suggest, however, that they require conscious manipulation or mediation on the part of the artist if she wishes to frustrate traditional readings of them.

Though from our terms of description and categorisation, it is no doubt obvious that we agree with many anti-essentialist arguments regarding the reductive nature and strategic dangers of 'celebration' of supposed 'female qualities' (of which emotion and sensation are certainly culturally-loaded ones); we do not propose that work by feminists which addresses or describes the realms of sensation or emotion be abandoned. We would wish instead that these notions be challenged, discussed and contextualized. One of the tasks necessary to finding suitable forums for such discussion and contextualization is an ongoing analysis of issues of organisation and curation.

THE ARTIST/ORGANISER AS CURATOR

Feminists have long been aware of the problems with and are actively critical of the art-star system, traditional arguments of 'quality' and in some cases, the overdetermination of value and meaning in work by its forced conformity to classification. However, if work is going to be shown, some methods of organisation and choice must be decided upon. In this case a theme was named, a call for work went out,

and work was chosen and installed.

In the attempt to deal with these considerations/contradictions and to include a broad range of responses to the theme, organizers of this event included work that represented varying levels of development, both artistically and theoretically. Much of the work was seriously lacking in an informed feminist base and very little appeared to acknowledge or benefit from the vast body of feminist information, criticism or philosophy that had put the question of desire and of our erotic

WAS IT GOOD FOR YOU?



Angelo Pedari

JOHANNA HOUSEHOLDER PLAYING MINIATURE GOLF IN HER DANCEWORKS PERFORMANCE

life into our laps in the first place. Finally, to us, it seemed that a lot of the work actually didn't belong in a show under the title of desire or eros, any more than it did under the title, "Recent Works by..."

Another concern is that the public representation which such a festival makes of the level of feminist understanding of the supposed theme is extremely important in our consideration of strategy. How do politicized feminist artists deal with the fact that we may find ourselves showing work that we're not at all sure we can endorse. All of these points sound too close to standard arguments of 'quality' for us not to broach the term. When feminists responded to the art world's use of the word, it was not an attempt to deny its existence, but rather to expose the term's use as a dismissive, or as a tool of exclusion. We believe that the festivals (both this year and last) have suffered as a result of our hesitance to analyze the problems which both the use and avoidance of the word create. We need not erase the term, but rather must remain responsible to the task which its use creates — including the responsibility of developing and supporting venues appropriate to full representation.

Some of the festival's problems lie in the definition of its themes. It seems that there was an oversight in not clearly defining, or even setting parameters to the themes 'sex', 'desire', or 'eros'. It would at first glance seem a simple enough task, and yet agreement

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may not be simply achieved. However, if the definitions are not initially enunciated and agreed to, they will, in the end, seem arbitrary. If limits are not set, the criteria for choice becomes increasingly obscure.

The fact that this will probably be the only major open show for women in Toronto this year also creates a dilemma. These festivals open up much needed venues for women artists to show their work. However, when organised around a specific theme, they raise problems along with the opportunity to show. Not all work submitted will have a direct relevance to the theme. Artists already immersed in projects may submit that work to organisers for any number of reasons — to support the festival or to reach an audience, as well as (of course) because their current work relates to the theme. On the other hand, artists might be willing to drop another project in order to produce something about desire or eros in the hopes of being shown and the resulting work may be less developed than other projects which they would be working on. The varied nature of these responses to the call for submissions is seldom made explicit in the final presentation.

When work brought together under these circumstances remains uncontextualized — when there is no accompanying introduction or statement (from either the curators or from the artists) — the reasons for inclusion remain confusing and mystifying to the audience. There is no point of access to the more

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out — the heavy toll that festivals take.

"The tremendous amount of energy that it takes to organize these shows...and then the exhaustion afterwards. And also the fact of always being *apart*, not really being part of a network. And the whole idea of a women's festival; we're always celebrating ourselves! There's something weird about always having festivals, as though we were some underground society that came out for 2 months of the year and had a party..."

The festivals are fun. They exude positiveness. They reinforce and give energy to the notion of women working together. That sort of feeling is both welcome and crucial. What is problematic is that the 'celebration' approach does not encourage theoretical and critical work that builds a language of meaning; that speaks to the condition of women, taking the broken pieces and putting them back together again.

There is also the danger, as Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock describe it, of "remaining on the margins, occupying a separate sphere established for women's practise in the 19th Century at best annexed to mainstream cultural production." Women's exclusion from cultural theory through the isolation of their cultural production (the feminist theory exists, but it is largely inaccessible), means not just reduced visibility, a lower profile or a depressing statistic. It also, and more importantly, means not owning the means of production — of language, meaning and ideology — and ultimately of political and social change.

For most women artists, the struggle begins in art school. Artists are molded not born: a woman going into an art institution with any sort of feminist stance will almost certainly have to sublimate it, or fight for it for dear life. Central to all our experiences were the art history courses, in which a denial of women as artists was unquestioningly, indeed fervently, maintained. Exclusion and intimidation were further echoed in the studios, where women were taught that work that was content or issue oriented was either bad art, or 'bourgeois feminism', depending on the political bias and age of the (male) instructor. Women would either be harshly and painfully criticized, or denied any criticism at all. One

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instructor, when I confronted him with his lack of useful, constructive response to my own and other women's work, told me that I had a deep-rooted and unconscious desire for a father-figure. This was the level of ideological exchange that went on.

The problems and issues that I and other women have encountered within art educational institutions remain built into the art community even when its patriarchal assumptions are overlaid with a heavy dose of liberalism. As a group of women art students from the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design wrote in 1982, "Feminism is included in educational structures only in a co-opted and neutralized form. It must not threaten existing conventions, while contributing to a facade of artworld progressiveness and contemporaneity. 'Perhaps this is as true of the gallery system — even the alternative one — as it is for the art schools."

Adrian Piper, in her unpublished article, "Power Relations Within Existing Art Institutions", (1983) delineates how shared presumptions are created within art schools, which favour the artistic values of a privileged class, i.e., "a concern with beauty, form, abstraction, and innovation in media, to which political and social content is either largely subordinate, or completely absent." She demonstrates how a consensus is formed, within the interlocking systems of art institutions, on what is good art, which is rooted in a prior socio-economic balance of resources. "Individuals who fail to fit this model are unlikely to pursue a career successfully within the constraints of existing art institutions."

"I graduated in 1970 from art school, and subsequently spent years working in complete isolation. I decided at one point not to do any work at all, because it was pollution. There was a feeling that I was polluting the environment, by producing more work. That was in the early 70's, at the tail-end of the ecology boom."

The combination of influences — from art education structures to the construct formed by art criticism — makes it very difficult for a strong feminist aesthetic, let alone a unified movement, to emerge within the

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difficult or thematically opaque pieces. The service which such a form of organisation performs for either the artist or the audience is, as such, questionable.

Most of the problems that we outline here centre around the issues of how we make choices and organize priorities as well as the need to make these, and our understanding of the theme, visible. In having to articulate a structure, in making the process of curation explicit in the final product, we can acknowledge our omissions, critique our often hurried process and provide a context for the work which is presented.

There are obvious problems with all large artist-run events: the endless amount of volunteer labour and work required; the poverty of the organisations; and collective practice itself, which is a laudable but time-consuming process. Added to these, we will find in feminist cultural collectives the problems of maintaining a feminist process — criticism, evaluation and consensus — in the face of getting the work done. In relation to all these points in 'process', the refusal or at least the active questioning of traditional curatorial and exhibition methods, complicates things further.

IT IS AS A RESULT OF THESE FESTIVALS THAT A FEMINIST CULTURAL COMMUNITY HAS EMERGED AND AUDIENCES HAVE DEVELOPED...

Finally, the demands of organisation (simply in terms of the time required) create a very particular problem: Those organising the event will often be those with the most highly developed analysis or understanding of the issue (if it is a theme show) and due to their role as organisers, they will be unable to find adequate time to develop their own work for presentation within the festival context.

A PROPOSITION

The major problems that we have raised center around the role and the process of curation and organisation. In order to propose useful alternatives

we must consider the events in terms of their larger objectives and achievements.

Some of the goals have been:

- to provide a venue and context for women's work in general,
- to develop participant's work specifically and,
- to develop a public understanding of the issues and concerns of feminism and its cultural forms.

In relation to these goals, many valid achievements can be identified. These large festival-style events have allowed connections to be made. Women who would otherwise be isolated in their discipline come into contact with other feminist artists, allowing for the exchange of ideas and understanding.

Also, the events and the network they create allow a context for the development of feminist work and criticism — specifically criticism which is based on an informed as well as an invested position. This year, in addition to the many informal discussions or 'street criticisms' that arose, there were two organised discussions/workshops. These were: "A Portrayal of Women", a performance ("Unwinding") and presentation by Pam Patterson and Leena Raudvee, followed by

an open discussion of the intentions and problems of feminist representations of women; and "Altered Eros: a question of desire", a presentation touching upon many of the issues which we have raised here, also followed by discussion.

These 'achievements' relate to the first two 'goals' identified above; they are a beginning and require maintenance. The third 'goal' is more directly a political and strategic question; it involves the way in which we will intervene into the public domain as feminist cultural producers. This relates to questions raised regarding our choices, priorities and understanding of visible 'themes'. Possibilities



FRAME FROM NANCY JOHNSON'S 'ALLIES: SEVERAL STORIES'

here include statements from the artists and/or organisers; but we should also consider alternatives in how we organise shows or articulate 'themes' — ways by which, for instance, we could avoid the expectation of a coherent or universal feminist 'truth'. Solutions to this problem can range from more tentative titling (which might remove the expectations of a fully formed 'alternative', 'answer' or programme, while emphasizing an idea of exploration) to more drastic changes.

Some organisational options which we could propose are:

- that we recognize that artists are at different points of development regarding either familiarity with their medium or the issues that they are being asked to address; perhaps it would be more appropriate to organize workshops for critiquing and discussion of work before it is made public. From these, curated public shows could be developed based on emerging issues and interests. This relates to the next possibility —
- that we curate existing work, letting the work articulate the themes.
- that we consider programming smaller events which are spread throughout the year; rather than individuals expending the vast amounts of energy necessary for public shows, or numerous simultaneous events, attention could be directed to consecutive and more 'developed' projects.
- that feminist cultural organisations devise programmes and proposals for curated packages for places like A Space, A.R.C., the Music Gallery,

Gallery 940, YYZ, the Rivoli, the Funnel and even some of the semi-commercial film outlets (also spread throughout the year).

● that we develop a context in which film, video and performance work could be presented, discussed and perhaps re-viewed. (It is an often-noted irony that work in these 'newer' media — which is equally complex and layered — is the least accessible to re-viewing).

● that we develop our available venues. In addition to the artist-run (or free access) spaces listed above, there are several publications, radio and cable stations through which we could represent certain aspects of our work, as well as the possibilities of street works and posters.

● that we recognize and pursue the funding which is available for the production and criticism of our work (the number of women applying for grants still does not match the ratio of female to male artists).

The festivals which took place these last two years have laid the foundation for our current and future work. It is as a result of these festivals that a feminist cultural community has emerged and audiences have developed. What our community now needs is a consistent presence in the city and the continued opportunity and challenge for its members to pursue the development of our work and its criticism.

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gallery system. The woman who continues to attempt to produce and show work will quickly realize that the art-world myth of political neutrality masks deeper truths. (I am not suggesting that art institutions should be apolitical. It is when notions of quality and 'aesthetics' are used to shield undemocratic policies and politics, that the artist is left to feel powerless, hamstrung by a seemingly incomprehensible and monolithic gallery and grant-giving system.) The woman artist under pressure to achieve and maintain a certain level of visibility and critical approval, may choose to ignore the wider ramifications of these influences. She may find herself doing work which conflicts with her political sensibilities, justifying this by positing a separation between political organizing and artistic production. This separation accounts for the abundance of safe, formalist work adorning local gallery floors and walls, as it does for the expressionistic, oddly traditional, and in its own way rather safe feminist work presented in the afore-mentioned festivals. I continue to use the word feminist in a serious sense, because I do believe that the process and mode of organizing behind these festivals is affirmative of women.

However it is important to discuss the work which is found in these festivals in more detail. Sandy Flitterman and Judith Barry, in their article "Textual Strategies" (*Screen*, 1980) trace the development of feminist art in the past 15 years and present a typology of women's cultural production. They discern four categories, which are useful:

- 1) the glorification of an essential female power — an inherent "feminine artistic essence" which needs to be liberated;
- 2) the valorization of the 'hidden history' of women's handiwork; [the first two being essentialist-feminist positions]
- 3) work which uses mainstream strategies but implies difference or separate-ness because it is by a woman;
- 4) work which regards artistic activity as a textual practice, which has the power to criticize and deconstruct existing social constructs.

femininity. At best, it superficially inverts the social order, having women depict women's bodies, instead of having men depict women's bodies. There are those who claim that it 'speaks the taboo', giving voice to women's experiences (i.e., by talking about menstruation, marriage, our own bodies, etc.) which have been considered inappropriate or even obscene. But the fact that these taboos were broken ten and even fifteen years ago is significant. This is not to concede to the artworld's insistence on 'originality' or the "new", but there are lessons in the past from which we should learn. Judy Chicago's "Menstruation Bathroom" in 1971 (L.A. Women's Building) or Mary Beth Edelson's matriarchal images of the mid-seventies were perhaps cathartic at the time they were made: but they never came to terms with their own shortcomings — the ways in which they are easily misunderstood as perpetuating an exclusively body-centred identity for women, or the ease with which they can be co-opted by male culture, and seen as pornographic. If the equations — even if full of hidden, ironic meanings — remain the same (two breasts + one vagina = fuck), then is anything really being challenged? (Could it be that this is as far as women are allowed to go, if they still want to get in on the group shows, even the women's ones? Is this really the best of the work that is produced and submitted?)

Implicit in the essentialist stance, is a sense that work shown together by women is in itself a complete statement — that because women have for so long been voiceless and separated from one another, that showing work together is a strong political act. But this can result in an abdication of responsibility for the meanings that are constructed in these women's paintings, sculptures, installations and performances. If, as artists, we do not take responsibility for the consequences of our own production, then how can we be recognized as politically responsible activists?

Perhaps a show like *Alter Eros* might have been more successful had it been more specific. As it was, the "Alter Eros" theme was related to, but not necessarily analytical of, the social and biological construct that is sexuality. Sexuality is a crucial issue that needs to

be dealt with effectively by artists; it affects our lives from many angles, and is present in the public and private spheres of our struggles: birth control, reproduction, abortion, incest, pornography, as well as relationships: love, sex, desire; the currents and pulses of our own bodies. Catherine Mackinnon wrote in the journal *Signs*, in 1982: "Sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism: that which is most one's own, yet most taken away... socially constructed yet constructing, universal as activity, yet historically specific, jointly comprised of matter and mind." The work in *Alter Eros* focused overwhelmingly on individualistic, expressionistic images of eroticism, thus mirroring the privatized, inaudible, and fundamentally powerless image of the feminine self that dominant culture portrays and calls 'femininity'.

Perhaps geographical analogies are appropriate here: colonization, the imagery of our bodies so taken over, so coded by patriarchal assumptions, that it is no longer possible to use those images in a new way. There is a phrase my mother often used, which (translated) meant "the country is foreign even to itself". Clearly, the distortions within our image-making index the pressures, the exclusions, the intimidations, that are part of living in a larger world. But perhaps they also imply a forgetfulness and a discarding of existing resources — our own history and theory. There is a growing body of feminist theory which could act as a resource and women's work should be more consciously affected by it.

Textual practice, the fourth category in the Flitterman/Barry typology of feminist work, places strong emphasis on 'theoretical reflection'; on an understanding of how certain representations of women are perpetuated, and of their social locations. Such an understanding must work with, and never be separated from, activism. I would suggest that this sort of theoretical basis is urgently needed within feminist art practice here. It is a basis which need not be elitist in its working method — there are many strategies already long in use by feminists to access information and theory, such as study groups, workshops, and the writing of criticism and analysis which uses collo-

quial language rather than jargon or art-talk. A more theoretical approach can in fact work against elitism by rupturing the notion of art as a wholly personal, individualistic form of expression, and by building a wider, more collectively owned understanding of art practice.

Feminist artists need also to develop their connections with the non-art community; with the larger women's movement, and with working women, with low-income and less visible women. These sorts of connections can ground our work in social, as well as aesthetic concerns, and strengthen the notion of art as one of many tools for change. Lucy Lippard, writing about a collaborative show of artists and members of a national hospital union in New York (whose members are 85% women, 70% Black and Hispanic), said:

"It is important to encourage artists to deal with workplace experiences and the relationships between women on and off the job. The hard times resulting from a retrograde, union-busting government indifferent to human needs demand that artists, like everyone else, learn to work with others, learn to take on an increased social responsibility for...the lives and needs of working people. Collaboration is a means by which to break down the conventional artworld barriers between artist and audience that are supported by intimidation, elitism, cultural differences, and aesthetic misunderstandings."

Women's Art Journal, 1982

A utilization of such strategies would necessarily move us from an essentialist/celebratory stance, (respecting it for the initial energy and the solidarity amongst women which it provides) towards a methodology of feminist art-making, in which women would take hold of, and determine, the meanings and contexts of their work, making certain that they are not only seen, but heard and new areas of information and meaning are created.

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SEXISM & ROCK 'N ROLL RACISM

In the 60's, popular music introduced a basic pattern of sex and drug usage into the mass culture. In the hands of the music industry of the 70's, counter-culture images were manipulated into slick products pushing violence, women-hating and racism as cultural norms. And now, with a package of numbness and brutality, the industry's marketing strategy delivers yet another decade of anti-social themes.

So pervasive is today's popular music that it is impossible to avoid exposure to it. Through the music and lyrics, much of the Top-40 graphically reflects and reinforces a dangerously alienated reality. Abundant documentation regarding the effects of media bombardment indicates the need for attention and awareness. The solution is not in censorship, but through analysis and understanding.

—Alix Dobkin and Denslow Brown

LECTURE BY ALIX DOBKIN EDITED BY LYNNE FERNIE

"This is serious business
Sex, violence and rock and roll."

—John Cougar Mellencamp
"Serious Business", 1983

THERE ARE MANY EXCELLENT songs which have hit the Top 40 charts over the years, but there are many more whose lyric content is tedious at best and outrageously offensive at worst. The latter are the songs I will focus on here. They make up a disproportionately large percentage of the songs in rock 'n roll — songs which perpetuate racist assumptions, glorify violence and objectify, stereotype, trivialize, ridicule and/or ignore women in order to bolster the egos of the men who have become the pillars of pop.

The notion that women are on earth to serve the needs of men is inherent to

our way of life and this is reflected and reinstituted in the music we listen to. Overt and subliminal racist and sexist messages pervade every medium, but popular music, especially, is crawling

MICHAEL JACKSON'S GRAPHIC SKILLS DISPLAYED ON THRILLER'S LINER NOTES



with them. These messages penetrate our minds and modify our images of ourselves and others and so affect our actions and expectations. This is especially true in the field of "entertainment" — we are supposed to relax and enjoy ourselves — so we disengage our critical faculties, fail to exercise our consciousness and forget that we are receiving assumptions which subvert our own politics and values. Compelling popular music, because it often sets cultural styles, is especially effective in this process.

SEXISM

Most of the songs in rock or pop music are written by men and they therefore project the unmistakable biases of men. Of the 440 "five star" albums in *The Rolling Stone Record Guide* which lists "25 years of rock, pop, soul, country, blues, jazz and gospel", only 19 are by women, either in female groups or by solo artists, and only 12 groups are composed of men and women. *The Best of the Golden Oldies*, another guide distributed in record stores, lists over 900 titles. This guide includes 108 women soloists and 30 groups that include women. Out of the "1983 Top 100 Albums", 10 are by women soloists and 5 are by groups which include women, says *Rolling Stone*. In addition, a disproportionate number of songs recorded and sung by women have been written by men, and most of these reflect male self-interest and point of view. And, because women have been excluded from the business of music, virtually every one of these albums has been produced, arranged, engineered and promoted by men.

It is not surprising, therefore, that violent, abusive and women-controlling behaviour in society are reflected in the narrative content of popular music. These songs — which operate on the level of unconscious behaviour modification — ignore the reality of women's lives. The songs, in effect, lie to us.

To reject this mass media information, we must first identify it. I found it helpful to "put myself in the picture" of the song, and developed a series of questions which, although simple, clarify what the song is saying about or to women:

- What is the song about?
- Who is it directed to?
- Who am I supposed to identify with?
- Who do I *really* identify with?
- Is the song telling me to do something?
- Is the song threatening?
- Is the information in the song different from my knowledge and/or experience? (i.e., am I being lied to?)
- How do I fit into this picture?

If we keep these questions in mind while looking at the following examples of lyrics, it becomes abundantly clear that, for the most part, rock and pop music is not good for women — indeed, it's not good for anyone but white men.

MYTHS, LIES & MISREPRESENTATIONS

One of the biggest lies perpetuated by pop culture is that there is a scarcity of men and, therefore, to pursue and keep a man is the proper career for women. We are supposed to compete with each other for a man, and once he is "gotten", we are supposed to spend all our time understanding him and caring for his needs, no matter how demanding or violent those needs may be. We are also told that we need a man for protection: "There's a killer on the road/Gotta love your man, gotta understand", warns Jim Morrison in his song "Riders on the Storm". But, getting a man is, in the lives of real women, a relatively simple task; having one, however, is no guarantee of safety for many women — on the contrary, there are numerous songs threatening women by the men they

are with. For example, Roger Walters of *Pink Floyd* expounds:

Run to the bedroom. In the suitcase
On the left you'll find my favorite ax
Don't look so frightened
This is just a passing phase
Just one of my bad days
Would you like to watch tv
Or get between the sheets?

If the above are obvious examples of woman-hating, there are other more



THE ROLLING STONES ALBUM FEATURES PEEL-OFF STICKERS

subtle instances of language designed to keep women in their place as helpers and nurturers of men. Depressingly low-level, infantile relationships thrive and flourish in pop music and always have. In these relationships in rock, possession is 9/10 of the 'love'. "You will be mine, you will be mine, you will be mine, all mine", the *Rolling Stones* declare in "Emotional Rescue", a mind-fucking title if there ever was one. Bob Dylan, in "Sweetheart Like You", from his *Infidels* album (1983), takes the stance of a man who knows how dangerous it is for women on their own, but his solution is for her to get married and stay home:

"What's a sweetheart like you,
doing in a dump like this?
A woman like you should be at home,
that's where you belong,
taking care of someone nice
who don't know how to do you wrong.
Just how much will you be able to take?
Well, there's no way to tell by the first
kiss."

And, witness the overabundance of "Don't leave me" and "who is gonna save me?" songs. Bryan Adams, in "Don't Leave Me Lonely", makes clear

who is most important when it comes to women's independence:

You say you need your independence
Well, I need mine
Separate lives and separate feelings,
I guess that's fine.
But that won't last
It's no solution.
I know I can't survive.
And lately I've been thinking,
Thinking 'bout you all the time.

Don't leave me lonely
Just want to be right by your side
Your one and only, tonight
So don't leave me lonely
I need you here all the time...

If women aren't being threatened or intimidated, we are being guilt-tripped into providing support for men. Randy Van Warmer complains: "You left me just when I needed you most", and *The Cars* beg in "Why Can't I Have You": "oh baby/just one more time to touch you/just one more time to tell you/you're on my mind/baby, why can't I have you/you're breaking my heart in two/you know what I'm going through/oh baby, why can't I have you."

POP CULTURE AS A TRAINING MANUAL

Teenagers, who comprise the major pop music market, are intensely conventional and particularly subject to mass culture images and peer pressure. Rock 'n' roll and pop music furnishes their environment with every no-win, dead-end assumption and convention of a no-win, dead-end world for women.

Rock 'n' roll, if we look at the whole marketing industry — music, lyrics, band images and rock videos — tells boys that they should be aggressive, ego-centric and irresponsible in satisfying their 'needs' (in fact, pop and rock culture often defines these 'needs', and provides the actions and stances to be adopted into which 'need' then accommodates itself). It teaches girls to be passive, admiring and nurturing masochists without independent options and without a future apart from men — following the early sex-role training that girls already receive from our culture. In rock narratives, if girls or women attempt to exercise some power over their lives, they are either

ridiculed, scorned or made to appear 'evil'.

Examples of this ridicule and scorn are "Evil Woman" by *Electric Light Orchestra*, "Bad Blood" by Neil Sedaka, "Rich Girl" and "Man Eater" by Hall & Oates, and "Big Shot" by Billy Joel, to name a fraction of the total. These girls or women, according to popular music, deserve to be punished for their resistance to male views — in fact, any woman who doesn't act passive and admiringly is threatened with exclusion from 'normal' society through what amounts to a smear campaign written by men.

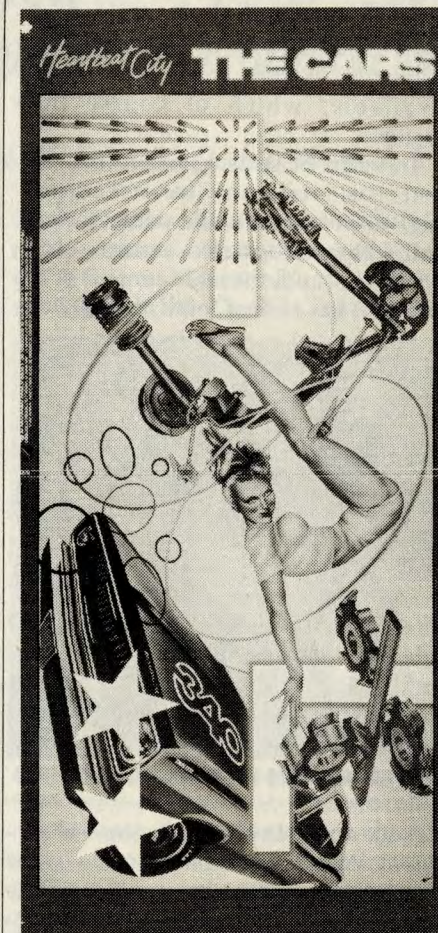
Women are also told that there isn't much we can do about these smear tactics even if we speak out — because women are not to be trusted or believed. "You're so emotional/You're so emotional/You never use your head/give your heart a rest...", *Loverboy* tells women in "Emotional", implying that women can't be trusted to think. *The Cars*, in "You Might Think" (from their album *Heartbeat*), tell us what *they* know we really are: "you might think it's hysterical/but i know when you're weak/you think you're in the movies/and everything's so deep/but i think that you're wild/when you flash that fragile smile.../and it's so hard to take/there's no escape without a scrape." In the video of the same name by *The Cars*, a woman is spied on, invaded, and finally run over by a car with the face of the lead singer superimposed on it. Another example of men *knowing* that women don't mean 'no' when we say it: "You say, 'no'/You say you don't like it/But I know you're a liar", writes Bruce Springsteen, the "people's poet". And, an even more insidious kind of message is given to women when men write about their own love of violence and have a female 'protagonist' in their song liking it:

Cruisin' for a bruise/last Saturday night,
must have been something I drank
I looked her in the eye like I had to fight
Had a bone to pick and to yank.
Took her to the room with mirrors on the
wall
showed her my brand new whip
With a gleam in her eye and a smile on
her face
She screamed as she started to slip
"Give me a dose of your violent love
baby"

SUMMER 1984

writes Ted Nugent in "Violent Love" (1983), a rape song if there ever was one.

Popular songs give no encouragement to women's independence or autonomy. Where do girls or women



THE CARS RUN DOWN A WOMAN IN 'YOU MIGHT THINK'

find the support to say "no"? In popular music, with few exceptions, they don't. According to rock and pop, domination and rape are a way of life for women and they must therefore be unfailingly sexually available to men, or to a man. "Don't stop me now when I'm feeling this way", the *Doobie Brothers* insist, sliding in on their upbeat, well-constructed and beautifully vocalized song.

And, of course, we must have a man in order to be recognized at all. Women scarcely exist in relation to a man. The rock 'n' roll boys don't like to address women unless they're telling us what to do, what not to do, or what they want to do to us — and what we should like about it.

A couple of examples comparing teenage and young girl's lives with the content of some of the rock and pop tunes provide a clear picture of the way these songs distort and ignore the realities of girls' lives:

According to a recent survey in the U.S., 70% of runaway girls in New York City were on the street because of incest and/or abuse at home. The songs about homeless girls, however, tell a different story, one which supports a sexualized/romanticized picture, such as Nick Gilder conjures: "Hot child in the city/Running wild and looking pretty", or "She was a runaway at just thirteen/Toughest thing I've seen...picked up a trade, now she's street made/She knows just what to do". Van Halen adds a note of sympathy for the boys who are 'victims' of these girls in "Girl Gone Bad": "Lazy eyes in the summer heat, fresh from out of town/Now she's working on the street/Shake them poor boys down".

Between 1971 and 1979 the rate of premarital pregnancy doubled in the States and it's still rising. Four out of ten girls conceive in their teens and half of these give birth. Eighty percent of female dropouts from highschool do so because of pregnancy. Sexually active girls under the age of 16 run a higher risk of cervical cancer in later life. The pressure to perform sexually is psychologically damaging for everyone, but it's most often dangerous for girls and women. You'd never suspect it, though, from the information given in the Top 40 or anywhere else in pop culture. From the *Stray Cats*' portrait of teenage girls: "She's sexy and 17/My little rock and roll queen/Acts a little obscene/gotta let off a little steam/Dig that sound and shake it around/you're mine, mine, mine" ("She's Sexy and 17"), to *Loverboy*'s tune about seducing and controlling a young girl ("Little Girl"):

"How can I make you trust me?
And make you lose control?
How can I make you at all
When you don't know what goes on
inside your mind?
I'm gonna make you do it.
Just you wait and see.
I'm gonna make you prove it, that
you don't know
what goes on inside.

You're too little, little girl

...
to fall in love.

men are telling girls what they should do to turn boys on and that the boys will get it because 'girls don't know what they want anyways'.

In rock music, boys are not concerned with the possibility of pregnancy (except in the case of a possible paternity suit, witness Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean"), nor are they troubled by the realities in girls' lives. It's not surprising, then, given the expectation and behaviour molding role that popular music plays in teen's lives, that girls do not pay attention to their own needs or realities either — often, even, after they experience some of the consequences of living only for men's desires.

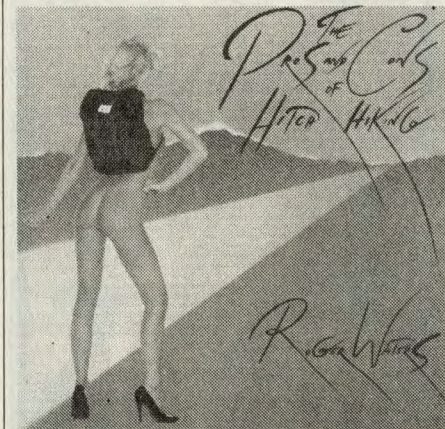
RACISM

Without Black music there would be no Rock 'n' Roll, let alone much original American music altogether. Without racism, we'd have better and less reductive pop music and there would be many more Black musicians enjoying the financial fruits of their labors. *Motown*, a Black recording company, was a pioneer in promoting (though not always paying) Black artists, and this led to the current recognition of more Black and minority artists. By ripping off Rhythm & Blues, rock 'n' roll at once exploited an oppressed minority culture, obscured its originators and watered down a powerful, energetic musical form.

When *The Crew Cuts* "covered" *The Chords'* tune "Sh Boom", and Bill Haley took "Shake, Rattle & Roll" from Joe Turner, they led the way for generations of white musicians to extract fame and fortune from the works of Blacks. Georgia Gibbs covered songs by Etta James and LaVerne Baker, Pat Boone covered Fats Domino, Little Richard, Ivory Joe Hunter and others. Steve Lawrence, Andy Williams, *The Beatles*, *The Stones*, *Grand Funk Railroad* and others covered songs by Buddy Know, Charlie Gracie, Chuck Berry, *The Miracles*, Solomon Burke, Don Covay and Little Eva — to name just a few. Eric Clapton took "I Shot the Sheriff" from *The Wailers* and later appropriated the music for "Lay Down Sally" from King Sunny Adé. With

their appropriations, these white singers were dishing up second hand goods, courtesy of a racist music industry, for mass consumption by a white audience which (according to white industry marketing men) would have feared and rejected the high-powered and more interesting originals, if they had been widely available, which of course they weren't.

In terms of sexism within this context, it is interesting (but not surprising) to note that while white rock 'n' roll has appropriated, intact, along with the sound, the male content of the Blues, it has almost totally ignored the



ROGER WATERS AND HIS HITCH-HIKING

female sensibility in Black music of survival. With notable exceptions — some early *Motown* "girl groups" and the disco queens of the 70's (Donna Summer still champions the working woman) — popular music left out a mainstay of the Blues: the independent Black woman who refused to bow down to men, refused to be a victim. The voice and self-respect of the assertive Black woman was too strong (according, once again, to those ubiquitous marketing men) for those who required that women be passive objects and/or willing victims.

Not satisfied with appropriating Black musicians' work, white men go on to write their own 'portraits' of women and men from other races. *The Rolling Stones*, for example, provide us with both racist and sexist lyrics: "Brown Sugar", a song about black slave women: "Hear him whip the women just/aroun midnight/Brown sugar you dance so good/Brown sugar, just like a Black girl should" and their song, "Some Girls": "White girls

they're pretty funny/Sometimes they drive me mad/Black girls just want to get/fucked all night/I don't have that much jam/Chinese girls are so gentle/They're really such a tease..." *Genesis*, in their latest album, present a libelous stereotype of the 'illegal immigrant' — a man who spends his time drinking and lives by pimping his sister:

"Got out of bed, wasn't feeling too good
With my wallet and my passport, a new
pair of shoes
The sun is shining so I head for the park,
With a bottle of Tequila, and a new pack
of cigarettes

(Chorus)
It's no fun being an illegal alien
(3 more times)

Keep your suspicions, I've seen that look
before
I ain't done nothing wrong now, is that
such a surprise?
But I've got a sister who'd be willing to
oblige
She will do anything now to help me get
to the outside.

ALBUM COVERS

Albums by male musicians graphically depict men in authoritative straightforward, sharp and power-taking images. If women are pictured, they are objectified, anonymous and dominated by the men, either explicitly or by implication of their appearance on an all-male group's cover. Women's bodies, and various parts of the female anatomy are used as metaphors (usually for something evil) and/or as jokes. On their own album covers, women artists have generally been presented as soft, fuzzy and wistful — inevitably waiting for a man to make her complete, real. Familiar scenes with the clothed male contrasted with the naked or partially clothed female posing in vulnerable, subservient positions leave no doubt as to who has the power. Equality between men and women is as rare in the visual packaging of pop and rock as it is in the lyrical content.

Black and minority cultures on mainstream labels are often portrayed as particularly savage and cruel, and these portrayals promote racist stereotypes of the lowest kind. It seems that the only power white men have

CONTINUED ON PAGE 60

SUMMER 1984

THEATRE

Breaking New Ground Exploring the Duality of Tradition & Experimentation

DAVID MCILWRAITH

Double Take A Second Look

Created and performed by Monique Mojica, Billy Mercasty, Gloria Miquel, and Maariu ??????
Directed by Muriel Miquel
Native Earth, Toronto.

"YOU THINK YOU HAVE US defined, but take a second look. We just might change into something else." This is the challenge offered by a new Toronto-based theatre company, *Native Earth*. Though new, it is not the first company to have performed in the Native Canadian Centre on Spadina Road. But, this time, the thought, vision and planning is entirely in the hands of native people. *Double Take a Second Look*, the first show produced under this new structure, played in Toronto last December and in N.Y.C. in February. The play was created and performed by four actors and directed by Muriel Miquel (director and performer with NYC's *Spiderwoman Theatre*).

Eight scenes or stories were played without intermission in an open space, against a painted backdrop which was stretched, like an animal hide, onto an aluminum frame. The actors created the environment of the scenes by evoking time and place primarily with movement and language — very little was used in the way of sets, props or costumes.

The overall structure of the piece was patchwork in nature, each actor having a story, a personal concern, a history, and training to contribute to the whole. The stylistic influences included native traditions such as storytelling, mask and Inuit games, as well as contemporary experimental theatre. One actor was trained in the technique of Grotowski, another worked with Joseph Chaikin and the

Open Theatre, another was trained in modern dance. All of these influences played a substantial role in the development of *Double Take A Second Look*.

The various scenes, each different in style, content and mood, went from the dramatic and the touching to the absurd. From a woman who tells a story — half in English, half in French — of her Jewish father's parents who were killed in the Holocaust, we were taken through the scenes via 'bridges' or 'transitions' which were often short samplings of 'native wisdom' ("how to snare a rabbit", "how to take care of a burn") to the final lip-sync chorus line. Muriel Miquel directed it with a good deal of daring. She managed to weave the various stories and styles into a wonderful patchwork by maintaining a consistent physical energy in the ac-

tors and by focusing on the theme — each scene, challenging and re-examining both stereotypes and lived experience.

One segment performed by Monique Mojica was called "Bag of Bones". In it she told a story: In her White high school the football team was called The Indians. Posters made by students, depicting indians were hung in the cafeteria before a big game. One of the poster-indians held a scalp of human hair with blood dripping from it; another, a tomahawk and a bottle of whiskey. Recounting the embarrassment, anger, action and confrontation, Ms. Mojica also used her considerable dance training in this scene. Dragging a bag of bones with her, her history and culture were made tangible both as burden and as strength in the face of taunts and "authority" — providing

Life on the border: the cast of *Double Take: A Second Look*



Marie Josée Crete

substance or weight to counterbalance the 'conjured' images of others.

Much of the humour in the show was provided by Billy Mercasty, a northern Manitoba Cree. His acute sense of the trickster and sly comic edge cut through much of his work. One of his best scenes was one in which he persisted (against the cautioning, jibing and interruptions of the others) in his determined efforts to tell us that he was gay. "They don't want to hear that, Billy." Or "Don't you want to have children?" "Ah, Billy...I don't think we need to talk about that now." But from each interruption/distracton he turned back towards the audience determined to challenge the assumption of heterosexuality.

Perhaps the most memorable scene in the show was the "Christmas story". Set in a reservation home on Christmas Eve, a young girl makes cookies while talking with her brother. Waiting for their father to come home they reminisce about their mother who has died. The spirit of the mother — a role played by Gloria Miquel of *Spiderwoman Theatre* — hovers in the background of the scene. The influence of the now disbanded *Open Theatre* on Ms. Miquel (and *Spiderwoman*) was evident here — particularly, the concentration on the spiritual aspect of the actor's work. Miquel was an extraordinarily powerful presence as she hovered and floated throughout the scene. The father was played by Maariu. Trained in Grotowski technique while working with an Inuit theatre company in Denmark, he brought a precision of detail to his character. Dropping his chin to his chest and placing a blood-streaked mask on the top of his head, he became a startling picture of a broken man.

Monique Mojica, actress and artistic director, put succinctly an important part of the play's impact and intentions when she told me, "A lot of what we ended up saying in *Double Take A Second Look* was about duality. We all live it all the time. It's more acute when you have a background where you come from a hunting and fishing family like Billy and Maariu, but even those of us who have been city indians for generations live in this duality. We live on the border, being able to step in and out, being both places at the same time. It's a unique position to be in; sometimes you can feel very strong

and sometimes your position is really tenuous...". When talking about the focus of the company and some of the problems they encounter, she told me, "Our immediate goal is to produce honest, excellent work that comes from the experience of being native people, but not to be limited by this — not to take those experiences, those cultural things we have and make them museum pieces. So often we buy that whole bit about being artifacts...as defined by anthropological societies. And if you don't, you get a lot of criticism — not just from academics who say, "that's not really correct", but from native people themselves who say, "that's not the old way...that's not the first way". I think those of us involved in *Native Earth* want very much to say that we are all those things...we are native people; we do have this history, this culture, this spiritual bond. But, we are also here, right now and we're affected by all that's happening right now and we have a lot to say about that."

The company has many plans for the future, ideas as different one from the other as you might expect from a company willing to take risks. They hope to embark on collaborative efforts with other companies, both native and non-native, but most of the excitement is generated by their own particular plans. They are considering doing some legends and stories — but in the context of contemporary urban reality (Coyote on Spadina). They also talk about a collaborative cabaret and plans to do *Waiting for Godot*; "it reminds me of the reserve — of people just hanging out waiting for things to get better, hoping that something else is going to come. Native people are always waiting and hoping. All waiting for that 'Black Hills Money' or saying, "It'll be all right once my lease man pays me", or "Next week we'll have plenty of food", or "If only daddy didn't drink...". It reminds me of a *Ghost Dance* — if we all dance hard enough the earth will roll up and all the white people will be in there; all the bad people will be gone and the buffalo will come back." I hope that we need not wait so long or dance so hard for the next piece of good theatre from *Native Earth*.

David McIlwraith is an actor based in Toronto and Montreal.

SEXISM RACISM ROCK 'N ROLL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 58

been willing to share with men of colour is the power to abuse and objectify women. White image-makers obviously felt that it was more acceptable for Black men to humiliate women (also Black) than for whites to do so, just as Black artists were, in earlier rock 'permitted' to be more sexually explicit in their language than whites.

In spite of the efforts of men to keep women busy taking care of their every need so that they could pursue more rewarding work (music, perhaps?), women and people of colour continue to demand a voice and activity in the world, and this applies to the area of popular music as well. The days when it was unthinkable for girls or women to play drums, bass, lead guitar or lead anything, are gone. It is now thinkable (thanks to the women who are involved in the music industry). But women's participation is still in the minority; and rock, even with more women involved, is still overwhelmingly male-defined.

The new genres of popular music have already had a profound impact on our culture and its music. Joe Jackson, *The Talking Heads*, Cyndi Lauper, and gender-mixed groups such as *The Parachute Club* from Toronto, are introducing a refreshing new perspective into the stale narratives of popular music's white "Boys' Club". They represent a thoughtful and responsible sensibility which takes women seriously, which wants more quality and less reductive fundamentalism in their lyrics and in their relationships. Women-identified content and music is achieving a foothold in the current music scene. The success of Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" or Pat Benetar's "Love Is A Battlefield" indicates that pop audiences are obviously capable of accepting something more than male-defined music. The inclusion of all the above artists — and their tunes — on the current pop charts may even mean that audiences want progressive lyrics and new roles for women in pop music. As Lorraine Segato from *The Parachute Club* sings in "Rise Up": "The spirit's time has come/Women's time has come/Everybody's time has come!"

Alix Dobkin is a lesbian-feminist singer and songwriter living in Woodstock, N.Y. Lynne Fernie is on the editorial collective of FUSE.

THEATRE

New York Theatre in Spring A Second Coming — Just the High Points

VALERIE ELLIS

L.S.D.

Just the High Points

Directed by Liz Le Compte

Performed by the Wooster Group

Performing Garage, N.Y.C.

PARANOIAS, THE PECULIARITIES of male anxiety and liberalism gone awry are the 'subjects' of *L.S.D.* *Just the High Points*, the latest manipulation by the Wooster Group, an experimental theatre in existence in New York's Soho since the early '70s. As much a play about style, genre and authorship as about any clearly defined political position, *L.S.D.* follows a post-modern ethos. Only here, unlike so much recent work that falls into this category, the appropriation of texts, quotation from history and mixing of media is more than mere juxtaposition.

The play begins with a scene from the '50s. Seated at a conference table, which is the set for the entire show, are Alan Watts, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Bill Burroughs and Timothy Leary reading excerpts from their poetry, journals and philosophical treatises. At the head of the table is Nancy Reilly playing Leary's 'babysitter' who orchestrates the scene, reminiscing about days with Leary, playing hit tunes of the day and occasionally interrupting her drone for their pronouncements. Next comes Director Le Compte's version of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, a parable of the '50s red scare whose ostensible subject is the Salem witch trials of 1692. This abbreviated version makes the trial/hearings intermittently look like an hysterical judgment day — papers scattered all about, screaming and raucous argument — and a cattle call where young girls are sacrificed to the Devil for men's earthly sins (here adultery). The last section of *L.S.D.*

doubles as a re-enacted rehearsal of the Wooster Group's play and the scene at Leary's hang-out — Middlebrook — after his dismissal from Harvard. Everything's mellow and wasted here, where rehearsal is endless partying and visa versa.

The Wooster Group has chosen these texts cleverly: the beats, Miller's play about the red scare and Salem itself are all easy prey for their point about recurring paranoia and anxiety and the seemingly predictable ways in which they are avoided and ordered. The play shows how the ideals of liberalism turn into the (false) lament of narrative/lulling personal history; how repressed sexuality and politics explode into accusations of 'possession' ...by some ill-defined 'other'; and how being mellow and drugged-out becomes an extended rehearsal for life. Since the play is presented both in and as an hallucinatory haze where visions get

equal weight with reality, these themes appear always to be shifting and merging. The garbled exchanges, moving and shaking, a mixture of costumes from puritanical to punk make *LSD's* serious themes wild and fun too. There is a clear sense here of the joy in the theatrical/theatrics being played off of the play's irony and cynicism.

Yet if parody and layering are the Group's primary devices for showing the absurdity and hypocrisy of paranoia, the confusion which these techniques produce makes some of the play's indignance drift off into intangibility and lack of clarity. For example, what audience will understand the specific references to Leary's life, to Newton and Middlebrook (the titles of Parts I and III) or the reference to the babysitter? And why not drive a few points home a little more clearly? Some of Director Le Compte's most powerful theatrical tropes involve the depiction

From the Beats to the Crucible: Confusion of techniques undermines *L.S.D.*



Nancy Campbell

of repressed sexuality and the conflation of metaphors for failed love with nostalgia for the '60s and for liberalism; but, considering their potential impact, these were often rather confused and understated. For example, in Part III, we see Kate Valk who plays Mary, a young girl, and Tituba, the black slave and nursemaid for the girls, attempting a faint for the play of Part II. Egged on by another woman, she tries everything — gagging, heaving and sighing, giggling, etc. — while three white males play wimp rock love songs. This 'faint' doubles as a metaphor for failed orgasm and failed ideals, but it seems muted by all that's going on around it — the confusion of the set, recurring monologue of the 'babysitter', and an '80s style sci-fi-urban video (the purpose of which was unclear). It is too confused to come off as a strong and telling metaphor, as a relationship that the play will explore.

Sifting through the mess of confusion to find something meaningful and tangible is a point that *L.S.D.* is trying to make, but the theatrics the group uses to make this point can become too obscuring. In fact, the amount of material and shifting of historical contexts is almost too much here. I would rather *L.S.D.* had been composed just of the middle section — based on Miller's *Crucible* — but more highly developed. Perhaps more of the distinctiveness of style, subtle thinking and indignance would have come out.

The danger in doing works that make social/political points with overlays of parody which are obscuring is that they can have the look of social commentary devoid of a clearly articulated point of view and feeling. At worst this leads to works in which critique is only implied by the choice of material and texts, the known or assumed political leanings of the author, and his or her artistic nomenclature. It can also lead to a notion of parody as just style, an idea that needs harsh criticism in the current political climate where 'oppositional' (I use this term with hesitation since it is fast los-

ing its significance) acts — artistic, political or cultural — are so quickly swallowed up, appropriated and re-appropriated for any number of opposing purposes. To make a critique appear motivated and to make it go somewhere, offer material that makes an audience re-think ideas and attitudes, a work needs to articulate a stand, however transitory the stand is. While *L.S.D.* is much more than juxtaposition, it is too vague about its intentions...about what is being said on the subject of paranoia, aside from suggestive historical paralleling. There is an implied critique and a lot of emotion, especially anger behind the play which if brought closer to the surface might have made for more twisting and turning of history and provided an emotional foil for the play's intelligence.

Woza Albert!

Created by Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon
Performed by Mtwa and Ngema
Lucille Lortel Theatre, N.Y.C.

'JUST LUCK' IS HOW DIRECTOR Barney Simon describes his success in premiering *Woza Albert!* at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, South Africa. It is hard to imagine that the play could have been performed there without humour for a cover. *Woza Albert!* was written and conceived by Simon and the play's leads, Percy

Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema. It is based on the satiric hypothesis: what would happen if the Second Coming took place in South Africa.

The play opens with the two actors in roles of prisoners asking this question. One, feverishly reading the Bible, insists that Morena (Lord) is coming, while the other rebukes him with remarks of disbelief and occasional kicks to the shins at the mention of Morena. From here, it's ninety minutes of vignettes performed virtually non-stop by Mtwa and Ngema. These vignettes satirically explore what the promise of salvation can produce: a young boy hopes that Morena will bring him good meat to sell; a barber wishes for a shop so he won't have to do his business on the street; and workers hope for passes to work in Johannesburg.

Morena's 'arrival' is announced in a hilarious scene where Mtwa plays Pier Botha. Wearing a bulbous rubber nose — used whenever Mtwa and Ngema are portraying Whites/clowns — and a pair of black-rimmed glasses, he says: "We don't need you Larry Holmes, go home John McEnroe, we've got Morena." But Morena's tour gets him into trouble — his opposition to apartheid and incitement of the populace to protest their oppression prompts the authorities to brand him a Communist...or perhaps an agent of the CIA — it doesn't seem to matter — and to 'nuke' him as he's spotted making his walk on water to Johannesburg.

When Morena finally arrives in the flesh, it's in *Woza Albert!*'s last scene, at a cemetery where he has come to find Lazarus. The grounds-keeper informs him that there is no Lazarus in the 'L' section, but that there are plenty of saviours to resurrect — Albert Luthuli (leader of the African National Congress and a Nobel Prize winner), and Steve Biko (anti-apartheid activist who was tortured and killed while detained in a South African prison), and other Black revolutionaries. The play ends with Morena calling out Woza (arise) Steve Biko, Woza Albert, etc., each name chosen by the groundskeeper, the symbolic everyman.

Woza Albert! is refreshing for its energy and joy, and for its damning but playful humour. It's also superbly performed. On a stage that has only packing crates and a rack of clothes for a set, Mtwa and Ngema manage to

* Valk is a white woman, wearing black-face for the part. Two years ago, the Wooster Group's use of whites playing blacks in "Routes 1 & 9" was the subject of significant enough debate [see *FUSE*, March 1982] that the N.E.A. cut its funding of the play. In *L.S.D.* because Tituba is a character in Miller's play (the second part of *L.S.D.*), Valk, as exemplar of black over white, seems to work better: she is "black" in Miller's play and, stripped of her mask, white actor in the third part.



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Chris Bennion

Humour as a weapon against repression: Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema in *Woza Albert*

create an incredible range of characters and to reenact the theme of humanity in poverty just by their masterful performances in such sparse surroundings. And despite the play's straightforward and uncompromisingly blatant themes — apartheid, oppression and poverty — Mtwa and Ngema never slip into self-righteousness or an overly didactic posture. Neither a glorification of the 'native' culture nor of the individual revolutionary as saviour, *Woza Albert!* is evenhanded with its humor and parody. It is political theatre à la Dario Fo where everyone is the butt of the playwright's

joke(s). There is a strong sense of right and wrong but not of easy solutions, despite the play's positive ending.

Having said this, and given the limitations on political expression under repressive regimes, it remains important to consider *Woza Albert!* in the much different context of the Lortel Theatre in Greenwich Village, New York. Caricature and relentless satirical humour work effectively as a disguise where there are clearly defined censors, but how do these techniques function effectively in a liberal context? That is, does this kind of play allow a North American audience

to laugh too much at something in which we are so obviously complicit? It's very easy to step too close to the frontier of self-righteousness, to criticize political humour for the sake of political rigour when arguing about such difficult and complex points...but *Woza Albert!* kept making me ask the question of the audience, to ask whether or not it placates/humours a liberal audience too much with its constant punning, and its mocking of things too few people take seriously.

Valerie Ellis is a writer living in New York City.

Pheminism and Fysics

Progressive Global Politics & 'Retrograde Barf'

SUSAN G. COLE

The Anatomy of Freedom

Feminism, Physics, and Global Politics

By Robin Morgan

Anchor Press/Doubleday

Garden City, New York (1983)

ROBIN MORGAN IS A POET, author and activist who has been afforded the luxury of scribbling a work that will encompass her personal view of the world. You can tell she's going to hit on just about everything by the subtitle of *The Anatomy of Freedom: "Feminism, Physics and Global Politics"*. Take seriously the "global" in global politics. Morgan culls from Hindu and Chinese Philosophies, knows cross cultural data like the back of her hand, has done as much as anyone else to uncover heretofore unknown works of women's culture; she even reads books written by men (more on this later).

In the last pages of her book, Morgan tries to scoop the critics by anticipating our response to the text: "A Warble of science and fantasy from a woman's libber perspective"; she claims we'll say. "A poetic flight of fancy"; "A flat-out challenge to separatism"; "retrograde barf about marriage"; "a bizarre affirmation of men as well as women". Robin Morgan is a smart woman. The self-criticism is entirely accurate. This is indeed a "warble of science and fantasy" from a women's liberation perspective (no, I can't brook the "women's libber" diminutive). Morgan talks about everything in a ramble: sex, love, marriage, anatomy, technology, aging, child-rearing, art, death and life. Don't look for too many connectives. Count on bolts of insight, some of which are quite compelling, some of which are

infinitely dispensable. The decision as to how to distinguish between the two types of insights is entirely a personal one. Although she is not always right, she is on the mark often enough on a wide range of subjects to make the journey through the book worthwhile for anyone interested in cultural criticism.

The book combines analysis, parable, poetry, fantasy, fiction, confession and, of course, physics, as Morgan sweeps through what is essentially the anatomy of consciousness. The first chapter — "the poetic flight of fancy" — is a breathtakingly written, though enigmatic, parable entitled, "The Handmaiden of the Holy Man". It attempts to convey a truth about the anatomy of freedom, namely that freedom is a process, a dynamic, a movement, not a thing, or even a state of being. The Handmaiden in this case begins to understand freedom as the process of ceasing to want to serve. The Holy Man in turn discovers freedom when he understands the liberation that comes with not needing to be served. This is one of only a few instances in the book where the virtuosity of the prose seems out of step with the banality of the thought. But it does make a reader want to continue.

"The Two Way Mirror: the anatomy of a woman", reads almost like an exercise for a beginner's writing class. Morgan describes her own body in loving detail. It's the "loving" part that's so new for women who often hate their bodies and seldom have any control over their reproductive function. "The Dialogue with the Dream Self: an anatomy of dreams" features Robin, the Waking Self chatting with Robin, the Dream Self, in a predictable byplay about how consciousness resists the

unconscious and how it shouldn't. Morgan has a habit of leaping from the ridiculous to the sublime, and from this point of pretense, launches into the crucial section of the book — a chapter on the anatomy of sex and another on the anatomy of a marriage.

These are the "flat-out challenge to separatism" and the "barf about marriage", as she later refers to them. It is clearly the part of the book that matters most to her — the ideas and experiences on which her feminism hinges. The anatomy of sex or "The Stake in the Heart", is a foray into the arena of sexuality and its social construction. Morgan's thirst for sexual energy is a hard one to slake in a culture which most often gives us the depressing choice between sexuality with no energy or a sexuality characterized by violent energy. "Sexual violence is the cultural synonym for sexual energy." Hence male sexuality. "The eroticization of violence via romance is a substitute for passion." Hence female sexuality.

"The Bead of Sensation" is a love chapter written to poet Kenneth Pitchford, Morgan's husband and the father of her son. It almost tries to be a bonafide marriage manual, though how useful to anyone without the idiosyncracies of a Pitchford or a Morgan, it is hard to say. One wonders, reading of their furious arguments, their joy, their commitment and of how they were able to reconcile all three, whether in order to have a workable marriage, one must be a poet, or crazy, or both. Still many couples trying to work out the problems of marital commitment may find some of these phases quite familiar.

Morgan goes on to explore the anatomy of kin, mortality, art and

technology and anatomy with only slightly less passion. The thread that weaves its way through all of these perceptions is the New Physics. Morgan's choice of metaphor is very important, since, as she explains, metaphor is to the poet what mathematics is to the physicist. Whereas the old order of science insisted on the fixedness of matter, the new physics celebrates flux and change; whereas classical political theory fashioned the political spectrum as we know it, feminism redesigns the political matrix so that right, left and centre lose their meaning to the point of becoming irrelevant. Hence, according to Morgan, both the new physics and feminism are "second generation critiques of the old order".

The comparison holds throughout the book. All astrophysics is about nature's attempts to release the energy in matter, Morgan says. And so is feminism. The New Physics:

"encourages, even demands utterly new thinking; an intellectual discipline, it refreshes the brain into glimpsing how just nothing is inevitable, just how everything is relative, just how ceaselessly everything changes, just how inescapably natural all concepts are."

The application to feminist theory is plain enough: "The biological determinist theory is a failure of intellect". And after running us through the definitions and physical applications of the concepts of the electromagnetic field in physics, Morgan cheerfully explains that

"we are the particles...the waves, the bumps on the ribbon, the leaps of negentropy information gathering itself to itself for the sheer joy of communicating through interference waves which also are part of the field to other negentropic hemolian photons of light-darkness-matter-illusion-ENERGY"

This is about as heavy as the book gets. Although Morgan fears that her lay view of physics will become the butt of a critic's jokes, she is, in her way, a kind of Isaac Asimov of feminism and physics. And the vision is relentlessly positive. After all, if nothing is fixed or immutable, that must include patriarchy.

Robin Morgan is the maven of emotionalism. You may recall that it was



Morgan: "The eroticization of violence via romance is a substitute for passion."

she who could not get through the documentary shoot of "Not a Love Story" without breaking down in tears. I personally have never heard her speak publicly without witnessing a similar collapse into tearful fits on her part. It has almost become Morgan's signature to emote all over everything, and the pages of *The Anatomy of Freedom* do not escape the blitz. Morgan's emotionalism can go both ways. When the passion infuses the rhetoric she can be quite wonderful. FUSE readers especially might want to hear how she vents her feelings on the subject of art and artists. On art: "Since men couldn't control (it), they diffused its power by making it irrelevant". On avant-garde artists: "Ranks of pretentious male supremacists who carry their moral laziness over into a torpor of technique while remaining conveniently alienated from the human suffering which surrounds their aleatory violation of politics, sexual passion and art".

Her rhetoric works most of the time and even her self-indulgence can be

engaging, particularly the section on the perils of being short. But too many times the self-indulgence backfires. I don't know why she chose to publish the hysterical letters she wrote to a lover she took while married. The confession (she also knew we would call the book "confessional") which is supposed to trace a process of consciousness, makes having an affair seem like something to be avoided at all costs. You would have to be extremely enamored of Robin Morgan to care much about all these ups and downs. Morgan would call publication of the confession, "risk". I call it the worst in editorial judgement. And, from time to time, the emotionalism in her fervent insistence that the world can change if only we can get it together in the spirit of love and struggle and fury and anger and joy, can be cloying.

In the end, Morgan is right; *The Anatomy of Freedom* is "a bizarre affirmation of men as well as women". It is an affirmation of humanity in its celebration of a successful marriage

Continued on page 67

Through the Holes

Structuring a Passage for Meaning

PAT WILSON

ELIZABETH VANDER ZAAG, WEST coast video artist, writer, creator of multi-layered electronic/organic imagery, engineer of language structures...came to Toronto in April through the auspices of Techknowledge, the workshops branch of Trinity Square Video. She showed her tapes in a workshop format introducing each tape presentation with a brief reading from her production notebook. The talk took on the form of a modified stream of consciousness, including a description of the context in which each tape was conceived, the equipment that was used, the meta-physical

impetus for the tape and what she felt the end result of the tape was in terms of the evolution of her personal artistic language. Not the cracker barrel philosopher musing, but an electronic philosopher speaking of the electronic peripherals and paraphernalia, the tools of the linguist, the electronic image-maker whose prime concern is to create a language that is both electronic and human.

Digit: Tape 1

Digit, a logical place to begin. A binary, logical and simplistic building block, the "and", the "the", the first

stroke of the language electronic...001, 100, 010; yes, no.

These tapes, starring Digit, are computer graphic cartoons, short and simple and funny. Digit is a sound, a process, on-off. 1. 0. "Digit is logical, unemotional, binary, weird, and dependable." (from E. Vander Zaag's notebook).

Through the Holes: Tape 2

"The surface of the screen becomes content." (E. Vander Zaag)

The "meta-language" is created in Vander Zaag's tape "Through the Holes". This is one building block in

the artist's evolving language, combining imagery and sound, that takes the viewer through the pixel* point on the video screen. In this video tape, the camera zooms in across the terrain that is the screen, focuses on a shimmering and distant pixel and in a nano-second (through the macroscopic lens) takes the viewer directly to what seems to be the most intense point of electrical activity, to the hole that exists at the intersections of the video information grid.

Over this electronic image's dancing variations of flickering pixel activity rides the droning voice that pushes and drives "Through the Holes" in electronic sympathy. This tape is "devoid of conspiracy," and the electronic "tabula rasa" wherein Vander Zaag begins to leave phosphorescent indications of language constructs.

A structural analysis of Vander Zaag's hidden grammar begins here. "The surface of the screen as content, particularly portions of it; then meta-language on another level wherein...a story revolves around a simple pebble, or a small piece of wood, and its location." This is a partial quote from the lecture/notebook of Vander Zaag concerning her view of her constructs/tapes.

Potatoes: Tape 3

"...I quote George Bataille, who too was preoccupied with work that contained an excessive point of view..." (E.V.'s notes).

"Potatoes" is a tape in which the word potatoe replaces strategic nouns within conversations between friends and lovers. In this tape Vander Zaag is in essence dealing with a metaphysical theory; that the part means something quite different from the whole.

"You know what I mean. Like if you have a really bad toothache, and the pain is taking over completely...and you have to do something about it. And you just select one tiny bit of that pain and focus on that part, and the larger pain gradually subsides, disappears...and you have a small part of the pain..." (quote from character in tape).

"Potatoes" deals with abstractions of meaning, of language. There is no way that "potatoe" is important in this con-

text. And yet this language construct alters our perception of the context, alters our perception of the created video world.

This work occurs on two levels simultaneously, and there are superb moments of performance. In particular two scenes in which Vander Zaag appears first as an eavesdropper, and secondly as a diabolically intense metaphysician who has trapped a victim and into whose ear she pours obsessive syllogisms, concerning the "part" and the "whole"; concerning fragments being enough upon which to construct a whole, but entirely different from the original whole.

Baby Eyes: Tape 4

"Baby Eyes" is Vander Zaag's most dense, most definitive work to date. She interfaces layers of electronic imagery with video imagery and in the process "extends the content of the medium" (E.V.'s notes).

Synthesized imagery interlocks with video recordings of an external reality. Synthesized and acoustical sound meld. There appears to be three and four layers occurring simultaneously and/or at regular intervals creating rhythmic patterns of information that are revealed again and again in varying contexts.

The video tape is a window. It is an open-ended piece. You can choose whatever you would like from this/these window/s. You can go through it time and again, and choose something new each time. The baby cries and it is a solitary and distant cry. But it is strong and persistent and integral. The baby eyes...we see through them...we feel through some omnipresent cat awareness; we are allowed in. We are not allowed in. The language and images are available. But not easy. "Baby Eyes" is an "extreme solipsism" and a powerful and excellent video tape.

"Wrapping oneself in a big black woolen sweater. Surrounded by the world yet oblivious to the obvious. Creating instead a myriad of images out of the rain... Staying out of the rain at all...even the eyes out of the rain. The randomness of choices when more and more tools are available for altering reality." (E. Vander Zaag's notes)

Pat Wilson is general manger of *Trinity Square Video* and a member of the Fuse collective.

ROBIN MORGAN

Continued from page 65

and the pleasure of having a male child (the book is dedicated to her son Blake); in its appreciation for some of the ideas men have brought into the world; in her insistence that men are salvageable as friends, partners, brothers; in its devotion to a feminism that has a place for men.

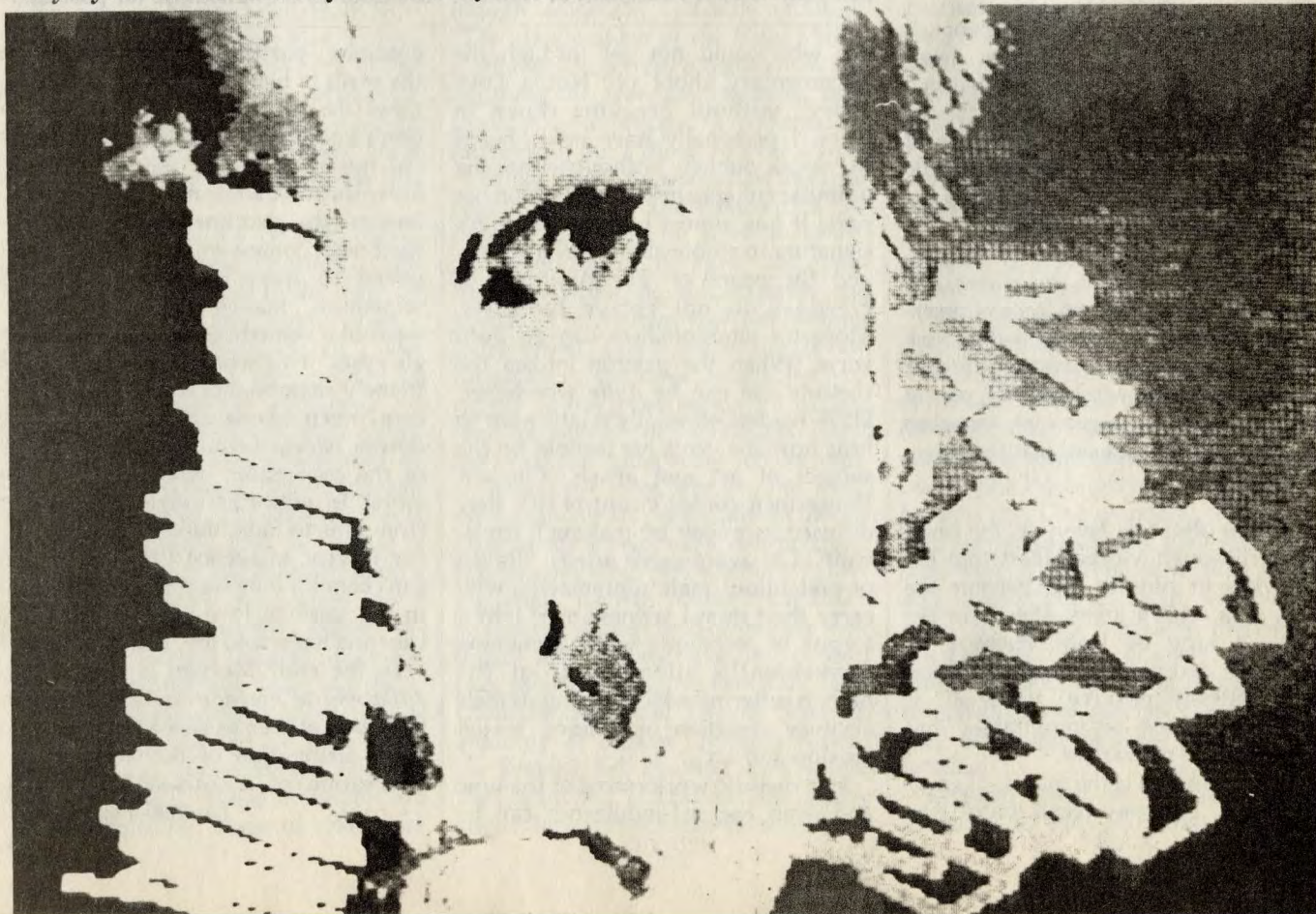
It is a bizarre affirmation; but not for the reason Morgan thinks. Morgan's sensitivity to book reviewers is surpassed only by her sensitivity to correct line-ism. Much of this text seems to be an answer to separatists (women who live somewhere "far away" in a blissful rejection of men and everything fashioned by them) whose political obsolescence makes Morgan's ongoing argument with them seem bizarre. It is almost unbelievable that she feels she has to justify the occasional citation of a male author as having something important to say (especially when she comes up with such gems as Sir James Jeans' comment on the significance of the New Physics, "The universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine"). Perhaps it's the case that a separatist posture has more intellectual currency in the United States women's movement; perhaps separatists write more down there. None of the separatists I know get off the farm for long enough to have much of a profile. My personal view, having considered the dreadful options of biological intervention or cages for men — both of which bode poorly for fundamental change — is that a feminist vision that cannot embrace both women and men is doomed and not worth pages of refutation.

But, even with the problems in the book, a sophisticated feminist will still find something of value in *The Anatomy of Freedom*. It is a good book to dip into. But really, if you know any men who suspect they would be sympathetic to feminism if they knew more about it, give them this book. It is a good primer for a lively mind and for a heart that can tolerate the gushy emotions. If you know any men who already feel a personal commitment to feminism, give them *The Anatomy of Freedom*. It's a most reassuring text, the kind I'd give to my boyfriend — if I had one.

Susan Cole is a feminist writer living in Toronto.

* element of picture, a square area of the subject copy which is seen by the scanners at any instant.

Baby Eyes: "Surrounded by the world yet oblivious to the obvious"



Courtesy Artist

The Discourse of the Mother

Radical Theoretical Practice & Feminist Production

SHEENA GOURLAY

Post-Partum Document an installation, reproduced and published as a book

By Mary Kelly
Routledge & Kegan Paul Publishers
(London)
Distributed in Canada by Oxford
University Press (\$37.75)

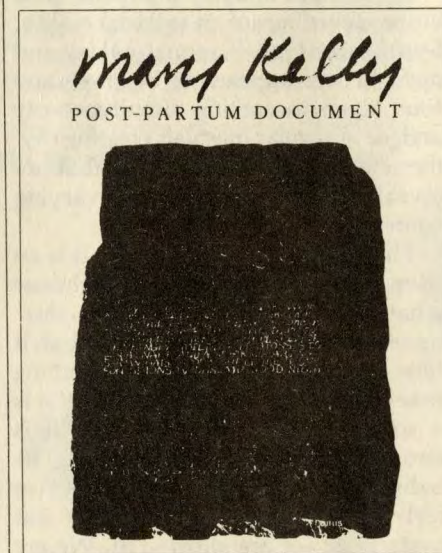
IN POST-PARTUM DOCUMENT, I AM TRYING TO SHOW THE RECIPROCITY OF THE PROCESS OF SOCIALISATION IN THE FIRST FEW YEARS OF LIFE. IT IS NOT ONLY THE INFANT WHOSE FUTURE PERSONALITY IS FORMED AT THIS CRUCIAL MOMENT, BUT ALSO THE MOTHER WHOSE 'FEMININE PSYCHOLOGY' IS SEALED BY THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR IN CHILDCARE.

Mary Kelly,
Post-Partum Document, 1973

WITH THIS STATEMENT MARY Kelly began Post-Partum Document. It both lays out her intentions and indicates the political and theoretical basis on which it began. Through the document runs the personal story of Mary Kelly, told through the diary excerpts, of her experiences and thoughts as a mother during the first five years of her son's life. It also documents the story of 'the mother', the position of 'mother', inscribed by social practices and psychic investments. It is told through an installation of diagrams, footnotes, objects and texts hung in a linear sequence. Altogether it is made up of 135 carefully mounted and framed units and a binder which contains the footnotes, bibliography and references.

PPD is a product of the Women's Movement in Britain and the political and theoretical debates within the

movement. In 1973, when PPD began, feminists in Britain were theorizing the position of 'mother' in terms of a 'feminine psychology' constructed through the sexual division of labour. At the same time the process of socialization was recognized as reciprocal. Therefore, along with a Marxist analysis of the interdependency of production and reproduction, there developed a discussion on 'subjectivity' and the usefulness of Freud's



theory of the unconscious. By the middle of the 1970's Jacques Lacan's Structuralist re-reading of Freud's work in terms of language shifted the debate from 'sexual division' to 'sexual difference'. Lacan defined 'femininity' and 'masculinity', not as pre-given essences, but as subject positions that are structured through social and psychic processes. His theory provided a language with which to theorize the subjective position of 'mother' and to represent the mother as subject of desire without falling into the trap of either a biological or cultural essentialism.¹

In 1983, the installation, PPD, carefully photographed, was published as a book also titled "Post-Partum Document". The book re-presents the personal, political, and theoretical debates that run through the installation. In reading it, the reader need not begin at the beginning and work through to the end. PPD resists a strict narrative reading as there are overlays and gaps within the sequence of documents and within each document. To read PPD is to read a map of the debates that run through it and of the terrain of desire for the mother and the structuring moments of that desire.

The work begins with a set of four carefully folded infant vests, one for each of the first four months of the child's life. Lacan's diagram on inter-subjectivity is drawn across them, each vest having one more line until, in the fourth month, the diagram is complete. The use of the vests with the diagrams indicates that the work of PPD is played out across the body and re-worked through the discourse of psychoanalytic theory. However, there is already a displacement from the child's body onto the vests. This displacement introduces one of the concerns of the work: the possibility of fetishism in women.

Fetishism has been considered a male psychic structure where absence is simultaneously recognized and disavowed.² However, PPD posits it as a female psychic structure where what is absent or lost is her love object, usually her child. In this case the infant's vests take the place of the infant's body and represent the close interdependence of the mother and child before weaning. Significantly, there is no written text in this section, reflecting the imaginary completeness of the mother-child relationship which is supported by the physical dependence of

the infant for nourishment and care.

Following the vests, the work is laid out in six sections or Documentations. In the book, each section is introduced by a diagram and documentation notes and followed by the Experimentum Mentis. (In the installation the notes and Experimentum Mentis are presented in a binder.) The diagrams are taken from various technical and theoretical books on subjects from pediatrics to drawing and language systems. Their function is not to illustrate the Documentation, rather they act as metaphors or analogies for the mother's desire. The documentation notes outline the empirical procedures used in each section.

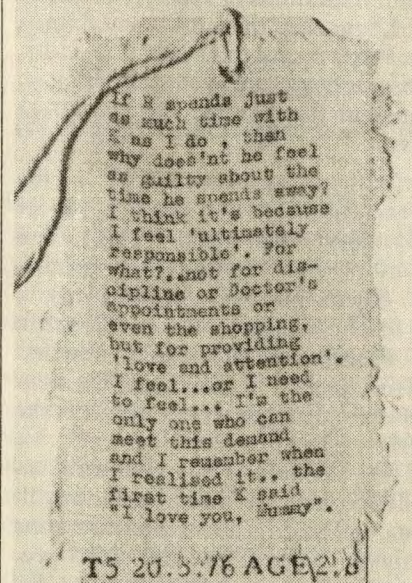
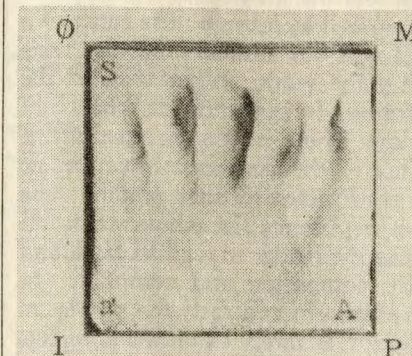
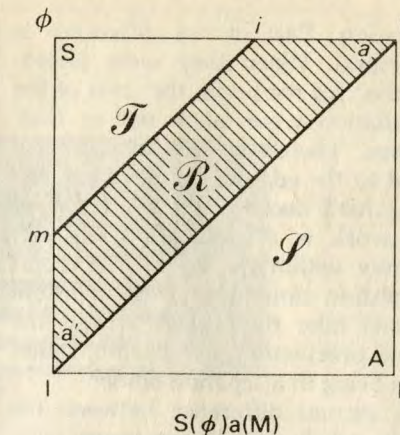
The main body of each section contains the diary notes and memorabilia, secondary revisions of the personal experience, etc. The diary notes provide the most easily accessible level of reading. They document Mary Kelly's experiences as a mother and her feelings about those experiences. This is then re-read and analysed using text, other collected material, and the objects used in constructing each piece.

At the end of each section is another diagram, an 'algorithm', and the Experimentum Mentis. The diagram is Lacan's Schema R. It is to be read as an analogy for his theory that the subject is constructed by a loss. In PPD it is also an analogy for the psychic construction of the mother's position through loss; loss of the maternal body as well as loss of the child as he/she grows up. The 'algorithm' is an adaptation of Lacan's S_2 . Subject over or divided by little subject. Replacing the upper S is a question which points to the way that desire is structured through social constraints. The Experimentum Mentis provides an elaboration of the psychic implications of the personal experience. Like the empirical language used in the documentation notes, the use of psychoanalytic theory undermines the cultural assumptions about the 'naturalness' of motherhood and places it in a material and historical context.

The Documentations

The political and theoretical debates within feminism in the 1970's run through PPD, effecting the analytical and methodological procedures used in re-working the story of the positioning

POST PARTUM DOCUMENT



Above: Lacan's algorithm, Schema R.
Below: Fifth in 'Transitional objects, diary and diagram' series, 1976

of 'the mother'. It begins with the vests at the point where the mother has the 'object of desire' in the form of a child. It depends heavily on Freud's and Lacan's theory that the mother's desire is the desire for the child to be the 'phallus'³ or 'object of desire' and on the idea of women's 'negative entry' and 'negative place' in the Symbolic

order. At that time the usefulness of psychoanalytic theory to help analyse the positioning of women in culture was being explored.

The first three Documentations map out successive separations and loss. "Weaning from the breast" documents the introduction of solid food into the child's diet. What this means for the mother is that the child is no longer dependent on her body for food, and, by extension, is no longer a part of her. "Weaning from the holophrase" documents the child's acquisition of language. It marks out the shift that begins with the child's single word utterances that the mother expands on and returns back to the child completed with meaning. "Weaning from the dyad" marks the break that occurs when the child begins nursery school. The beginning of extra-familial life for the child is part of a nexus of events whose meaning is 'outside the mother-child dyad': the father, language, culture. This section relies on Maud Manoni's⁴ views of the importance of the mother's words, particularly in relation to the father or authority.

Documentation IV, "On femininity", is the story of the mother's simultaneous acknowledgement and denial of loss. It is a denial not just of the loss of her child and the pleasure of the child's body, but also the loss of 'the mother's body', of experiencing her own body as maternal. It is also the story of her recognition that she is constructed as the child's 'Other',⁵ the one to whom desire is addressed and who has the whimsical power to grant or refuse all his/her demands. Documentation V, "On the order of things", tells of the child's growing curiosity about the mother's body and, by extension, the world. It is laid out in the manner of 19th century scientific specimens. However, the body of the child's imagination, the body that has 'everything' (babies, a penis, all good things) transgresses the logic of biology and the circumscribing power of naming. The final meaning of the child's questions about his/her mother's body is "What am I?", a question that also places the mother in relation to what she is, and what she is not. The earlier formulations in Documentations I to III of sexual difference in terms of 'negative entry' and 'negative place' in the Symbolic order have, in IV and V, begun to be framed

in terms of 'representation'. These two sections were greatly influenced by Michele Montrelay's article "Inquiry into Femininity".⁶ The term 'representation' was understood in the ideological sense as 'femininity' being a construct formed through specific social practices. It was also understood in the psychoanalytic sense as the way that the subject represents desire in terms of aims and objects. Therefore 'femininity' is a position that is taken up in relation to 'the object of desire' in order to represent desire. These representations or constructs are not fixed but are shifting and often contradictory positions.

The final Documentation, "On the insistence of the letter", maps out the child's final acquisition of culture, represented by his going to school and learning to read and write. It works as a re-exploration of the mother's body, displaced onto the similarities and differences of letters. In the end, with the writing of his own name, meaning is fixed and made to conform to the cultural order. This section of the work relies on theories of language developed by linguists such as Jacobson and Saussure and on the work of Melanie Klein on the Oedipus Complex. At the same time, when the child enters school, the mother's position is articulated socially by the legal, medical and educational discourses which address her as the functional position of 'mother/housewife', having specific responsibilities in relation to the child. (This holds true even when many of these functions are performed by the father.) The diary tells of the mother's desire that "the child will grow up to be what she wants him to be" through her search for a good school. It also marks out a socio-economic category called 'disadvantaged', constituted by a nexus of meanings around poor urban areas, overcrowded schools, poor facilities, etc. This section re-poses the question of 'the social', raising the issue of what is the 'relation between the psychic and the social'?

The Presentation

This reading of PPD treats the book and the installation as the same. This is true to the extent that the narratives and discourses that run through the installation are reproduced in the book. However, the book is neither a documentation of nor equivalent to the in-

stallation. Part of the difference is structural. When they were photographed for the book, the units of the installation were taken out of their frames. Therefore they visually expand to the edge of the page and the book itself becomes the frame. Also, the work is organized slightly differently within the book. The documentation notes and Experimentum Mentis take their place within the work, bracketing each section, rather than being in a separate binder.

A second difference between the book and the installation comes from its function as a book. The form of a book and the inclusion of the texts within the work, rather than in the footnotes, foregrounds the aspect of reading. There is also the pleasure of the text — the pleasure of 'meaning' as it is constructed through reading. The book re-presents the whole work, allowing the reader to wander back and forth, comparing and compiling the narratives. In contrast, the whole installation is rarely exhibited complete due to limitations of space. (For example, I have seen the work several times but, when I saw the book, I was surprised and excited to discover the existence of the section with the infant vests.)

What is lost in the book is the materiality of the objects, their presence as fetish objects. The careful mounting and framing of the installation objects functioned as a parody of the fetishistic quality of art objects. In the absence of the objects, the fetishistic quality of photographs is invoked, acting as reminders of the work.

The final difference between the installation and the book is historical. The installation was worked out as the analysis changed and the story progressed. This is reproduced in the book. However, the discourse around PPD continues. Since it was begun in 1973 it has been exhibited many times and there have been numerous articles and debates around it. The inclusion of four of these articles in the book, along with the introduction and preface, provides a re-reading of the work in terms of its place and effect within the discourses of art and feminism. The work takes part in these discourses, expanding the audience and posing more questions in relation to the work.

Though PPD both comes from and

is addressed to certain political and theoretical debates within the women's movement, feminism is not a homogeneous discourse with a completely separate theoretical language. Feminism begins with the assumption that women are placed differently in culture in ways that constitute discrimination in relation to the ways that men are placed. Working from a range of political and theoretical positions, feminism then analyses how women's position is constructed in order to work against that construction.⁷ Feminist theory has therefore tended to 'read through' other political theories and institutional structures, both using and criticizing the analytical and institutional structures found there.

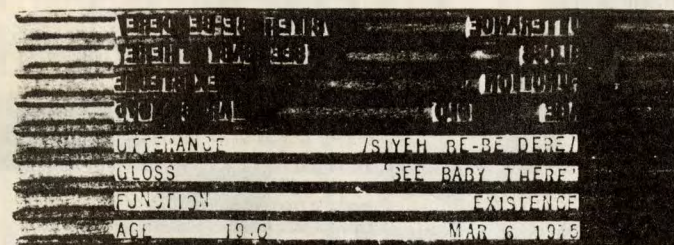
The Discourse

PPD is part of a political and artistic practice which is concerned with the relationship of art to other social practices. This practice grounds the works in socialist, and sometimes psychoanalytic, theories of the individual and society. Thus, PPD is part of and addressed to current political debates around ideology, subjectivity and social positioning.

Among feminists, the reaction to PPD has tended to be divided over the usefulness of psychoanalytic theory. Some of the disagreement with the use of this theory centres on the sheer difficulty of psychoanalytic theory itself. (As one person said, why should it be necessary to have two degrees to understand the work?) The difficulty of psychoanalytic theory, its sheer density, is largely due to the writing style and language which Lacan has used to describe the structuring of the unconscious. However, since PPD can be read on several levels, knowledge of psychoanalytic theory is not required altogether. The theory is used as a language with which to work through a difficult experience and as a way to undermine the cultural assumption about the 'natural' bond between mother and child.

Another criticism is that psychoanalytic theory has a phallogocentric (patriarchal) bias. This criticism comes both from the way that it has been used historically and from the language that is used to name and describe certain concepts within it. In both cases there has been a tendency to assume that psychoanalytic theory is a single

All photos from the book, Post-Partum Document



T7 26.4.75

CONTEXT: M(mother) getting K(son) dressed. 09.30 HRS.
SPEECH EVENT(S):
25.1 K. /shu/ shu/ (trying to dress himself) /siyeh be-be dere/825
M. That's right, shoes.
What's this? (picture of K's first birthday)
K. /ah/ be-be dere/ be-be/ be-be/ be-be/ (excitedly)
/siyeh be-be dere/
M. Let's put it back now. (R wants to save it)
K. /wan da be-be/ weh da be-be/
M. All gone.
K. /ma-ma/ weh da be-be/ (crying)
M. Shh, be quiet. (deciding to let him have it)
K. /dere/ e be-be/ e be-be dere/
MOST FREQUENT UTTERANCES: /weh da be-be/ siyeh be-be dere/
MEAN LENGTH OF UTTERANCES: 2.38 19 months

Left: From 'Analysed utterances and related speech events', 1975. Right: One of four vests that 'introduce' the book, 1973.

theory rather than recognizing the different discourses and interpretations that run through it. Within PPD itself there was a shift in theoretical language and emphasis.

When Freud described his theories he used an ancient Greek myth to describe the way that a child adopts a gendered position. The problems with the language that he used was that it was and is easily reduced to a biological determinism which can and has been used to oppress women. However, there is a difference between the notion that 'biology is destiny', a pre-determined destiny, and the idea that 'biology figures' or acquires meaning.

Feminists also react against particular concepts within psychoanalytic theory, i.e. the 'castration complex' and the 'phallus'. These concepts are part of Freud's theory of penis-envy in little girls and of Lacan's theory of women's 'negative position' in the Symbolic order. Both terms are used to describe 'representations'. The 'castration complex' is a representation of

loss, of the child's recognition that he/she does not have everything. The 'phallus' is the representation of the 'object of desire'. The penis can come to represent the phallus but, since all representation exists in the absence of what is represented, to represent *having* the phallus is, as Mary Kelly once said, the great hoax. As a representation it is always under threat of breaking and revealing lack — the fact that one does not have everything.

A much more serious criticism of PPD apropos of its use of psychoanalytic theory is one of academicism, its distance from immediate social issues. This is perhaps more a problem in North America where the appropriation of feminist readings of psychoanalytic theory by academic discourse, turning it into another avant-garde, has tended to mute its political effect. However, this criticism disregards PPD's work as the active political analysis of a personal experience and its work as theoretical practice.

I would argue that PPD is an example of a radical theoretical practice

working through the discourses of art and feminism. I do not consider radical theoretical practice to be in opposition or contradistinction to radical social practice. If, as feminists, we discount theoretical practice we run the risk of participating in our own subjugation by refusing to think through the implications of particular social strategies or by refusing to analyse and question one real nexus of power within society — the discourses of theoretical practice. In the area of art practice where women are finally becoming visible as artists, the position of power has been appropriated by those who write — that is, by those who construct the theoretical discourse around art practice. The position of critic is almost totally occupied by men, even though the people that they write about (make their careers on) may be women. As radical theoretical practice PPD does not separate theory from the lived experience or apply theory afterwards as a totalizing 'explanation', but uses each to 'read through' — to understand and to question — the other.

The book, PPD, acts as a document of a certain trajectory of political/theoretical discourse within feminism. It was originally posed as a question, a proposition; its construction mapped out the debates around those questions and ended by raising new ones. The work therefore acts as a paradigm, providing a visual and theoretical language with which to formulate certain political questions within feminism and art. It also continues to pose questions for feminist practice.

PPD posed the possibility of representing 'woman' as subject of desire. In our culture, where 'woman' is raised as a cultural sign, an image, whose meaning is 'sexual difference' or 'other', all other characteristics of 'woman' are trivialized or appropriated to 'man'. Where ideology is structured through representation, to work on representation is to work on ideology. PPD offers a paradigm in which 'woman' seen as 'sexual difference' or 'other' is subverted. It does this by refusing the image of 'woman' or 'mother' and, instead, foregrounds it as a social positioning through social and psychic discourses. This is not to say that images of women are impossible. However, given our cultural context, they continue to be problematic.

Another question for feminists is found in relation to its use of psychoanalytic theory. Post Partum Document began by examining the mother-child relationship, the construction of a 'feminine psychology', and the usefulness of psychoanalytic theory in analysing the position of 'mother'. In the end it re-poses the question to ask: "What is the relation between the psychic and the social?" This question is raised in the last Documentation when the child goes to school and the social becomes articulated differently into the mother-child relationship. It also introduces the book: Mary Kelly writes at the end of the preface, "But at this point, certain feminists began to worry about another kind of loss — losing sight of the 'social', in the end, failing to understand the political relevance of the personal. Were we suggesting in some way that the psychic was the truth of the social? Could psychoanalysis simply become another political orthodoxy? ... If the psychic is neither outside of it (the social), nor the truth of it, but simply another level of the social inscription

of subjects, then is it one which necessarily constitutes an autonomous object of discourse? Problems remain. The debate continues."⁸

1. By biological essentialism I mean the tendency to define 'femininity' or 'woman' in physical or reproductive terms. In art it has led to a valorization of women's bodies or reproductive functions. By cultural essentialism I mean the idea that women have a separate language or culture that has been repressed. It has led to a search for a separate visual language or a separate women's history or culture, often seen to be found in women-centred religions or in 'matriarchal' cultures.
2. Fetishism in men is classically defined as a structure where what is absent is the penis/phallus in women. It's absence is denied by the substitution of a fetish object, for example spiked shoes, or by turning the whole of the woman's body into a fetish object.
3. 'Phallus' means 'object of desire'. It is not an object as

such but a way of representing desire. However, the penis can come to represent the phallus. Its value, as sign, comes from an already pre-existent hierarchy which the penis then represents.

4. Mannoni, Maud; *The Child, his 'Illnesses' and the Others*, Tavistock Publications, 1970.

5. The 'Other' is the position or place to which desire is addressed. As such it is a shifting position, the original 'Other' being the mother.

6. Montrelay, M.; "Inquiry into Femininity", 1970, Eng. trans. Adams, P., *M/F*, No. 1, February 1978.

7. This is true even for those feminists who refuse theoretical discourse because it is considered 'patriarchal' or 'authoritarian'. It is not possible to speak without speaking from analytical/theoretical assumptions, even if the speaker has not acknowledged what those assumptions are.

8. Kelly, M.; PPD, page XX.

Sheena Gourlay is a feminist artist and writer, currently living in Toronto.

White Dog, continued from page 10

Black person or the person of colour, and that it is the responsibility of Blacks to effect a moral change in Whites.

White racism is a Black problem, or a problem for peoples of colour, in so far as the actions of Whites affect them. It is imperative that every attempt be made to change these actions and their harmful consequences. But in so doing, it is also imperative that Blacks and other peoples of colour be aware that the moral nucleus of the problem lies in a certain ethnocentric world view. As peoples of colour succeed in changing their lives, and acquire autonomy (often painfully slowly, since every advance has to be wrested from the powerful), that in itself forces the powerful to change, to accommodate (sometimes even to co-opt). But finally, Whites must take moral responsibility for their own immorality. It is a very fine line that must be drawn — sometimes unsuccessfully, and its significance is to be found in the Black person's ability to delimit the extent of one's responsibility to oneself, to one's community and to others.

If the character that Paul Winfield portrays had been aware of the extent of his responsibility to himself and his community, or rather, if Fuller wanted to portray such a person, the character would have destroyed the dog and taken steps to prosecute the owner. That would have been an image of a liberated Black man, not "pleading for tolerance", but demanding respect. Instead, what we have is an image that panders to all the liberalism and subtle racism in this society, and one that

presents a Black person who has taken on not only the problems of living in a White society, but also those of the White society — he will show his nobility and retrain this dog who means to him, and all like him, death. It is at this point that Fuller's allegory is unexpectedly most successful — in revealing the unspoken assumptions of American (including Canadian) society, and in so doing he unwittingly reveals his own racism, and how it fits into that society.

In matters such as these, the issue of censorship is always present. The film was in fact censored in the United States. If, as happened in Canada, such a film remains uncensored, criticism and analysis should be encouraged so that some of the less obvious issues are revealed for what they are — apologies for a racist society. I did write to the *Toronto Star* taking issue with the film and its reviewer, Jim Bawden. I suggested that the dog should have been shot and its owner charged. I also suggested that Jim Bawden's review constituted a needless pandering to violence against Blacks which was psychologically oppressive. This letter went unpublished.

In a society in which the status of some groups is so fragile and susceptible to exploitation, and where even criticism is severely circumscribed, there needs to be a change in the social and economic matrix to allow both for self-determination of one's own images, as well as an empowerment of such groups to exclude negative images of themselves, created by others.

Marlene Philip is a black poet and writer living in Toronto.



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